TEACHING EXCELLENCE: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF MULTIPLE

STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES

by

Nicole Rene' Frederick

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative, collective case study explored the phenomenon of teaching excellence from the perspective of multiple stakeholders to include parents, administrators and teachers in one Michigan school district. Research questions focused on stakeholder perspectives regarding the cognitive and affective attributes, as well as dispositions of excellent teachers. Teaching excellence, for the purpose of this study, was defined as teachers who demonstrated high levels of effectiveness in four areas: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. Effectiveness was identified using teacher evaluation results of teachers who had at least 90% Highly Effective and Effective ratings with no rankings of Ineffective on their most recent annual evaluation. Demographic questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and a collection of artifacts provided qualitative data was used to build an in-depth picture of teaching excellence attributes in teachers as reported from multiple perspectives. Five major themes were identified as a result of initial coding and categorical aggregation following the collection of data from multiple stakeholders. The themes were: excellent teachers design effective instruction, excellent teachers know themselves, excellent teachers focus on relationships, excellent teachers know their students, and excellent teachers consistently exceed job expectations.

Keywords: teaching excellence, teacher attributes, professional dispositions, teacher efficacy

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Teaching excellence is a highly-debated topic in education due to an increased focus

being placed on teacher accountability and student achievement in America's schools. The No

Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 and the introduction of the Common Core State

Standards (CCSS) of 2012 were two major initiatives that placed the spotlight on the importance

of highly effective teachers and student achievement. Teacher effectiveness is often defined

differently, making it challenging to identify a consistent, clear set of indicators (Blanton,

Sindelar, & Correa, 2006), thus the debate on how teacher effectiveness should be measured

continues.

Student achievement results, teacher evaluation rankings, and teacher preparation

programs as measures of accountability are some of the methods at the center of the discussion

of how to effectively measure teacher effectiveness (NCATE, 2012; UCLA Center X, 2013).

Large organizations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2013), along with many

federal and state legislators, have placed the spotlight on student achievement scores as the major

factor defining teacher effectiveness. The Value-Added Model is a specific growth model that

measures a change in test scores over time and examines the effectiveness of teachers on student

achievement. However, some uncertainty about the validity and reliability of such measures

remains (Harris, 2013). Therefore, if such ambiguity exists, the focus on teacher effectiveness

cannot solely rely on such measures.

Prior research showed effective teachers positively impacted student achievement. Grant,

Stronge, and Ward (2011) examined the effectiveness of 307 fifth grade teachers and their

impact on student learning as measured by classroom observations and achievement test results.

The results showed that those students with the highest achievement results had teachers with

strong skills related to planning, instructional approaches, classroom management, and rapport with their students. Nye, Konstantopoulos and Hedges (2004) conducted a study over a period of four years to determine if teacher quality had any impact on student achievement. Results showed that there was some connection between the effectiveness of teachers within the same school and student achievement. The researchers also noted teacher choice within a school had greater impact than overall school choice, further supporting the importance of teacher quality. Hanushek (2002) noted the magnitude of differences among teachers was impressive, and teachers "within a single large urban district near the top of the quality distribution can get an entire year's worth of additional learning out of their students compared to those at the bottom" (p. 3). Hattie (2003) outlined five dimensions of excellent teaching and 16 attributes of expert teachers. Excellent teachers are subject matter experts because they possess a deep and meaningful understanding of both content and pedagogical knowledge. They guide learning through classroom interactions, monitor learning and provide feedback, attend to students' emotional needs, and positively influence student outcomes (p. 5).

Teachers graduating from accredited institutions should possess the necessary skills to produce high levels of student achievement (NCATE, 2010), regardless of their years of teaching experience. Much discussion on experience versus expertise posited that not all teachers with experience possess or display attributes of excellence (Hattie, 2003; Huntly, 2008). The exploration and evaluation of what makes teachers not only effective, but excellent, remains a topic of interest and is one that needs to be further developed. Paramount to identifying the impact of effective teaching is the identification of attributes that differentiate excellent teachers from those who are merely effective. Excellent teachers decrease achievement gaps, reach more students, lead other teachers, and positively impact the overall school climate (Hassel &

Coggins, 2012). While effective teachers deliver expected results, excellent teachers have an expanded impact with far-reaching results that exceed mediocrity (Hassel & Coggins, 2012).

Understanding specific teacher traits which lead to teaching excellence may assist both teacher preparation programs and school districts in training and supporting highly-qualified teachers. Additionally, identifying attributes of excellent teachers as described by stakeholders may shed insight into other factors that are seen as having a positive influence on student success in school. Additional perspectives may highlight areas not previously considered.

The goal of this study was to explore the concept of teaching excellence from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders and explore their perceptions regarding attributes and dispositions of teachers that build a solid foundation based on specific cognitive and affective attributes along with professional dispositions. Identifying these attributes in teachers and associating them to outside perspectives may lead to a better understanding of specific attributes that are possessed by excellent teachers.

Background

Teacher quality and effectiveness are important topics in education because research linked them with positive gains in student achievement. Heck (2009) studied teacher-related effects on student achievement, more specifically, teacher quality and levels of student achievement. A large sample of 156 elementary schools was examined for teacher-related effects. Findings from this study illustrated the connection between teacher quality, organizational stability, and effective teaching practices. Highly effective teachers impacted student achievement and overall school effectiveness. Grant et al. (2011) confirmed that highly effective teachers possess specific skills, and students of these teachers tend to perform at higher levels.

Results of multiple studies about specific attributes and dispositions provided information regarding an understanding of teachers' and researchers' perceptions about what knowledge and skills make an effective, high-quality teacher (Chen, Brown, Hattie & Millward, 2012; Huntly, 2008; Wasserman, 2011; Watson, Miller, Davis, & Carter, 2010), but a gap in the literature focusing on teaching excellence from the perspectives of various stakeholders in the K-12 arena was found. Huntly (2008) conducted a study on the competence of beginning teachers and found that "beginning teachers believe that teaching competence requires demonstration of thorough preparation, a sound knowledge base, effective classroom management, professional communication with a range of stakeholders, and an accurate sense of self-awareness in the role of teacher" (p.1). Chen, Brown, Hattie, and Millward (2012) studied 951 Chinese middle school teachers' conceptions of excellent teaching and the relationship that exists between those conceptions and actual teaching practices. An 83% consistency rate was found between ideas of what constitutes excellent teaching and the self-reported, actual practices of those teachers. In other words, the teachers applied their beliefs about excellent teaching in their daily work with students. Watson, Miller, Davis, and Carter (2010) similarly studied middle school teachers' perceptions of effective teachers. Characteristics of effective teachers were compared to Stronge's (2007) Teacher Skills Assessment Checklist. Results were surprising and did not align, requiring even more indicators of teacher effectiveness to be created. Wasserman (2011) studied attributes of excellence of mathematics teachers during teacher education. The results showed the following themes were present when identifying teaching excellence attributes pre-program: self-starting, hard-working, and holding a belief that all students can learn. Other mentioned attributes included being flexible and adaptive.

If a teacher has already been identified as effective in the classroom based on their performance evaluation results, then gathering perspectives about additional attributes that are viewed as excellent can assist leaders of teacher preparation programs and hiring committees as they search for candidates that are going to have the greatest impact in classrooms across the nation. Research supported continued efforts to identify and recognize teachers of excellence (Hattie, 2003; Huntly, 2008) as schools seek to replace simply adequate educators with excellent educators (Wasserman, 2011).

Unfortunately, a focus on teaching excellence is just beginning to emerge. The negative perspectives associated with poorly-performing teachers often minimize the positive influence and impact great teachers have on their students. With such great attention being placed on teacher effectiveness in America's schools, this study aimed to better understand the phenomenon of teaching excellence from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. The researcher sought to explore the specific attributes and dispositions of excellent teachers as identified by teachers, administrators, and parents as determined through in-depth analysis of emerging themes.

Situation to Self

The significance of situation to self, developed from my triadic role as school administrator, teacher educator, and teacher. In each of these roles, teaching excellence has a different level of importance. I value knowing the specific attributes and dispositions of excellent teachers, so these can be identified as a focus of training and professional development programs. As a school administrator, hiring high-quality teachers who demonstrate an understanding of teaching excellence is imperative in building a solid framework for an effective school. Focusing on teaching excellence attributes allowed me to have a better understanding of

necessary characteristics and dispositions that are imperative in building a solid team of

professionals. As an educator, I always strive to demonstrate teaching excellence in my own

classroom. I do not settle for mediocrity; I strive for excellence, which should be the goal of all

educators. Understanding stakeholder perspectives on the attributes that influence teaching

excellence will allow me to focus on the characteristics and dispositions within my own teaching

that embody these ideals.

My philosophical assumptions stem from an epistemological framework (Creswell,

2007). I believe that both knowledge (cognitive) and behavioral (affective) attributes, along with

teaching dispositions (attitudes and beliefs that form behaviors), impact the effectiveness of a

teacher, and that these attributes come from one's own knowledge. Through life experiences,

one develops a self-system, or collection of personal perceptions (Bandura, 1977), that

determines one's attitudes, abilities, and cognitive skills used to accomplish goals in particular

situations. Components within the self-system work in harmony and determine how people

"think, behave, and feel" (Bandura, 1994, para 3). Teachers have their own life experiences that

form their educational philosophies which inform teaching behaviors. I feel cognitive and

affective attributes need to be aligned and complement each other in order to demonstrate

teaching excellence. Studying individual attributes will help tell the story of how cognitive and

affective attributes work together to develop a teacher of excellence.

Problem Statement

Teacher attrition continues to plague the nation's schools (Wang, 2007). Increased

accountability requirements have placed high levels of stress on educators, causing teachers to

leave the profession at an alarming rate of 40-50% in the first five years of service (Smith &

Ingersoll, 2004). If this trend continues, the nation will experience a shortage of skilled

educators. Stakeholders are continually asking questions about the cause of this mass exit from the profession. As teacher evaluations focus more on student achievement as measures of effectiveness, teachers become more and more disenfranchised because of several outside influential factors of which they have limited control. Researchers have identified several causes of teachers leaving the profession such as salaries, poor working environments, increased accountability pressures, and lack of school support (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011; Henry, Bastian, & Fortner, 2011; Krieg, 2006).

An increased understanding of the attributes and dispositions of excellent teachers may provide both teacher preparation programs and school districts with a different approach for ensuring high quality; excellent teachers are persisting in the nation's classrooms. Teaching excellence, regardless of years of experience or seniority, should be the focus of all personnel decisions to ensure children are receiving the highest quality education. The problem addressed in this study is the limited knowledge of what specific attributes and dispositions are characterized as excellent from the perspectives of teachers, administrators, and parents. In order to more clearly define and recognize teaching excellence, additional studies need to focus on the attributes and dispositions that demonstrate not only teaching effectiveness, but teaching excellence (Hattie, 2003).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this collective case study was to explore the perspectives of administrators, parents, and educators regarding the attributes of teachers who demonstrate teaching excellence in K-12 educational arenas. Educators demonstrating teaching excellence are often overshadowed by the problems struggling teachers face. Often more focus is placed on teachers who are not successful as these stories receive much more attention than the teachers

who demonstrate high levels of performance on the job. Traditionally, teacher evaluations were based on one or two administrative observations, while real-time data such as student achievement results were not considered when measuring teacher effectiveness. In recent years, many states have changed their evaluation procedures and accountability policies to include student performance data. A recent change in legislation (superintendent, personal communication, 2013) allowed administrators in states where the data were collected to make personnel decisions based on teacher evaluation scores, further supporting the relevance of conducting a study about cognitive and affective attributes, along with professional dispositions to better understand the perspectives of multiple stakeholders.

 Negativity is plaguing education, and proper credit needs to be given to the excellent teachers who teach the nation's children every day (Anderson, Evans, Kozak, & Peterson, 2006). Exploring the views of stakeholders regarding teaching excellence provides additional insight into the attributes and dispositions of this phenomenon. Gathering viewpoints from various constituents helps deepen the understanding of what characteristics are seen as highly effective in excellent teachers.

For the purpose of this study, teaching excellence was defined as teachers who demonstrated high levels of effectiveness in four areas: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities (Danielson, 2007; Marzano, 2013). Effectiveness in these areas was measured through annual school district teacher evaluations which were adapted from the Framework for Teaching (Danielson, 2007) tool, and these quantitative data were used to identify excellent teachers in the selected research setting. The evaluation tool has multiple aspects related to planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. Teachers are evaluated from highly effective to

ineffective in each aspect of all domains.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study lies in the further potential to identify attributes and dispositions of excellent teachers as identified by multiple stakeholders. In identifying attributes of excellent teachers, institutions of higher education and school districts can begin to concentrate on identifying, growing, and developing these cognitive and affective attributes and professional dispositions in teachers. Instead of focusing on what not to do, organizations can begin to focus on what can be done to achieve excellence in teaching. With increased accountability measures, tightened budgets, and forced terminations, districts can focus on retaining excellent teachers who provide high quality learning experiences for students, regardless of years of teaching service or experience. Promoting positive support to increase teaching excellence in teachers provides opportunities to increase school performance (Ingersoll, 2012).

A qualitative, collective case study of this nature provided an in-depth look into the perspectives of stakeholders that have experienced the phenomenon of teaching excellence through the lens of multiple cases (Stake, 1995). The case study design provided opportunity to gather data from more than one case, which afforded more credible evidence than a single case alone (Stake, 1995) and provided additional qualitative information to support the quantitative data the district was already collecting. Stakeholders included administrators, teachers, and parents who had a stake in the success of the research site. Exploration into teaching excellence through a qualitative, collective case study provided insight into teaching excellence from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders within the natural setting. Gathering insight from each of these stakeholder groups provided a clearer picture of the specific attributes and dispositions

contributing to the teaching excellence of the identified teachers. Hattie (2003) stated "Only when we dependably identify excellence, and study excellence, can we provide the goalposts to aim for. Let us have more studies on excellence" (p. 5). This qualitative study explored the attributes and dispositions of teaching excellence as perceived by teachers, administrators, and parents.

Research Questions

Although there were many studies that identified effective attributes of teachers (Grant, Stronge, & Ward, 2011; Hattie, 2003; Huntly, 2008), there is a gap in the extant literature related to teaching excellence as identified from multiple perspectives of various stakeholders. Triangulation of common themes and trends amongst various groups is missing, which is an important piece in identifying teaching excellence traits from multiple perspectives. Administrators, parents, and teachers have a vested interest in the success of the school and each individual child. Therefore, their perspectives regarding attributes and dispositions of teaching excellence needed to be explored. The central research question for this qualitative study was: "What are the attributes and dispositions of excellent teachers from the perspectives of administrators, parents, and teachers?" Additional sub-questions were:

- What specific instructional (cognitive) behaviors influence teaching excellence in teachers as reported by teachers, administrators, and parents?

- What specific relational (affective) behaviors influence teaching excellence in teachers as reported by teachers, administrators, and parents?

- What professional and personal teaching dispositions do excellent teachers possess as reported by teachers, administrators, and parents?

Research Plan

A qualitative study using a collective case study design (Stake, 1995) was used to identify specific cognitive and affective attributes displayed by excellent teachers as evidenced by the perspectives of teachers, administrators, and parents. A collective case study was used to collect and analyze the data because it was important to study this phenomenon within the context of the K-12 setting. The bounded system was the case (teachers demonstrating teaching excellence within one school district). A collective case study was chosen to gain understanding through multiple cases within the bounded system (Stake, 1995). Exploring multiple cases provided greater depth in identifying specific attributes that represent teaching excellence. As an interpretive, inductive study, it was not used to test a previous hypothesis, but to identify common themes and patterns among the perspectives of the varying stakeholders: administrators, parents, and teachers.

Procedures

A school district in Mid-Michigan was chosen as the setting for this study because of an increased focus on empowering effective teachers and its high level of academic success. The school district is a high-performing district, which validates that highly-effective teaching is taking place. The school district was ranked in the state's top 30% in all testing measures (MI Schools Data, 2013). The mission of the school district is solely focused on excellence and reads "The purpose of X school district is preparing students to be successful adults through excellence in education" (School District, 2014, para 1). The culture of the school district is well-known throughout the region, and many people move to the area so that their children can attend school in this district.

Permission from the district to conduct the study and collect data was obtained from the district superintendent. Because of privacy regulations, the district superintendent was given selection criteria and was asked to select possible study participants using quantitative data gathered from the teacher evaluation model which was adapted from Danielson's (2007) Framework for Teaching. Four identifiers, planning and instruction, classroom environment and rapport, professional responsibilities, and reflective practice, were rated using the district evaluation rankings of Highly Effective, Effective, Minimally Effective, and Ineffective. Teachers receiving more than 90% of scores in the Effective and Highly Effective categories and no categories marked as Ineffective were chosen as possible participants. After receiving school district approval through a formal written letter, consent from the Institutional Review Board at Liberty University was obtained.

Once appropriate permission was obtained from the university, the school district superintendent identified participants who met the requirements of the study, and then I used a random sampling method, choosing 30 numbers to choose participants from the pool of teachers identified as excellent. The superintendent made initial contact with the school administrators of each teacher by email, and the study participants were notified via email that they had been chosen as possible participants. The superintendent provided the teachers and administrators with my contact information. After the preliminary contact was made by the school district superintendent, the study participants contacted me via email to schedule interview times. Subsequently, follow-up emails were sent to identify interview days, times, and locations.

I also asked the administrator to be both a participant and liaison for the process because access to parents was needed. All administrators agreed to provide a sample of parent groups for each teacher so that focus groups could be conducted. Teacher interviews were conducted in the

teachers' classrooms while the administrator interviews were held in the administrator's office. Each interview lasted less than 60 minutes. Administrators were given a letter asking for parent participation in focus groups, and then they sent these letters home to parents with my contact information. Parents contacted me via telephone or by email to accept the invitation to participate in the focus groups. The focus groups were held in the learning center, elementary, and high school libraries.

As stakeholders arrived to interviews and focus groups, informed consent was obtained through the signing of an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix A) that outlined the major study components. When consent had been obtained, data collection through demographic questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and artifact collection took place within the school setting. Each interviewee was asked a series of questions related to cognitive and affective attributes that they perceived as indicative of teaching excellence. An interview guide (see Appendix B) was used, but additional follow-up or clarifying questions were also asked to reconcile some of the interview comments. The interviews and focus groups were recorded using the iPad audio recorder. Additionally, field notes were recorded to document nonverbal body language of participants of interviews and focus groups. Artifacts were collected in person and electronically for viewing to further corroborate themes and trends. After the data were collected, analysis began to determine themes or trends that were present within the data collected to answer the research questions.

<center>**Delimitations**</center>

The delimitations for the study included using only teachers who were identified as excellent teachers based on the district identifiers within the teacher evaluation system. The annual teacher evaluations were based on Danielson's (2007) Framework for Teaching model

and were used to determine high levels of effectiveness in the following four areas: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. The reason for this delimitation was that the researcher was exploring the phenomenon of teaching excellence. Only perspectives from stakeholders who had personal interaction and experience with the teachers were chosen for the study. The perspectives of participants who had personal interaction with the teacher provided in-depth data that was gained firsthand through experiencing the phenomenon.

Limitations to this study included a lack of generalizability of the results because the research was conducted in one school district, in one region of Michigan. Possible issues with the interpretation of teacher performance scores when identifying participants were present, while some participants may not have understood the different teaching excellence criteria. Additional limitations related to participant responses, based on an understanding of the meaning of excellent teaching through personal experience, may have been present. Each participant may have individual experiences or biases that impacted responses about teacher behaviors and perceived knowledge. Due to the nature of this qualitative study, differing perspectives based on participant interactions included various biases that may have impacted the themes and patterns identified.

Summary

Results of prior studies identified several different attributes and dispositions of effective teachers (Hattie, 2003; Huntly, 2008; Wasserman, 2011). The attributes highlighted academic and personal characteristics that support teaching excellence. Effective teaching is often measured in the level of student achievement. There are many programs available to assist teachers in meeting a standard of excellence. Accrediting agencies and foundations in support of

teaching provide opportunities for teachers to gain the necessary skills to be effective in the

classroom from the very beginning. Many times effective teaching is measured by area experts

or other teachers (Chen et Al., 2012; Watson et al., 2010). There is very little research available

that gains the perspectives of other stakeholders who recognize teaching excellence. While

effective teaching encourages student achievement, there are many other aspects to teaching that

can provide success for students, in school, outside of the scores on a test. I sought to explore

the perspectives of various stakeholders about which attributes and dispositions can be identified

in excellent teachers.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

A thorough review of the literature provided opportunities to clearly synthesize key ideas surrounding teaching excellence. Several themes emerged during the review to provide a solid framework for this study. Teaching excellence is an important topic amongst educators and stakeholders as increased accountability puts more pressure on teacher performance and student achievement results. Measures of student achievement are being tied to teacher evaluations and performance pay in many states across the nation as a result of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) enacted in 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). However, educational policy makers continue to debate the impacts of teaching effectiveness on student learning. In the age of accountability, it seems there is a delicate balance needed to connect accountability to the art of teaching and excellent teachers have figured out this balance.

Research indicated that a positive relationship exists between teacher effectiveness and student learning (Grant et al., 2011; Heck, 2009; Valenta, 2010). There is no question that teacher effectiveness leads to higher levels of student achievement, and importance is found in identifying measures that assist in identifying excellent teaching (Gates Foundation, 2013). The question of identifying measures of teacher excellence posits whether teaching excellence is only measured by student achievement scores, or if other factors can also determine teaching excellence. Could it be that additional measures of student successes, such as social, emotional, and developmental growth, also demonstrate teaching excellence? Does an increase in student motivation, engagement, or student growth demonstrate teaching excellence even if scores on the standardized test scores do not reflect on grade level performance? This study explored the perspectives of various stakeholders regarding cognitive and affective attributes and dispositions

of teachers that have been identified as excellent. Through this exploration of teaching

excellence, a clearer picture of important factors that measure student success were formed. The

following literature review includes prior research and topic specific literature obtained through a

search of educational journals that align the conceptual and theoretical framework of this study

to Danielson's Framework of Teaching (2007), teacher attributes and dispositions, contributors

to increased self-efficacy, and factors that influence excellence in teaching.

Overview of the Literature

Prior research addressed the issue of teacher effectiveness in many different ways. A

review of this literature highlights a multitude of studies linking teaching and learning that

promote successful student learning experiences (Chen et al., 2012; Danielson, 2007; Grant et

al., 2011; Grieve, 2010; Huntly, 2008; Penn State, 2012; Rice, 2010; Wasserman, 2011). There

are many programs such as the Bill and Linda Gates Foundation (2013) and The New Teacher

Project (2014) that assist school districts in focusing on student achievement by developing

attributes that exemplify excellence. With so much of the focus being placed on student

achievement scores, there is a lack of literature identifying how teaching excellence, at any level,

influences other areas of student success, especially from the perspectives of teachers,

administrators, and parents. Furthermore, a concrete definition of teaching excellence remains

elusive as the research provided multiple operational definitions.

Teachers who have support and are well-trained in teacher preparation programs are

better prepared to meet the demands of their own classrooms (Ingersoll, 2012). Additionally,

teachers who participate in induction programs and receive mentoring from administrative

leaders also tend to have more success in the classroom (Ingersoll, 2012). Ingersoll also asserted

that teachers with positive support systems in place are more effective and have marked

longevity in comparison to teachers without support systems; therefore, teachers of excellence, more often than not, have some sort of support. Studies by Hattie (2003) and Huntly (2008) highlighted multiple cognitive and affective attributes and professional dispositions that characterize excellent teachers. These studies highlight my own perspectives as the researcher and that of the teachers with limited information providing insight into the perspectives of other important stakeholders. Teachers tend to have a clear understanding of what makes an excellent teacher based on their own perceptions, but limited research on the perspectives of administrators and parents on teaching excellence was found. Hattie discussed how various stakeholders impact student achievement, so it is important to identify attributes of excellent teachers within the context of stakeholder perspectives.

A thorough literature review of teaching effectiveness, teacher experience, and attributes of effective teachers was conducted. While the literature on these topics is plentiful, the literature regarding teaching excellence in the K-12 educational setting is limited. A few studies in Australia were identified, and the findings demonstrate, that key cognitive and affective attributes are present in highly effective teachers (Hattie, 2003; Huntly, 2008), but oftentimes the data were gleaned from the researcher's perspective, or it was teachers themselves that provided the professional perspective on what constitutes effective teaching (Chen et al., 2012; Watson et al., 2010). However, a gap existed in the extant literature related to the attributes of excellent teachers from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders such as administrators and parents. Thompson and Cuseo (2012) identified four contextual factors that impact school success: student, school, family, and community. Therefore, teachers, administrators, and parents must have the same expectations for what constitutes excellence. Most of the empirical evidence is based on quantitative methodologies correlating specific teacher attributes to student

achievement based on standardized test scores (Grant et al., 2011). Therefore, this qualitative study sought to add to the literature and field of education by further exploring teaching excellence in K-12 teachers from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders to develop a rich, thick understanding of how excellence is perceived by teachers, administrators, and parents.

Theoretical Framework

The foundation of this study was built on both theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory envelops the theoretical framework with a focus on self-efficacy and reciprocal determinism while Danielson's (2007) Framework for Teaching comprised the conceptual framework with an emphasis on four domains tied to teacher effectiveness: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. The theory that informed this study included two components of Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory: self-efficacy and reciprocal determinism. These two theories focus on one's perceived ability to complete a task and the influence of personal behavior and environment in determining one's response to certain situations.

Social Cognitive Theory

The theory that informed this study was Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory, more specifically the ideas of reciprocal determination and self-efficacy. In other words, a person's behavior both influences and is influenced by, their own personal characteristics and environmental factors. According to Bandura (2012), human interaction and behavior is "a product of the interplay of intrapersonal influences, the behavior individuals engage in, and the environmental forces that impinge upon them" (p. 11). Through this interaction, individuals have a role in how they manage different aspects of their lives. Teachers have both cognitive and affective attributes that comprise their personal characteristics. Personal attributes inspire

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specific behaviors that many times can be impacted by the school and classroom environments. Teachers have personal attributes that determine how they will interact with their students and professional responsibilities, but there are also factors within the school and classroom that impact how a teacher interacts with professional expectations.

Reciprocal determinism. Reciprocal determinism (Bandura, 1978) includes three specific components of interactions: person, behavior, and environment. Each of these components is present in the relationship between teachers and stakeholders. A person's influence in a situation can be attributed to both knowledge and emotion. This influence then determines what behaviors may be present, while also considering environmental stimuli that impact a person's response. Environmental stimuli do not only relate to a specific setting or location. Symbolism is used to define and expand multiple possibilities for one's environment (Bandura, 2012). Teachers are lifelong learners, so regardless of where they are in their careers, the social cognitive learning theory addresses many of the contexts in which teachers influence student learning through the marriage of personal attributes, knowledge, skills, and dispositions that influence their success.

Self-efficacy. Perceived self-efficacy is the judgment of one's own abilities and capabilities to execute the expectations of specific courses of action such as choosing appropriate instructional strategies, managing a classroom, or communicating with various stakeholders (Bandura, 1978). Teachers with high levels of self-efficacy are reported as being more effective in the classroom (Hoi, Bender, & Lonner, 2013). Determining what influences high levels of self-efficacy may come as a result of identifying specific cognitive and affective attributes that are seen as highly effective amongst various stakeholders. Understanding what internal and external experiences shaped one's self-efficacy helps identify what life experiences have had an

impact on developing and growing teaching excellence attributes. Penney (2008) conducted a case study on the attributes of teacher efficacy and found teachers with high levels of self-efficacy positively impact student achievement.

The study was framed by Danielson's (2007) Framework for Teaching, which focuses on four domains: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. These four domains allow for the identification of teacher attributes and dispositions within distinct components of a widely used evaluation tool used to measure teacher effectiveness. Teacher preparation, support, and evaluation processes impact the career of teachers, and teachers who are more prepared for the rigors of managing and maintaining a classroom are more likely to succeed and persist (Ingersoll, 2012). Reviewing the empirical evidence of teacher evaluation connects the theoretical framework of teacher perception and behavior response to the conceptual framework of having effective teachers in the classroom. The Framework for Teaching (Danielson, 2007) provides administrators and teachers specific indicators to assist in identifying and rating cognitive and affective attributes. The Framework for Teaching is used in various ways depending on the school district or school, but for the purpose of this study, the Framework provides the foundation for recognizing key domains associated with identifying excellence in teaching. Studying teaching excellence in teachers through the lens of Danielson's Framework for Teaching should provide a clearer understanding of what is being defined as excellent teaching and how key indicators relate to teachers' specific cognitive and affective attributes. This conceptual framework lays the foundation for teaching excellence in beginning teachers with a clear definition of competencies that align with effective teaching (Danielson, 2007).

National Excellence Frameworks

The development of multiple national frameworks to include the National Council for

Accreditation of Teacher Accreditation (NCATE) and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment

and Support Consortium (INTASC), along with the National Board for Professional Teaching

Standards (NBPTS) has helped to define and describe components of teaching excellence. These

national frameworks draw attention to research-based practices that have proven results related

to teacher effectiveness and increased levels of student achievement (Danielson, 2007). Not only

do such frameworks allow practitioners to place emphasis on accountability, teachers are able to

better understand varying levels of performance in relation to student learning (Danielson, 2007).

Each of these frameworks includes performance domains that require exhibits demonstrating

both cognitive and affective skill sets.

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education

NCATE (2010) defined what makes teachers effective and provided key indicators of

teacher effectiveness through predetermined competencies. The research showed that teachers

within the first five years often leave because they do not feel prepared to meet the demands of

the classroom, highlighting a definite disconnect between the identification of teaching

excellence principles in colleges and universities across the nation (Joiner & Edwards, 2008). If

teacher preparation programs are NCATE accredited, then it seems reasonable that teachers

leaving such institutions would be highly prepared to fulfill both the instructional and

professional responsibilities of being a classroom teacher.

NCATE (2010) highlighted eight standards in which institutions of higher education must

demonstrate competency in order to earn institutional accreditation. These standards cover the

major functions of a teacher preparation program. Clearly defined parameters for meeting or

exceeding expectations within each standard are provided. Standard 1 defines teacher quality and dispositions. Teachers must demonstrate content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and skills, pedagogical and professional knowledge and skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students. Evaluation of competency is based on assessments that measure the candidate's ability to meet professional, state, and institutional standards (NCATE, 2010). The competencies identified are: content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, professional and pedagogical knowledge and skills, student learning, and professional dispositions (NCATE, 2010). The institutions must provide evidence that teacher candidates are meeting these requirements. Artifacts that demonstrate competency in this area are collected to justify and validate the effectiveness of preservice teachers. Teacher preparation programs that are NCATE accredited focus on developing attributes and dispositions in teachers that mirror effective teaching. Teachers must be willing to demonstrate that they are willing and able to perform the necessary duties of classroom teachers. Therefore, teachers entering the field of education, even in their first year, should be prepared to meet the demands of the classroom.

Often there is a disconnect between the preparedness and the actual follow through and implementation of professional skills and dispositions in teachers when faced with the real responsibilities of being a classroom teacher. Therefore, this leaves a gap in preparedness tied to professional dispositions and affective attributes within higher education. Measuring affective attributes and dispositions can be difficult, and in the past, there has been limited exposure to such discussion in higher education. As institutions of higher education aim to improve the quality of their programs and develop highly effective teachers, it must be remembered that teaching excellence happens when teachers leaving an accredited preparation program are able to implement, grow, and sustain high levels of teaching practices. In order to produce excellent

teachers, teacher training and preparation must be excellent. However, as research continues to reveal the importance, more emphasis is being placed on identifying dispositional and affective concerns in teacher preparation programs.

Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium

Danielson's (2007) Framework for Teaching aligns closely with INTASC principles which allow administrators to further identify specific teacher performance indicators with components within the four domains outlined. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO, 2013) outlined key principles in a model that allows teachers to apply certain standards that have proven student success. Often these performance indicators can be seen on teacher evaluation tools as administrators seek to identify elements of effective teaching. Both cognitive and affective attributes are embedded within the components of the Framework for Teaching (Danielson, 2007)*,* and the INTASC standards allow administrators to clearly identify these attributes and dispositions within the professional context (CCSSO, 2013). These attributes are divided into four components: The Learner and Learning, Content Knowledge, Instructional Practice, and Professional Responsibility (CCSSO, 2013). Noted is a clear alignment between these indicators and Danielson's (2007) Framework for Teaching.

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS, 2014) has set high standards for evaluating teacher performance, which requires teachers to design, develop, and implement highly-effective lessons, while reflecting on their instructional practices and professional responsibilities in rich, in-depth ways. The Board sets the standard for which teachers are identified as excellent as evaluated by other teachers. The organization seeks to propel teaching into professional practice requiring teachers to demonstrate excellence through a

rigorous process developed by and for teachers (NBPTS, 2014). Through the National Board

Certification process, NBPTS hopes to achieve a true measure for defining teaching excellence

in the profession.

Definition of Excellence

Scholars have varying definitions of teaching excellence and most definitions have been

developed in higher education. Literature supporting teaching excellence in the K-12 arena is

limited, and excellence is often used synonymously with the term effectiveness. For the purpose

of this study, teaching excellence was operationalized through Danielson's (2007) four domains:

planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities.

Educators demonstrating teaching excellence consistently score at the highest level of

performance in each of these domains. The difference between teaching excellence and teaching

effectiveness, for the purpose of this study, was that the teachers consistently performed at higher

levels, with no indicators scoring below Minimally Effective. Because teaching excellence is so

hard to define, the research sought to identify specific attributes that define excellence from the

perspectives of multiple stakeholders. Defining excellence is a practice that is not often done as

schools continue to struggle with what exactly makes an excellent teacher. Lists of identifiers

have been made as researchers continue to seek the true definition of what makes an excellent

teacher, but a specific definition is difficult to build as organizations have different standards for

which competence is demonstrated.

Measuring Teacher Excellence

Rating the level of teacher knowledge, or cognitive attributes, is done in a variety of

ways. Danielson's (2007) Framework for Teaching defines excellence by describing what

teachers should be able to do and what student outcomes should reveal. Teachers must be subject

matter experts, be able to anticipate student errors, and must possess the skills to implement best practices specific to the content area. Teacher performance evaluations target levels of proficiency related to critical thinking, analysis, and synthesis of content area material, along with demonstration of competencies related to professional teaching dispositions. Each of the four domains has various components that provide performance indicators. Teachers are rated based on the level of proficiency in each component. Figure 1 highlights each of the four domains to include each specific component. Each component is measured using: unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, and distinguished. Excellent teachers should rank proficient and distinguished in each area with no ratings in basic or unsatisfactory. These domains align with the InTASC (CCSSO, 2013) national framework of excellence.

Domain 1: Planning and Preparation	**Domain 2: Classroom Environment**
1a Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy 1b Demonstrating Knowledge of Students 1c Setting Instructional Outcomes 1d Demonstrating Knowledge of Resources 1e Designing Coherent Instruction 1f Designing Student Assessments	2a Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport 2b Establishing a Culture for Learning 2c Managing Classroom Procedures 2d Managing Student Behavior 2e Organizing Physical Space
Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities	**Domain 3: Instruction**
4a Reflecting on Teaching 4b Maintaining Accurate Records 4c Communicating with Families 4d Participating in a Professional Community 4e Growing and Developing Professionally 4f Showing Professionalism	3a Communicating With Students 3b Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques 3c Engaging Students in Learning 3d Using Assessment in Instruction 3e Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness

Figure 1. Descriptions of the four domains of Danielson's (2011) Framework for Teaching.

Teachers who are evaluated based on the NCATE (2010) standards should exceed the target level of performance. Along with knowledge of the content area subject matter, teachers must have pedagogical knowledge that demonstrates an understanding of the teaching and learning process. Teachers must have knowledge of instructional approaches and strategies that elicit responses from students in a variety of ways. Teachers must be able to align a chosen

approach with the targeted learning objectives, while also meeting the needs of diverse learners. NCATE (2010) Standard 1b identifies the following target:

>Teacher candidates reflect a thorough understanding of the relationship of content and content-specific pedagogy delineated in professional, state, and institutional standards. They have in-depth understanding of the content that they plan to teach and are able to provide multiple explanations and instructional strategies so that all students learn. They present the content to students in challenging, clear, and compelling ways, using real-world contexts and integrating technology appropriately. Candidates in advanced programs for teachers have expertise in pedagogical content knowledge and share their expertise through leadership and mentoring roles in their schools and communities. They understand and address student preconceptions that hinder learning. They are able to critique research and theories related to pedagogy and learning. They are able to select and develop instructional strategies and technologies, based on research and experience that help all students learn. (para. 6)

Teacher effectiveness is defined in many ways. Instructional effectiveness is demonstrated when teachers use appropriate instructional approaches and strategies that foster student learning (Grieve, 2010). According to Danielson (2007) to receive a ranking of Distinguished, based on the Framework, a teacher must demonstrate expert knowledge both in content and pedagogy. Distinguished teachers also are proactive in interpreting content which may prove difficult and reactive in addressing student misunderstanding (Danielson, 2007). Frequently, instructional effectiveness is aligned with student achievement results. Teachers who are instructionally effective produce high student achievement scores, and there is a push for quantifiable effectiveness ratings for all of America's teachers (Keigher, 2010). The Harvard

Education Review Symposium (2012) presented the argument about the importance of evaluating teacher effectiveness and the importance of having highly qualified, highly effective teachers in the classroom.

Excellent teachers demonstrate a high level of professional responsibility and pedagogical understanding. Teachers are able to implement activities and lessons that align with chosen instructional approaches. In essence, excellent teachers who demonstrate high levels of teaching skill are able to not only comprehend the material and choose appropriate approaches, but they are able to implement theory into practice. NCATE (2010) iterated:

> Teacher candidates focus on student learning and study the effects of their work. They assess and analyze student learning, make appropriate adjustments to instruction, monitor student learning, and have a positive effect on learning for all students. Candidates in advanced programs for teachers have a thorough understanding of assessment. They analyze student, classroom, and school performance data and make data-driven decisions about strategies for teaching and learning so that all students learn. They collaborate with other professionals to identify and design strategies and interventions that support student learning. (para. 9)

Teachers demonstrating teaching excellence impact student learning through instructional planning and preparation. Teachers are able to identify learning goals and objectives, align activities, assess outcomes, and anticipate changes that need to be made to meet the needs of student (Danielson, 2007). Additionally, excellent teachers exceed normal curriculum practices and seek out innovative avenues for gaining a deeper understanding and to provide varied opportunities for students to interact with outside resources (Danielson, 2007).

Teacher Evaluation

Another common theme in the literature reviewed is the use of teacher evaluation measures to identify effective teaching. While a myriad of tools and programs have been tested (Harvard Center for Educational Research, 2013), there are not many tools that differentiate between effective teaching and excellent teaching. One of the largest efforts on identifying effective teacher evaluation has come from the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Project funded by the Bill and Linda Gates Foundation (2013). The founders of the MET Project conducted research to identify the types of evaluation tools that provide the best information related to the impact teacher effectiveness has on student achievement. While the results of the study allowed the development of specific teacher evaluation principles, a lack of distinction existed between a teacher who demonstrated competency by advancing student achievement and those teachers that stood out as excellent. However, it was recognized, "Teachers previously identified as more effective caused students to learn more. Groups of teachers who had been identified as less effective caused students to learn less" (p. 6). The results iterated that teaching excellence can be measured, balanced weights indicate multiple aspects of effective teaching, and adding a second scorer proved to more valuable and were more reliable (MET, 2013).

Teacher Attributes and Dispositions

NCATE (2010) identified several factors that influence teacher effectiveness. These factors are: "teacher preparation/knowledge of teaching and learning, subject matter knowledge, experience, and the combined set of qualifications measured by teacher licensure are all leading factors in teacher effectiveness" (para 1.). InTASC (CCSSO, 2013) also identified four areas that influence teaching excellence: Learner and Learning, Content Knowledge, Instructional Practice, and Professional Responsibility. Danielson (2007) identified four areas: planning and

preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities that also provide performance indicators for measuring teacher excellence.

Clear alignment between teaching and learning, content knowledge, instruction, and reflective practice can be seen in each of these frameworks. However, there is also research that identified specific attributes possessed by the teacher that leads to teaching excellence (Grant et al., 2010; Hattie, 2003; Huntly, 2008). The national frameworks identify expectations of excellent teachers. These attributes can be categorized in two ways: cognitive and affective. Aaronson, Barrow, and Sander (2007) conducted a study of Chicago public school teachers to measure the impact of quality on student achievement. The results showed greater gains in students of teachers who were more effective. Aaronson, et al (2007) concluded although the data shows marked academic improvement, the specific attributes of what makes a good teacher remain elusive, therefore, further supporting the need to identify specific attributes and dispositions of excellent teachers.

Cognitive attributes. Hattie (2003) described cognitive attributes as the way that teachers organize and implement content knowledge. Simply understanding the content or being able to recall content information does not make a teacher an expert. Holt-Reynolds (1999) conducted a case study to explore the connections between teachers' learning subject matter information and being able to teach the information to students. The study concluded learning and understanding the information does not translate into teaching excellence, but how the teacher presents and models the information is a stronger predictor of excellent teaching. Synthesizing the information in a manner that can be presented to students in a way that can be received, stored, and retrieved through the use of instructional approaches and teaching style can be considered as cognitive attributes. Hattie (2003) stated excellent teachers have the following

cognitive attributes:

- Have a deeper representations about teaching and learning

- Adopt a problem-solving stance to their work

- Anticipate, plan, and improvise as required by the situation

- Can identify which decisions are important and which decisions are not

- Context dependent and high situation cognition

- Adept at monitoring student problems and providing appropriate feedback

- Adept at developing and testing hypothesis about learning difficulties or instructional strategies

- Automatic

- Create optimal classroom environment

- Multidimensional perception of classroom situations. (p. 5)

Teachers with high levels of cognitive attributes have a deep, meaningful understanding of the teaching and learning process as evidenced by their ability to design, develop, and implement lessons and assessments that align standards with learning objectives and authentic assessment. The teacher is able to expand students' understanding of the content through rich, in-depth descriptions and examples that allow deep, meaningful connection. Danielson (2007) noted that distinguished teachers design coherent instruction which encourages significant learning among all types of learners. Excellent teachers can delineate between approaches and are able to connect the right approach with the information being taught. Teachers are able to identify which strategies work best for their students, and when planning and preparing for lesson activities, they vary their instructional approaches (Hattie, 2003). Excellent teachers not only plan and prepare differentiated, engaging lessons, but they also assess student learning

outcomes through varied approaches. Evidence of student understanding is measured in a variety of ways, and the results are used to inform future instruction (Danielson, 2007).

     Breadth and depth of knowledge. Excellent teachers have a breadth and depth of knowledge of the teaching and learning process. King (1963) stated,

> The instructional leader should seek increased breadth and depth of knowledge in understanding how children, youth, and adults grow and develop and learn. Such knowledge is basic to all instructional decisions, whether they concern long range plans or incidental matters. (p. 451)

Through this understanding, teachers are able to identify key learning competencies, make appropriate alignment between standards, lessons, and assessments, and clearly provide authentic opportunities for students to demonstrate their understanding of the content. Teachers demonstrating excellence are able to see the *big picture* and understand what instructional approaches and strategies will best meet the needs of the learners and convey the content information in the most meaningful and clear manner (NBPTS, 2014). In order to receive the ranking of distinguished in Danielson's (2007) Framework, teachers must display both content and pedagogical expertise. Instruction,

> links the purpose of the lesson to students' interests; the directions and procedures are clear and anticipate possible student misunderstanding. Teacher's explanation of content is thorough and clear, developing conceptual understandings. Students contribute to explaining concepts to their classmates. The teacher's spoken and written language is expressive, and the teacher finds opportunities to extend students' vocabularies. Students are brought into the classroom lessons with a clear understanding of lesson. (p. 12)

Students clearly understand expectations and learning outcomes when teachers identify lesson goals and objectives and present instructional material in a relevant way. Lesson resources match the lesson requirements, and teachers are able to convey the information through the use of strategies that address multiple intelligences and engage students.

McCane (2008) found that teachers who set higher expectations for their students see higher levels of student achievement. Excellent teachers anticipate student questions and needs and have appropriate supplemental resources and materials to address any needs that may arise during the lesson (Hattie, 2003). Teachers develop a clear scope and sequence and have breadth and depth of understanding related to scaffolding and what prerequisite skills are needed in order for students to be successful. Excellent teachers know what obstacles may prevent success and plan accordingly. These teachers use multiple resources when planning to ensure that all facets of the lesson are clearly outlined and differentiated. More importantly, excellent teachers know when to be flexible and change plans based on student need.

Excellent teachers know their content (Heck, 2009). They have a deep understanding of the information and are able to share this information in a clear and concise manner. However, content must be delivered in meaningful ways that allow students to use schema and make connections to develop a deeper understanding of the information being explored. Teachers of excellence know their content in such a deep manner that they are able to anticipate details that cause trouble for students and have multiple approaches for delivering the details (Hattie, 2003). Heck (2009) iterated that student achievement is positively impacted by teachers who use effective teaching practices. Excellent teachers are continuously researching and learning about content in context and keep current with best practices in each subject area to ensure the content is delivered in the most relevant fashion.

Self-efficacy. Teachers with high levels of self- and teacher efficacy are confident in their ability to meet the needs of all learners. Akbari and Allvar (2010) discussed how "teachers with higher levels of efficacy take more risks, set higher standards, and provide potential for higher academic gains among learners that can impact student achievement" (p. 3). Students in today's classrooms learn differently. Excellent teachers stay current with brain-based learning and instructional practices that have demonstrated to be effective through a solid, research-base, and they are extremely comfortable with the implementation of new, innovative ideas (Jensen, 2008). Penney (2008) studied the self-efficacy of teachers and concluded reflection, persistence, and confidence were noted as attributes influencing self-awareness.

Reflective. Being a reflective practitioner requires an increased level of higher order thinking skills. Schon (1987) defined reflection as "knowing-on-action" and "knowing-in-action," and these types of reflection can be compared based on when the reflecting is taking place (p. 21). Reflective practitioners are able to think flexibly during instruction and make appropriate changes based on real-time responses, and they are able to reflect on practices and outcomes after instruction has ended to make informed decisions for future implementation (Schon, 1987). Excellent teachers are reflective because they are able to synthesize, analyze, and evaluate their planning, instructional delivery, and assessment practices (Danielson, 2007). Specific time and strategies are used for reflecting and making appropriate instructional changes. Excellent teachers use their reflections to inform their teaching before, during, and after instruction. Excellent teachers have the ability to think critically about their own teaching and are open to suggestions, feedback, and criticism to enhance their performance (Schon, 1987). They view these tools as ways to grow and improve. Reflective teachers change instruction as necessary. They do not use the same lesson plans year after year; they understand the

importance of the individuality found in each classroom.

Affective attributes. Affective attributes related to teaching deal with student feelings, attitudes, and emotions. Excellent teachers recognize the importance of students' backgrounds and how their situations impact success in the classroom (Hattie, 2003). Teachers who demonstrate excellence in teaching have a passion for teaching and learning that is vibrant and easily seen by others. Danielson (2007) distinguished teachers at the highest level of her Framework as interactive, culturally sensitive, respectful, genuine, and focused on classroom citizenship.

Thompson and Cuseo (2012) explained how cultural competency is important in creating learning experiences that ensure all students have an equal opportunity to learn. Teachers with a high level of affective attributes relate well to students, respect unique backgrounds, encourage students to be successful, communicate effectively, challenge their students, and think outside of the box. Danielson (2007) also suggested excellent teachers are communicative and provide encouragement and support in all classroom dialogue that is respectful of diversity. Grieve (2010) conducted a study of 88 excellent teachers in Scotland, who completed a 44-question survey. Characteristics related to developing relationships were continuously given high ratings. Hattie (2003) identified the following affective attributes of excellent teachers:

- High respect for students

- Passionate about teaching and learning

- Develop self-regulation, involvement in mastery learning, enhanced self-efficacy and self esteem

- Provide appropriate challenging tasks and goals for students

- Positive influence on student achievement

- Enhance surface and deep learning. (p. 8)

Rapport. Excellent teachers understand that the relationship between teacher and student is one of the most important indicators of student success. Hamre, Pianta, Mashbury, and Downer (2007) described a study of 4,000 classroom teachers in which teachers actions were focused on positive interactions in the classroom. As a result, positive classroom relationships were built, and effective classroom practice was evident. The researchers concluded that teacher-student relationships should be emphasized, and training should be provided to ensure positive interaction. In order to reach a student, teachers must understand their individual, unique stories, and be prepared to meet them exactly where they are at. This requires a high level of empathy, compassion, and flexibility. Excellent teachers take time to get to know their students, they make appropriate attempts to build relationships, and show they care (Marzano & Marzano, 2003). Relational effectiveness is achieved when teachers create a positive rapport with students. Creating a classroom environment that is comfortable and inviting so that students feel safe to take academic risks supports positive teacher-student relationships (Thompson & Cuseo, 2012). Understanding the diverse backgrounds of students and doing what it takes to meet the needs of each and every student not only demonstrates cultural competence, but exhibits teaching excellence.

Excellent teachers take the time to identify student interests, to talk, and to show understanding. Building rapport is the foundation of the teacher-student relationship, and if a student does not trust the teacher, a barrier is present between the two. Gehlbach, Brinkworth, and Harris (2012) noted that changes in student-teacher relationships occur over the course of the year. These changes require attention by the teacher to ensure students feel valued and feel as if they are important. It is difficult to create student buy-in without solid relationships. Students

who do not trust teachers are often unwilling to take academic risks in the classroom.

Therefore, regardless of the cognitive attributes, an excellent teacher who possesses a lack of affective attributes results in a lack of rapport. Learning is void when rapport is low. Juvonen (2006) described rapport between a student and teacher as foundational in the success of that student. The classroom environment must foster a feeling of safety so that students feel confident in the learning process. Excellent teachers encourage students to engage in trial and error learning in a safe environment. Mistakes are not seen as fatal flaws, but as part of the learning process.

Cultural competence. Excellent teachers are culturally competent. They understand that cultural competence is not only focused on ethnic and race backgrounds, but that socioeconomic status, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and ability also impact a student's identity. Excellent teachers have self-awareness and self-knowledge and demonstrate acceptance and tolerance (Thompson & Cuseo, 2012). Students feel comfortable being themselves, and excellent teachers provide opportunities and resources that generate fairness and equality in the classroom regardless of cultural differences (Thompson & Cuseo, 2012).

Expectations. Excellent teachers are encouraging facilitators who set high expectations and then use their rapport, classroom environment, and cultural competence to guide their students to success. Excellent teachers set the expectations and encourage students to perform to their potential. Students want to meet the expectations set forth because excellent teachers set reasonable expectations based on individual student needs. According to Danielson's (2007) Framework, a student's intrinsic motivation is encouraged by an excellent teacher. The teacher knows what questions to ask, what type of feedback to provide, and the level of encouragement needed to motivate high level learning. Assor, Kaplan, and Roth (2002) studied the impact of

cognitive and affective behaviors of teacher and found that teachers, who know their students, received greater results from student effort. Excellent teachers do not lead from a one-size-fits-all model, but differentiate expectations so that students can meet success. Student ownership of classroom routines and policies is evident when excellent teachers develop management strategies that can be easily understood and implemented. Student behaviors reflect high expectations and expert classroom oversight. Excellent teachers are proactive, rather than reactive (Danielson, 2007).

Teacher Dispositions

Teacher dispositions reflect human behaviors (Schulte, Edick, Edwards, & Mackiel, 2004). The focus on dispositions can be aligned with affective attributes. If certain affective attributes are present, then certain dispositions should be displayed. Schulte, Edick, Edwards and Mackiel (2004) defined dispositions as cited in Katz (1993) as " a pattern of behavior exhibited frequently and in the absence of coercion, and constituting a habit of mind under some conscious and voluntary control, and that is intentional and oriented to broad goals" (p. 1).

Schulte et al. (2004) conducted several studies on dispositions of both teachers and administrators to determine what values, opinions, attitudes, and beliefs were held by effective teachers. The results showed that valid tools can be used to reliably measure teaching dispositions. Common dispositions based on Schulte's et al. (2004) index portray excellent teachers as caring and competent, fair and equitable, accepting of diversity, and possessing a belief that all students can learn. Furthermore, excellent teachers are reflective practitioners, collaborative, and agents of change. Schulte et al. discussed the importance of identifying appropriate dispositions in preservice teachers so universities and colleges can help candidates find another career path, if the required dispositions are not displayed. Therefore, teacher

preparation programs have high responsibility in recognizing appropriate versus non-appropriate dispositions.

Experience Versus Effectiveness

Rice (2010) evaluated over 40 years of research to determine if more experienced teachers were more effective and produced greater learning gains in students. Rice noted that the impact of teacher experience is greatest during the beginning years of one's career. However, after the first few years, experience is not a strong predictor of teacher performance. In fact, Rice found, that in some instances, more experienced educators may not be as effective or productive as their less-experienced counterparts. Rice further noted that teachers with less experience tend to teach in more difficult, high-risk locations, which in some cases may further compound the effects of their lack of experience. Schools who serve a high number of students from low socioeconomic homes are disadvantaged in that they have the most inexperienced teachers. Interestingly, Rice found that the greatest gap in performance came from experienced teachers who work in high-poverty schools. These teachers tend to not be as effective as their counterparts who teach in schools with different demographics. The debate on what creates this gap continues, but the lens is focused on lack of professional development, teacher burnout, or inability to stay current with educational trends and policies (Rice, 2010).

Kane, Rockhoff, and Staiger (2006) studied the effect of teacher effectiveness based on years of experience using value-added measures. The results showed that teachers with less than three years of experience had the largest difference in effectiveness, but teachers with more than three years did not show great improvement in effectiveness. This meant that teachers with more than three years of experience, while considered experienced, may still not be as effective as other teachers with less than three years of experience. Implications for this phenomenon that

focus on the numbers of years of experience are not valid and reliable methods for hiring or retaining teachers in the classroom. More experienced teachers are not necessarily more effective than beginning teachers. Therefore, reviewing what attributes excellent teachers possess would allow more relevant and sustainable personnel decisions to be made.

Research was also done on whether or not teachers with previous careers in fields other than education have a different impact on student achievement. Boyd et al. (2011) found that teachers in their first year of teaching, who had previous years of career experience outside the field of education, were not more or less effective than beginning teachers who did not have outside career experience. There were a few differences based on age and gender, but the overall results showed that career-switchers did not differ in level of effectiveness. This continues the discussion on exactly how experience impacts effectiveness.

Hattie (2003) conducted a study on National Board Certified Teachers as compared to less-experienced teachers to determine if experience played a part in student achievement. The results showed that teachers with National Board certification had students who produced deeper level work than those with less experience. Hattie also found that there were three major distinctions between expert teachers and those teachers with less experience. These included, "level of challenge, deeper representation, and feedback" (p. 15).

Stakeholder Perceptions

Thompson and Cuseo (2012) discussed how the four contextual factors of student, family, school, and community, make up the climate of a school and lead to higher levels of student achievement. Without a strong support system, student success can be negatively impacted, so it makes sense to consider the perceptions of various stakeholders when seeking to explore the phenomenon of teaching excellence. Administrators, parents, community members,

and teachers have a vested interest in the success of the school as a whole and in individual student achievement. Perceptions can be marred by personal experiences, individual expectations, positive or negative communication, and final achievement outcomes. As early as 1995, Epstein noted that when positive relationships are in place, teachers, parents, and community members are more effective in meeting the needs of students.

Administrators. Today's school leaders are held accountable for the performance of teachers through student achievement results. Often their focus is on school excellence, and with focus being on administrators as instructional leaders, it is imperative to understand how the role of instructional leader influences teaching excellence. Schools must meet annual yearly progress (AYP) by achieving the indicators set forth by the federal government. This means administrators must pay close attention to the teaching and learning that is happening. McKay (2011) conducted a study of elementary principals to seek perceptions of NCLB and the role of principals as instructional leader. The results showed that perceptions of school administrator responsibilities as instructional leader were impacted by NCLB requirements because there are many factors outside of school that influence student achievement. The implementation of Common Core State Standards brings a new role to the instructional leader model, and because this is such a new movement, there is no research exploring how the administrator changes or stays the same.

Administrators seek to hire highly-qualified educators so that the greatest impact on student learning can be achieved. Fink and Markholt (2011) differentiated between expert and novice in a variety of disciplines and examined how administrators must possess the qualities of an expert to be a true instructional leader. Administrators need to understand the indicators of teaching excellence and be able to succinctly define and identify attributes and dispositions that

demonstrate outstanding performance.

The perceptions of teaching excellence vary based on an administrator's knowledge of best practices in instruction; therefore, administrators must have the depth and breadth of knowledge related to research-based practices that have proven results on student achievement. Odhiambo and Hii (2012) conducted a qualitative study on key stakeholder perceptions regarding the effectiveness of school leadership. Findings revealed that administrators play a major role in ensuring high quality teaching and relational leadership. Administrators need to be able to use measurement tools to rate teacher effectiveness and provide feedback and support to move teachers from effective to excellent. Administrators must be subject matter experts and instructional leaders to ensure that teachers have the necessary tools to achieve excellence in their classrooms. Allowing administrators the opportunity to observe excellence and become familiar with teacher attributes and dispositions will increase the level of support being provided to teachers of all experience levels. Teachers at different career levels need different kinds of support, and the goal should be to grow and develop effective teachers into teachers of excellence. When administrators have a staff of excellent teachers, a level of excellence becomes the goalpost for the entire school climate.

Parents. Parents expect excellence for their children. They entrust the education of their children to teachers in the school setting. Most parents believe that highly effective teachers have been hired to teach their children. Because parents are not experts in education, it may be difficult for them to identify attributes and dispositions of teaching excellence. However, parent perception can be a large indicator of teacher effectiveness, and at times this can be problematic.

A study by Burns (1999) resulted in varying perceptions of parental involvement by the staff, parents, and students. In other words, parents perceived their levels of involvement

differently than students and teachers. Involved parents pay close attention to how teachers interact with their children and how the climate of the classroom impacts their student socially, emotionally, and academically. A series of educational briefs for the Harvard Family Research Project studied the impact of parental involvement in the schooling of children at all different levels (Weiss, 2008). The research showed parents who tune in to the interactions academically, socially, and emotionally complement the learning process. Communication between classroom and home highly impacts parent perception and can mean the difference between a positive and negative view of teaching excellence. Weiss (2008) stated "From the moment of their children's birth—and even before—parents' behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes affect children's cognitive development and behavior and even the establishment of achievement gaps" (p. 2). Parents are astute observers who recognize even the most insignificant details when it comes to their children's education, and allowing an opportunity to parents to further explore teaching excellence from their perspective helps to educate them on what should be happening at school. Oftentimes, parents are uninformed, or uneducated to the impact of teacher effectiveness of student learning. The literature reviewed supported positive parent perceptions and higher levels of student achievement, but the question remains as to whether or not achievement is the only measure of success to parents. Weiss also stated,

> Families are involved not just in schools and homes, but in a variety of settings. From the everyday "teachable moment" to formal educational institutions, families can encourage learning—in museums, on playgrounds, and in grocery stores, to name just a few settings. Broadening the concept of family involvement to include all of these settings provides more opportunities for families to support learning, reduces or compensates for barriers to traditional forms of involvement and promotes continuity of

involvement. (p.3)

Students of excellent teachers may experience a change in attitude, motivation, and self-worth, and these changes should be measured as a success right along with student achievement. Parents are advocates for educating the whole child, which means that parents want well-rounded, highly functioning citizens. Parents recognize when their children are receiving a well-rounded education.

Summary

The extant research identified several different attributes and dispositions of effective teachers (Hattie, 2003; Huntly, 2008; Wasserman, 2011). These attributes highlight academic and personal characteristics that support teaching excellence. Effective teaching is often measured in the level of student achievement. There are many programs available to assist beginning teachers in meeting a standard of excellence. Accrediting agencies and foundations in support of teaching provide opportunities for teachers to gain the necessary skills to be effective in the classroom from the very beginning.

Many times effective teaching is measured by area experts, administrators, and other teachers (Chen et. al, 2012; Watson et al., 2010). There is very little research available that gains the perspectives of other stakeholders that recognize teaching excellence. While effective teaching encourages student achievement, there are many other aspects to teaching that can provide success for students in school outside of the scores on a test. This study seeks to explore the perspectives of various stakeholders about which attributes and dispositions can be identified in teaching excellence.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study explored the perspectives of multiple stakeholders to ascertain what specific cognitive and affective attributes and teaching dispositions were identified as contributing behaviors to teaching excellence. Through this exploration, I hoped to gain insight into teacher characteristics that influence excellence in teaching. Teaching excellence is often quantified through the correlation of student achievement results (Grant et al., 2011); however, this study aimed to explore the qualitative features that influence teaching excellence in areas other than just student achievement. The following components were specifically identified and explained to provide a clear overview of the research design: research questions, participants, setting, procedures, data collection, researcher's role, data analysis techniques, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

Design

A qualitative study using a collective case study design was conducted to explore the phenomenon of teaching excellence in teachers (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). This design was chosen to support the purpose of the study which was to explore a phenomenon within its natural setting. This study provided a rich, in-depth view through the lens of multiple stakeholders regarding the phenomenon of excellence in teaching. The rationale for choosing a collective case study supported the opportunity to view multiple cases within one study (Stake, 1995), allowing for a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. The case was represented by teachers of various experience levels who have demonstrated teaching excellence. Teachers within the district were identified as excellent teachers based on the school district's teacher performance evaluation tool. The district measurement tool was not used to collect any data and

was only used to assist in identifying teachers who demonstrated excellent teaching. The rationale for using the case study design instead of other qualitative methodologies was to gain a clearer picture of the phenomenon within its natural setting. With this research design, a detailed account of the case, along with a detailed analysis, provides a holistic understanding of the specific phenomenon of teaching excellence (Stake, 1995).

Data were collected from multiple stakeholders and was focused on the cases within a bounded system of one school district. Yin (2009) discussed the importance of aligning the study's research questions with the appropriate research design. Choosing the collective case study design was based on the framework of the study which surrounds the research question stemming from the exploratory perspective of what attributes and dispositions teachers have that support the phenomenon of teaching excellence. The collective case study explored what specific attributes and dispositions influence teaching excellence.

Research Questions

Although there are a few studies that identified the attributes of effective teachers (Grieve, 2010; Hattie, 2003; Huntley, 2008), there was a gap in the literature related to the perceptions of multiple stakeholders regarding attributes and disposition of excellent teachers. The central research question for this qualitative study was: "What are the attributes and dispositions of excellent teachers from the perspectives of administrators, parents, and teachers?" Additional sub-questions were:

- What specific instructional (cognitive) behaviors influence teaching excellence in teachers as reported by teachers, administrators, and parents?

- What specific relational (affective) behaviors influence teaching excellence in teachers as reported by teachers, administrators, and parents?

- What professional and personal teaching dispositions do excellent teachers possess as reported by teachers, administrators, and parents?

Participants

Purposive, criterion sampling was used to identify teachers that demonstrate teaching excellence (Merriam, 2009). The participants of this study were six teachers identified as excellent by their school district teacher evaluation scores. The evaluation tool was adapted by the district; however, it closely aligned with Danielson's (2007) Framework for Teaching tool. Teachers were ranked Highly Effective to Ineffective, and for the purpose of this study participants had to have at least 90% of their rankings at Highly Effective and Effective with no rankings of Ineffective.

Administrators of each teacher were also participants, along with a few parent stakeholders. The number of participants provided a greater amount of certainty to ensure data and theoretical saturation, as well as informational redundancy was achieved (Yin, 2009). For each teacher, convenience sampling was used to identify stakeholders who provided additional perspectives on specific attributes and dispositions. The sample consisted of enough stakeholders to experience optimum learning about the phenomenon through balance and variety of participants (Stake, 1995).

Yin (2009) stated that more than five replications would be needed to obtain higher levels of certainty related to the phenomenon being studied. Gaining insight from multiple participants provided an adequate amount of perspectives to gain a clear understanding of the attributes of the teachers that lead to teaching excellence and for a variety of perspectives to be gained to establish an appropriate theoretical replication (Yin, 2009). Additional participants included multiple stakeholders such as the administrators and parents of each teacher. Age, gender, race,

and ethnicity were not considered as only personal experience with the chosen teachers would be used to determine stakeholder participation.

Setting

The setting for this collective case study was based on the case itself. The case included teachers identified as excellent teachers, and the setting consisted of the teachers' natural context in which specific contributions to the profession were made (Yin, 2009). The setting included an elementary and high school in a suburban school district in Michigan. At the time of the study, the district ranked in the top 30% of districts in all tested areas (MI Schools Data, 2013). The vision and mission of the school district is focused on excellence in education. The vision stated the school district "…will be the highest achieving school district in the Great Lakes Bay area" and the mission states it "...is to prepare students to be successful adults through excellence in education" (School District, 2014, para. 1). The rationale for this selection was collective case studies seek to understand the nature of the phenomenon in its natural setting (Stake, 1995) where teaching excellence is the standard goalpost. Teaching excellence, the phenomenon, takes place in the classroom of the teacher, which is the reason for the selection of K-12 classrooms as the setting. This study may add to the body of data being collected and may be used to inform decision-making within the district related to personnel hiring and teacher retention associated with teaching excellence.

Procedures

The first step in this qualitative study was to gain permission from the school district to collect data for this collective case study. A formal copy of the proposal was presented to the district superintendent in a face-to-face meeting to provide a clear understanding of the research design, methodology, data collection procedures, and proposed analysis techniques. The

superintendent was eager to participate and provided a written letter stating the research could be conducted in the school district.

Once written permission was received, an application to the Institutional Review Board of Liberty University was filed for approval to conduct the study. The study was outlined explicitly to ensure that the respect for persons, beneficence, and justice were protected. Approval was received on December 19, 2013. After appropriate permissions were received, from both the district and the university, the district superintendent reviewed teacher evaluations determining candidates that met the required identifiers. For the purpose of this research study, excellence was identified by 90% of teacher evaluation rankings Highly Effective or Effective with no ratings of Ineffective. The superintendent informed me via email when the candidate pool was determined. To ensure random sampling within the convenience sample, I provided the superintendent with 30 random numbers. The amount of random numbers was given to ensure enough participants would be available. Seven teachers agreed to participate out of a candidate pool of 30. However, after one of the interviews was completed, a teacher withdrew. Participant selection was based on the definition of excellence defined for this study based on Danielson's (2007) Framework for Teaching and the alignment of the district teacher evaluation tools. Each teacher is evaluated on the same criteria using the tool adapted by the district.

After the district identified possible participants with 90% of rankings at Highly Effective or Effective and no marks of Ineffective, the superintendent made an initial contact with administrators and teachers to see if any teachers were willing to participate in the study. Each candidate who agreed to participate in the study contacted me via email and provided personal contact information.

I made initial contact with each teacher and administrator via email. A written description of the study and requested participation requirements were provided to the teachers and administrators. I engaged in dialogue via email to answer questions from both teachers and administrators. As teachers and administrators voluntarily agreed to participate, I sent follow up emails to schedule initial interviews.

Data collection began with interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to gather teachers' perspectives to the question "What are the attributes and dispositions of excellent teachers from the perspectives of administrators, parents, and teachers?" Interviews were one-on-one and took place between the researcher and the teacher in the natural setting of the teacher's classroom. Through the implementation of an interview guide (see Appendix B), I asked questions related to the research sub-questions to explore what specific attributes and dispositions the teacher perceived as influencing teaching excellence. The questions were semi-structured and open-ended so that the teacher was allowed to include additional insight as necessary. Based on the variation of responses, interviews lasted approximately 25 to 45 minutes. During the interviews, I took field notes and engaged in dialogue to reconcile questions and facilitate discussion. Each interview was recorded using the iRecorder on the iPad.

Each interview with the administrator was held separately in the administrator's office. An interview guide (see Appendix B) was also used to guide the questions. The interview discussion explored what attributes and dispositions administrators identified as having positive contributions to teaching excellence. Open-ended questions were provided so that the administrator was able to add additional insight. Field notes were taken during the one-on-one interviews, along with an audio recording using the iRecorder on the iPad. The length of each interview was approximately 45 minutes.

Focus groups were attempted, but obtaining enough parent participants proved difficult. Many of the focus groups changed to individual interviews when parent stakeholders failed to attend the scheduled sessions. The focus groups were held in a classroom and media center. The semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix B) was employed to allow parents to add to the discussion. The interviews and focus groups allowed me to gather data from multiple perspectives as to what attributes and dispositions can be identified in excellent teachers. The focus group discussions provided detail that could be analyzed to see if there were any overarching characteristics that can contribute to teaching excellence. The length of the interviews was approximately 30 minutes. Field notes and audio recordings using the iRecorder on the iPad were used to gather data.

Gathering of artifacts (newsletters, lesson plans, feedback, student work, etc.) took place after the teacher participants' interviews. An email with requested items was sent prior to the scheduled interview so that the interview participants were able to provide me with the artifacts on the day of the interview. Artifacts were used as a means to triangulate the data collection. I coded each artifact and created a graphic organizer, which reflected major themes and patterns of the artifacts. I studied each artifact based on Danielson's (2007) Framework for Teaching domains to determine specific attributes and dispositions that were present. Artifact collection provided me additional opportunity and added documentation to reflect on any common characteristics present, which may support the information gleaned during the interviews and focus groups.

Common themes and patterns began to emerge during the interviews, and coding began within the field notes during the data collection. Both direct interpretation and categorical aggregation were used to create meaningful understanding of the data collected (Stake, 2008).

Direct interpretation of each interview, focus group, and artifact allowed for meaning to be gathered from an individual instance (Stake, 1995). Categorical aggregation was used to take the meaning from these individual instances and create multiple categories from which the study's themes were derived.

All audio files were transcribed and sent to study participants for member checking prior to coding. Once the participants validated transcripts and provided any reconciling information, coding began and the search for meaning ensued through the recognition of common themes and patterns known as correspondence (Stake, 2008). First, codes for each interview, focus group, and artifact were developed. From these single instances, interview, focus group, and artifact codes were organized in three categories; affective, cognitive, and professional disposition characteristics. Once coding was completed, both within-case and cross-case analysis followed to continue building an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders.

The Researcher's Role

My role as Human Instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) comes from my current positions as school administrator, teacher educator, and teacher. The significance of my role as the human researcher comes from these triadic roles. In each of these roles, it is important to understand the attributes of an excellent teacher. School administrators have the high responsibility of hiring the most effective teachers to staff classrooms. Understanding attributes and dispositions that influence teaching excellence, as perceived by varied stakeholders, may assist in ensuring the best teachers are put in classrooms. As a veteran educator with many years of experience and as a new teacher mentor and professor of preservice educators, understanding the attributes that assist teachers in being excellent allows me to make deeper, more relevant connections to real-

life experiences to assist educators and teacher candidates in preparing to be the best teachers possible. Many years of experience in both K-12 and higher education settings as a teacher have prompted my curiosity in teaching excellence.

I did not know, nor did I have any prior relationship with any of the study participants. Epistemological assumptions, based on personal experience as an educator with coworkers and as the parent of students who have uniquely different teachers, may be present. As the human researcher, it was imperative to enact the skills of being an effective investigator; such skills associated with valid and reliable research are imperative to collecting data that supports the purpose of the study (Yin, 2009). While gathering data to answer the research question, my role was that of a nonparticipant observer.

Data Collection

Data collection needed to be systematic and timeframes for completing all components of the data collection were considered (Stake, 1995). Teacher performance evaluations used by the participating district were analyzed, and teachers with 90% of the identifiers being marked Highly Effective and Effective with no marks of Ineffective were identified as possible participants. Three data collection procedures were used in this qualitative, collective case study. Interviews, focus groups, and artifact collection were used for collecting data (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). Once possible participants were notified, the superintendent provided my contact information and study participants began to make contact via email. Interviews were scheduled at times and dates convenient for the study participants.

Interviews of the teacher participants were conducted individually in each of the teacher's classrooms. The interviews followed an interview guide (see Appendix B) and consisted of semi-structured questions so the length of sessions varied based on the teachers' responses. The

questions in the interview guide were developed by the researcher and reviewed by four educators and two administrators who were not a part of the study. Field notes were taken and audio recording was used to capture participant responses using the iRecorder application on the iPad. Teachers provided artifacts for analysis as an additional data point.

Interviews with administrators were conducted individually in their offices and consisted of semi-structured questions within an interview guide (see Appendix B). Field notes were taken and the interviews were audio recorded using the iRecorder application on the iPad. Again, length of the interviews varied based on the length of question responses and follow-up discussions.

Focus groups were held in neutral locations and the focus group questions were presented in a round robin format. Guidelines were presented to the participants prior to the start of the session to ensure that the integrity of the discussion stays in place and opportunities for all participants to speak were given. Sessions were approximately 30 minutes in duration.

Both interviews and focus groups were audio recorded. Field notes were taken during the interviews and focus groups in a standard college-ruled notebook. The audio recordings were transcribed and sent to the study participants via email for member checking. Each participant replied with approval and any addition reconciling statements if needed.

Access to artifacts, such as newsletters, websites, parent communications, and lesson plans, were sought during the one-on-one interviews. Using these multiple forms of data collection allows for the triangulation of the data (Yin, 2009). The methods for collecting data extended from the idea that each situation is unique, and deep, rich investigation needs to take place to fully understand the context of a specific phenomenon in its natural setting (Stake, 2008). Triangulation in this collective case study provided enhanced evidence for knowledge

uncovered through common themes and patterns in the data collected. Triangulation happened

through a varied sample and multiple data collection avenues. True understanding of the

attributes of teachers that contribute to teaching excellence came from an in-depth look at

multiple sources of data.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with six teachers who were identified as excellent teachers

and randomly selected by the school superintendent based on district teacher performance

evaluations. The administrators of each teacher participated in one-on-one interviews using a

semi-structured format. These interviews were held separately. The interviews consisted of an

interview guide (see Appendix B) that allowed for a semi-structured questioning process with

additional allowance for open-ended questions to lead the interview to additional discussion and

experiences of specific attributes that contribute to excellence in teaching. The purpose of the

questions pertaining to teaching excellence provided an opportunity for the participants to

identify attributes that encourage positive interactions in and out of the classroom that lead to

teaching excellence. The construction of the questions allowed an opportunity for the participant

to include open-ended responses and enhanced discussion. The questions allowed the participant

to elaborate on the foundation of the topics being covered in the semi-structured question stems.

Each interview was audio recorded using the iRecorder application on the iPad. Field notes

provided written observations and details of participant responses. The quality of the interview

guide was validated through a review by an expert panel in my local school district. The expert

panel consisted of two school principals and four veteran teachers with extensive training in

teacher evaluation systems. Changes were made and additional questions were added to

reconcile and clarify questions.

Focus Groups

In addition to the interviews, focus groups consisting of parent stakeholders were conducted. The interview guide (see Appendix B) was used to guide the focus group discussions. Originally five focus groups were scheduled, while in actuality only one focus group was held due to lack of parent participation. Two other focus groups were held, but only one parent attended, changing the format from a focus group to an interview. Semi-structured questions within the interview guide were used to facilitate the discussion. Oftentimes, the round-robin process of a focus group brings about discussions that are not present in interviews (Yin, 2009). Focus group discussions were recorded using the iRecorder application on the iPad. The parent focus groups and interviews were transcribed and member checks were performed to check the accuracy of the information and maintain the integrity of the study.

Artifacts

A variety of artifacts were collected to further the understanding of attributes that lead to teaching excellence in teachers. Newsletters, emails, projects, lesson plans, and worksheets were collected to gain a better picture of cognitive and affective attributes that support high levels of effectiveness. I explored the artifacts for common characteristics and coded common patterns to identify information that was supportive in nature of the interviews and focus guides. Through reviewing the components and characteristics of teacher-created materials, I gained additional insight into both cognitive and affective dispositions and attributes that influence teaching excellence.

Researcher Field Notes

Field notes were recorded by me. The field notes were used to record the nonverbal body language of study participants and to make observations about the classroom environments. The

field notes were used to further develop and substantiate information collected during interviews and focus groups.

Data Analysis

Yin (2009) discussed the many prejudices that exist in relation to case study research. Because of this, it is imperative that the data analysis techniques are clearly described and that plentiful data is gathered to thoroughly answer the posed research questions. Data analysis started with all of the collected data being transcribed. A coding system for the transcriptions evolved during the analysis process. Member checking of interview transcriptions followed by coding processes to identify common themes or points within the data collection ensued. Identification of emerging themes by myself, through coding, allowed for data to be opened up and meaning to be explored through the identification of important themes or patterns (Stake, 1995). In the initial phase, common themes or characteristics were identified as the responses from the interview questions were examined and the process of categorical aggregation evolved (Stake, 1995). Once these themes or patterns were identified within the case (within-case analysis), analysis of the themes across the cases (cross-case analysis) were done to assist me in identifying the specific cognitive and affective attributes that are present in teachers who demonstrate teaching excellence. A cross-case analysis provided me with an opportunity to understand what specific attributes are identified by all stakeholders as characteristics of teaching excellence (Stake, 1995). Once all of the data was collected, transcribed, and analyzed, a list of specific attributes and dispositions of teaching excellence was generated based on stakeholder responses.

Trustworthiness

The credibility of the study was measured through the triangulation of the data, member

checks, an expert panel, and in-depth engagement and observation. The triangulation of data

collection ensured that any weaknesses existing were addressed. Member checks conducted by

the participants ensured dialogue and information being conveyed was accurately reported in the

transcripts. The expert panel acted as subject matter experts to review the interview guide

questions (see Appendix B) for readability and ease of understanding. The credibility of the

findings was increased through thick, rich-data collected during the interviews, focus groups, and

artifact collection. The dependability of the findings was confirmed through an audit trail and

external audit process to ensure information was presented in a manner clearly supported by the

data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations ensured information collected was kept confidential in locked

filing cabinets and in password protected computer files to protect the integrity of the study.

Identifying information of each stakeholder was replaced with participant numbers to ensure

institution and participant confidentiality. Only the participants, the school district, and I have

access to data collected. Although I was a non-participant observer, there may have been some

researcher bias present because of my triadic roles as administrator, teacher educator, and

teacher. Through bracketing, I attempted to suspend any preconceived assumptions present due

to prior personal experiences. Also, as a parent of students who have had both effective and

ineffective teachers, it was important to exclude preconceived ideas so to be as objective as

possible for the duration of the study. Reflecting on personal assumptions and experiences

allowed me to act only as a non-participant observer of the specific phenomenon within the

identified bounded system.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The goal of this qualitative, collective case study was to explore multiple stakeholder perspectives regarding the specific cognitive and affective attributes of excellent teachers. This method of research was chosen to identify specific attributes and professional dispositions of teachers as noted through multiple stakeholder perceptions from the teachers themselves, administrators, and parents. One district located in Michigan served as the site for data collection. Various stakeholder groups clearly delineated the difference between how they perceived effective and excellent teachers. Several research questions informed the study. The overarching question focused on the attributes and dispositions of excellent teachers from the perspectives of administrators, parents, and teachers. Additional sub-questions focused on the specific instructional, relational, and professional/personal teaching dispositions that parents, teachers, and administrators believed excellent teachers possess. The findings reported in this chapter are based on analysis of the following data collection points: semi-structured interviews, focus groups, teacher artifacts, and researcher field notes. The data collected uncovered five themes related to cognitive and affective attributes and teaching dispositions displayed by excellent teachers as posed in the guiding research questions. The themes were:

(a) Excellent teachers design effective instruction.

(b) Excellent teachers know themselves.

(c) Excellent teachers focus on relationships.

(d) Excellent teachers know their students.

(e) Excellent teachers consistently exceed the expectations of their job.

Data Collection Procedures

The purpose of this collective case study was to explore the phenomenon of teaching excellence through the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. This case study used four specific data collection methods including interviews, focus groups, field notes, and the review of teacher artifacts. For the purpose of this research study, excellent teachers were identified as having 90% of teacher evaluation rankings of Highly Effective or Effective with no ratings of Ineffective. Participant selection was based on the definition of excellence defined for this study based on Danielson's (2007) Framework for Teaching and the alignment of the district teacher evaluation tools. Each teacher was evaluated on the same criteria using the tool adapted by the district. The superintendent initially identified a pool of 30 teachers in the district who met these standards. Seven teachers agreed to participate out of a candidate pool of 30. However, one teacher requested to withdraw from the study, so six teachers identified as excellent, based on the criteria, participated in the study. The teachers' supervisors were asked to participate, and three administrators agreed to participate. The administrators chose parents who had children currently enrolled in each teacher's class and contacted them via U.S. Mail and by telephone to request participation. Initially, five focus groups were scheduled; however, several parents canceled prior to the scheduled meeting, so one focus group was held with three additional focus groups turning into interviews due to lack of participant involvement.

Teachers identified having excellence, and their respective administrators participated in individual interviews. Parents participated in focus groups. The data were collected within the participants' natural setting. Teacher interviews were held in teacher classrooms and administrator interviews were held in administrative offices. Two parent focus groups were held in the teacher's classroom with one of the focus groups having only one attendee and the other

focus group which also turned into a parent interview was held in the school library. Informed

consent was obtained from all participants prior to the collection of any data. Participants were

given an additional verbal summary of the purpose of the study and provided with an opportunity

to ask any questions. Artifacts were collected from all teachers, but one, at the time of the

interviews. Field notes were recorded during and after each interview and focus group. Artifacts

included lesson plans, newsletters, and other types of parent communication such as emails.

Field notes taken by me during and after the interviews and focus groups provided additional

documentation and supporting evidence of cognitive and affective attributes and professional

dispositions.

Interview and focus group questions (see Appendix B) were developed to align with the

central research questions guiding the study. Additionally, specific questions were asked to

address each of the sub-questions. Each group of participants had slightly different questions

specific to their association with the teacher identified as excellent. Using a semi-structured

interview guide (see Appendix B), questions were posed that encouraged thoughtful, reflective

discussion. The intent of the questions was to focus on both cognitive and affective attributes

and professional dispositions that influence teaching excellence. Similarly, the interview

questions provided opportunities for participants to define teaching excellence from their

perspective, which allowed connections to be made between respondent answers to interview

questions, artifacts, and field notes. Field notes were noted on a graphic organizer developed by

me (see Appendix C).

Central Research Question

Specific questions within the interview guide (see Appendix B) were related specifically

to the research questions. The guiding central question of this study was "What are the attributes

and dispositions of excellent teachers from the perspectives of administrators, parents, and

teachers?" Table 1 displays each research question in connection with the specific question

asked during the interviews and focus groups.

Table 1

Alignment of Interview and Focus Group Questions to Research Questions

Research Question	Interview Question Connection
What are the attributes and dispositions of excellent teachers from the perspectives of administrators, parents, and teachers?	Questions 1-9
What specific instructional (cognitive) behaviors influence teaching excellence in teachers as reported by teachers, administrators, and parents?	Questions 2, 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9
What specific relational (affective) behaviors influence teaching excellence in teachers as reported by teachers, administrators, and parents?	Questions 3, 3,a, 3b, 3c, 3d, 4, 5, 6, 6a, 7, 8, 9
What specific relational (affective) behaviors influence teaching excellence in teachers as reported by teachers, administrators, and parents?	Questions 3b, 5

Building the Case

To fully understand the perspectives of the teachers identified as excellent, within-case

analysis was conducted through the detailed description of respondent answers based on each of

the interview questions. Because the research questions were related to either cognitive or

affective attributes or professional dispositions, I used categorical aggregation to meaningfully

assign each code to an attribute based on Danielson's (2007) Framework for Teaching, which

was used to help define the parameters of teaching excellence. The case site school used an

adapted format of Danielson's tool, and excellent teachers were identified based on receiving

90% Highly Effective and Effective ratings with no ratings of Ineffective. Prior research (Hattie, 2003; Schulte et al., 2004) also informed the development of the research questions.

<center>**Descriptive Data**</center>

Setting

A school district in Michigan was the setting for this study. At the time of the study, the district had one learning center, one elementary school, and one high school. The district is ranked in the state "within the top 30% by any testing measure" (Superintendent, personal communication, 2014). The vision and mission of the school aligned with the overall goal of the study. The mission stated, "The purpose of [district] is to prepare students to be successful adults through excellence in education." Likewise, the vision stated, "[District] will be the highest achieving school district in the Great Lakes Bay region" (School District, 2014, para 1). A climate and culture of excellence was evident in the engaging climates and appearance of each classroom in each of the school buildings.

Participants

The participants were comprised of six classroom teachers; two males and four females, who were identified as excellent based on teacher evaluation ratings using district measurement tools which were adapted from the Danielson (2007) framework. Three administrators (two female and one male), who were direct supervisors of the excellent teachers, and four parents (all females), who had children in the classes of the identified teachers, were chosen as participants. Of the six teachers, five were elementary teachers and one was a high school teacher. Originally there were seven teacher participants, but during the analysis phase, one of the teachers chose to drop out of the study leaving six teachers. Table 2 displays the demographics specific to each teacher participant. Table 2

Teacher Demographic Data

Teacher Participant	Gender	Years of Experience	Grade Level
1	Female	4	Eleventh Grade
2	Male	9	First Grade
3	Female	6	Sixth Grade
4	Male	7	Fourth Grade
5	Female	14	Second Grade
6	Female	6	Third Grade

Interviews

A semi-structured interview guide, developed by the researcher (see Appendix B) was used in all interviews with teachers and administrators. Questions were formulated based on prior research findings and were developed to guide the discussions during focus groups and interviews. The interview guide was used to initiate questioning and to keep the interview progressing; however, additional questions were used to reconcile respondent answers as needed. Interviews were conducted individually with six teachers identified as excellent and individually with three administrators. Responses to questions are presented in this section.

Teacher interviews. Specific statements from the actual interviews were used to validate the teacher, administrator, and parent responses to the interviews. Question 1 was an initial question asked of the teachers regarding their teaching experience and grade levels taught to gain additional demographic information.

Question 2. The second interview question asked teachers to describe the cognitive (knowledge) attributes that lead to positive interactions between teachers and students in the classroom. The teachers described cognitive attributes in terms of content and pedagogical

expertise. Highlighting the importance of a thorough understanding of content knowledge, many of the participants explained how understanding of pedagogy also encourages the implementation of varied instructional approaches to meet the specific needs of students. Overall, the comments focused on the idea that excellent teachers understand content standards, align curriculum, and assess student growth.

Teacher 1 described herself as well-versed in her content area which allowed her to modernize the topics. She explained that she took time to determine the learning preferences of her students. "I look at what type of kids I am working with. It's different for all of my classes. Are they better talking or moving? Are they better working with partners or in small groups?" In determining relevancy, Teacher 1 also stated that she connects the content to the students' lives to create deeper meaning: "Students need to be able to say, this is important too because, and then make a personal connection. I always try to make a real world connection."

Teacher 2 described how he makes instructional decisions based on the benchmarks students need to reach. He assesses student ability levels and makes adjustment to instruction to move students from one point to another. He explained that when he is teaching, if he realizes his students are not at a particular point or need additional time, he asks himself "So, what can I do to make sure they get that? What do I have to add in, or what can I do, or how can I fit more time for us to go over this or practice skill more?" He is always focused on "the long-term goal." Individualizing instruction allows Teacher 2 to differentiate instruction. He explained, "Individualized groups allow more time to work on things, allowing different students to ask for help, whether it's from me or from a peer, whatever's comfortable." Recognizing that individual students possess different needs, Teacher 2 allows students to take academic risks by providing a safety net in which he is always willing to "discuss their mistakes and show them ways to

approach it in a better way."

Teacher 3 discussed how teaching practices are constantly changing, so she must be flexible enough to implement updates or changes to curriculum, and district requirements, all aspects of being a pedagogical expert. She shared how she spends a great amount of time learning and perfecting content area knowledge. Teacher 3 explained, "Whatever content I am teaching, I always spend a ton of time getting to know the information. I don't feel comfortable teaching students about things unless I know that I will be able to answer their questions." Understanding individual student differences plays a major role in being a subject matter expert. Teacher 3 described how even though one may spend a great deal of time planning and preparing, students' individual differences impact how an excellent teacher delivers instruction. She stated,

> When I come in August, I feel like I am ready to go. Then I meet all of the kids. So I take all of my ideals and how I would like everything to align, but then I've got to figure the kids into it and if I have kids with special needs, cognitive impairments, or learning disabilities, or they just don't like social studies, how can I work it so that it fits with them?

Teacher 3 described how a safe learning environment allows her to meet the needs of all levels of learners, and that a tremendous amount of planning and anticipating is required to fully differentiate instruction. She explained,

> So, I spend a lot of time in the forefront building all of it and then throughout the school year, it's a constant process of changing everything and adjusting while making sure every kid's meeting the standard. And I think I do a pretty good job of meeting the needs of the kids while still trying to work those standards in there.

Teacher 4 addressed content and pedagogy expertise through the lens of multiple learning styles. He explained how providing multiple modalities allows him to address the needs of each individual student. He described the process by saying, "In almost all of my lessons, I try to offer a lot of visuals for kids and a lot of concrete examples for practice. Then I try to always offer things they can do at home with parents that are willing to extend if they want, and I offer a lot of remediation."

Teacher 5 connected content and pedagogical knowledge with knowing exactly where her students' skill levels are at and what interests them. She explained that in order to make meaningful connections to the content, she has to know what her students like. She spends time interviewing the students and then provides materials and resources to bridge the content with things that engage her students. For example, she stated, "We used to look at students' book levels in reading and make them read books at their level, versus finding books that students are interested in to engage them in the process." She believes that connecting content to interest allows students to "think about how you think."

Teacher 6 uses content standards and grade level expectations, along with what students are interested in, to bridge the gap between teaching and learning. She described how staying current with research and best practices allows her to be knowledgeable about all subject areas. She commented,

> I feel like I am pretty knowledgeable about teaching, especially the area of teaching reading because I am going for my master's and that is what I spend the majority of my bachelor's on, and I continue to keep myself current in that research. Like going to professional development, going to conferences, doing the research for my master's degree.

She also considers the different learning styles and different types of students she has in her classroom when determining what instructional approaches will be used. Based on her students, she determines how to approach her lessons. She explained,

> I have a very active class this year, so for social Studies this year, we did something called the Amazing Race and I took them to them to the gym. There was a lot of learning going on down there because they have to be moving.

Tailoring lessons to meet individual needs demonstrated pedagogical mastery and allowed students to master content skills.

Question 3. The third interview question asked teacher to describe the affective (emotional) attributes that lead to positive experiences in your classroom. The teacher participants openly shared emotional and relational attributes that lead to positive classroom environments and engaging experiences for students in their classrooms. The most common affective attributes discussed were authenticity, empathy, passion, and sincere care for students.

Teacher 1 explained the process for developing rapport with students and recalled that this was not immediate. She stated,

> It took me probably 2 ½ years to develop what I think is a meaningful relationship with all of my kids. Because of course, it is survival mode. With this year being my fourth year, I think just the fact that I can empathize with some kids and I can understand that things happen, you forget work, you show up late, and I can understand that.

Empathy encompasses additional attributes such as patience and compassion. Teacher 1 described how empathy is displayed in her classroom. She explained, "I try to be as patient as possible with them, probably when they don't deserve it, but I will be patient." Relationally, her students understand that she has compassion and is genuinely concerned with who her students

are as people. She tells her students,

> You need to understand that I care about you. I care about what you say in my room. I
>
> care about what you have to say, I care about what you think and what you write, so don't
>
> ever devalue yourself.

She acknowledges the importance of her students' presence in her room and makes each

student feel a part of the class. Building relationships with students encourages positive

interactions and motivates students. Teacher 1 builds relationships first, so that her students

understand the value of the work being done in her class: "I try to get them to understand that I

care about them, so if I care about you, I need you to meet me half way there. I need you to care

about the work I am giving you." Therefore, using relational skills, Teacher 1 encourages

student buy-in to the learning process. She believes it is about relationship first and the learning

will occur naturally. She explains that she creates real-life meaning for her students through

connecting her affective attributes to the content area skills. She describes it this way,

> So, I guess, building a relationship first and trying to get them to see it's not the fact that
>
> we're reading Frankenstein that I care about; it's your ability to take a position on a topic
>
> and to be able to defend it. If for whatever reason you meet the same situation after high
>
> school you are able to weigh pros and cons.

Teacher 2 described the importance of being sincere, being real with the students and

meeting them right where they are at. He explained,

> I think it's about kids being experts at knowing when you are just blowing smoke at
>
> them, especially at this age. They have to buy in that you care about them, not just about
>
> them doing well on tests, but you actually care about them and their growth.

Genuinely caring about the success of students whether it be socially, emotionally, or

academically provides the framework for his interactions with his students. He further explained,

> With my classroom rules, I don't say this is what you can't do. I tell them this is our classroom, our classroom is safe, and our classroom is a place to learn. Our classroom is a place of respect. And whenever there is an issue, I take the time to explain this is why it is not okay.   I use it as a teaching opportunity.

Teacher 2 provides opportunities for students to practice relational skills that are expected not only in school, but out in the world by providing examples of how to get along with people. He explained, "I believe that my students have high potential to be amazing" so he wants them to realize their value as people, not just as students.

Teacher 3 encourages authenticity through open lines of communication where students feel heard and understood. She builds relationships through modeling and by providing examples of positive interactions. She believes that rapport is built through "small baby steps" where the students feel valued and encouraged. She explains, "I found the biggest way [to build rapport] is just through communicating with them and just being honest." She describes her authenticity as

> being so open with myself and willing to admit my own mistakes and my own faults and my own shortcomings, I think they find me less threatening. They see me not as a peer, but they see me as someone that's relatable. They understand that I have dogs and I have a life. I think I am very open with them; I'm very honest with them.

Without talking over the kids and meeting them at their level, she is able to communicate effectively and genuinely, the rapport is a two-way street. She explains,

> I have the ability and the willingness to look and assess a situation and pay attention to

what their needs are. It's not just about me. It's not just about what I have to

accomplish. I hold them accountable still, and I support them.

Teacher 4 recognized that the "whole" child must be dealt with, in that they have a life

outside of school. He explains,

I try to stay mindful that every kid is a whole child meaning that they go home, they have

experiences at home, they have sports that are very important to them, they have

problems at home, they have parents that know things better than I do, they have parents

that know nothing about what I do. And I try to get to know them outside of the

classroom, inside the classroom. I try to bring things they are involved in into the

classroom. I like to go out and see them interact. I do all recesses so I get to see how

they're doing socially and I try to bridge some of the gaps so they don't have the things to

worry about.

Paying attention to individual needs and being compassionate about individual circumstances,

Teacher 4 builds rapport:

If I know a student doesn't have any help at home when they go home with their

homework, I try to make sure they have the hard ones done here then they can talk to me.

Instead of having them turn it into me first thing in the morning, I have them circle

questions so that I can go over those with them.

He encourages and motivates his students based on what he has learned about them. He

describes a situation this year where he authentically related with one of his students:

This year, I had a student who was struggling to be involved in sports or anything, and I

kind of basically came to realize that that's probably because his parents tell him; he's

not really a sports kid. He's more of a working on homework kid. He's not very athletic,

but I encourage him to go out for the wrestling club and he did and he loved it. He had a

lot of fun with it and it kind of made the parents go 'wow', there's more to this guy. I

basically identify with the student and understand that this six hours of their day is very

important to what happens at home, but what happens outside [the classroom] is very

important.

Teacher 4 sets clear boundaries through genuine care and open communication. He

explains,

I'm going to pick on you, and if I've picked too much, you have every right to say, hey

you're picking me too much old guy. You need to quit picking on me because it hurts

my feelings. And I see that environment is in place. We have a safe environment.

Students relate to Teacher 4 and their peers because taking academic risks is part of the process

in his classroom, but strong relationships cushion the fall of mistakes:

I have them clap for a kid who gets something dead wrong on the board and isn't afraid

to say, hey I don't know how to do this. Then we all clap and say hey, good job. You

were willing to say I don't get it.

Teacher 5 was passionate about being relationally effective and starts with the year by

connecting personally with her students:

I tell them lots of stories about my family and let them get to know my family as I get to

know them. I allow them to tell me many stories and interrupt teaching in order to have

that time to get to know each other.

Authenticity comes through connection. She explained,

The most important thing for me in setting up my classroom is to make sure my kids feel

connected to me. I find I have less behavioral issues because they want to behave for me,

not because, oh you're going to get in trouble, but because they want to behave for me

because we're connected and they love me.

She builds relationships by taking interest in her students outside of the classroom. She attends sporting events, dance recitals, and church plays; she takes pictures and shares them with the class and sends them to the parents. She sends the message "I'm not only invested in you here, but I care about you outside of here." She paused for a minute and looked up and said, "I absolutely love these kids, I adore them."

Teacher 6 balances a firm foundation with a caring attitude. Her students trust her because she sets the example of the standards she expects. She stated,

I make sure that I listen to their stories, I make sure that I am setting a good example by

showing my emotional side, showing that I am caring, showing that I care about them.

And I think they can see that, they know that they can trust me.

She takes their interests into consideration and creates opportunities for students to engage in activities that align with those interests. She describes authenticity as,

making sure they see a positive example, seeing those high expectations and so that

hopefully motivates them to reach those goals and reach those expectations. Doing fun

things every once in a while, making sure that they're doing things that they enjoy, taking

their interests into consideration.

She encourages positive interaction through intrinsic motivation. She explains, "I would like them to be proud of their work, and I have that open conversation with them several times a year, making sure they're taking pride in what they're doing."

Question 4. In the fourth interview question, teachers were asked to describe teaching excellence. There were common themes among all teachers to this question. Teachers 1-6 felt

that the difference between effective and excellence teachers is that excellent teachers inspire learning and go above and beyond what is required and expected of a classroom teacher. Teacher 1 stated,

> Effective teachers get the job done, the students get it. Yes, they do the work; they get the credit, they get the grade. And then they leave school and it's done. I'll go back tomorrow; I'll do the same thing. I think it's a habit. I think it's redundant, mundane.

However, excellent teachers inspire learning. She explains, "Excellence is when students leave your classroom and ask questions because they can see the real life application." She also stated she felt there was a difference in how the teachers interact with the students,

> Highly effective teachers talks with the students and not at them, they engage in dialogue back and forth and it forces both parties to kind of go back, think, rethink, and then give another response. I think the excellent teacher takes into account the individual as opposed to looking at the class as one.

Teacher 2 had a similar perspective on teaching excellence. He explained,

> Teaching excellence is when you inspire the children to learn but not for your sake, not for the parents' sake. Because they get it, they just desire, they're hungry to learn. That's teaching excellence to me, when they get excited about learning new things, and you bring up something and you can just tell that they want to learn more about it, and they get hungry for it. Excellent teachers give opportunities and they start seeking those opportunities to learn more about things. Because the kids, they internalize it more that way and it's longer lasting.

Teacher 3 discussed teaching excellence as going above and beyond what is expected to ensure that all students are showing academic success by meeting the individual needs of the

students. She explained, "An excellent teacher would be someone who's willing to differentiate and meet the needs of all students and never give up on them." Flexibility requires additional time and attention to ensure that each student is getting the support needed to be successful. Teacher 3 explained that an excellent teacher needs to be flexible which means,

> You need to be prepared not to teach the same thing every year, every day, every hour. It's different. This takes a great amount of preparation, planning, and effort on the part of teacher. Depending on the level and interest of the students, an excellent teacher adjusts accordingly.
>
> Teacher 4 explained teaching excellence as
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> having goals outside of your own for each of your students, setting those goals with students, finding out what the students' goals are, kicking in some reasons for what their goals should be and then working to help them achieve it.

He also stated, "I think a teacher who is really excellent teaches a student how to want to learn. I can't teach them everything they're going to learn now through high school. I have to instill a desire to learn." Excellent teachers do what it takes to motivate learning and encourage students to seek out opportunities. Teacher 4 stated, "As an excellent teacher, you have to teach kids to learn, how to learn."

Teacher 5 described going above and beyond as doing what is necessary to reach each and every student. She explains that excellence is when a teacher seeks out the unique characteristics of the classroom and does whatever is necessary to meet each individual student right where they are at. She explained,

> I think that every single class I've ever taught has a character. Has a different feeling. Has a different emotion. And you have to be able to adjust to that. It's not, this is how I

teach it, so this is how I teach it. You have to adjust your teaching to match the vibe of

the classroom and each individual child.

This means that the teacher has to put in more time and energy to getting to know the students

and being creative in how they interact to encourage and inspire learning. She explains, "You

can't be so stuck in your ways this is the right way to teach, that you can't hear what your kids

need. You also very much have to look at the motivation and not the action."

She feels the difference between effective and excellent is rooted in the emotion a teacher

feels towards the kids. She describes what this means,

I mean, I'll be in the middle of teaching and I have a kid this year that's very witty and

funny and he'll say something and instead of me going you know 'no shouting out', it'll

just make me laugh. You know that I enjoy them. I like what I do. So just showing up

because it's my job versus this is what I was meant to do, this is what I want to do. I

mean there's not a day I wake up and think I gotta go to work. I love what I do. I love

being here every day. So that makes a huge difference.

Teacher 6 described teaching excellence as "knowing your stuff and taking the students

into consideration in everything you do." She stated an effective teacher gets the job done, but

an excellent teacher "goes above and beyond" to make meaningful connections that inspire

learning.

Question 5. Teachers were asked to describe any support (from the district, colleagues,

professional development workshops) they have been given that may have influenced the

development of personal attributes and professional dispositions to increase their instructional

and relational effectiveness. All teachers participated in district provided professional

development to satisfy required growth and development training. Several of the teachers

described how they sought personal opportunities for professional development outside of the district. None of the teachers discussed engaging in development opportunities for personal growth. Each teacher stated that they participate in the workshops and that the district works to provide training that is needed. The trainings are commonly related to content area instruction, and mentoring programs are in place to assist with the development of affective attributes and professional dispositions. However, each teacher also stated that they often attend training, classes, and workshops on their own time based on their own individual desires.

Teacher 1 described a supportive administrator and collegial work atmosphere that encourages collaboration among grade level team members. She described her administrator as "supportive and reassuring." Teacher 2 described a cohesive grade level, in which his team "just sit around and talk about things." He stated, "I hear teachers say, I need to be doing that. I want to do that. And so I just learn from excellent teachers around me." Teacher 3 described how the professional development training within buildings is strong, but if additional information is needed, the teachers must invest their own time to collaborate with others or seek training to strengthen any additional skills. She explained,

> I think our district does a really good job within each building making sure that we're all
> on the same page. From there on, it's kind of up to us…it's up to us to self-motivate and
> do the rest of it.

Most of the teachers described how they own personal desires to learn new, innovative techniques to meet the specific needs of their students, which guided much of their professional development. While the district did provide some support, the teachers sought out opportunities to grow and develop with both affective and cognitive attributes and dispositions.

Question 6. The sixth question asked teachers to identify specific attributes they believe

encourage teaching excellence in the classroom. Teacher 1 described her classroom as active.

She stated that if someone were to walk past her classroom they would see, "active listening,

active reading, active dialogue. I am always interacting with the kids. There is a lot of

conversation between myself and the students." Teacher 2 described a vision of teaching

excellence as working with students: "I am always actively engaging with the students. Getting

them to pay attention by being comical or building suspense, I am always trying to get that

hook." He also stated,

> I work really hard to establish routines, then I am able to give them a stability of
>
> consistency, so there's a lot of consistency as far as the daily routine from day to day and
>
> week to week. So that gives them the comfort so that then they can grow and explore and
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> think more about other things instead of what am I supposed to be doing right now. I
>
> give lots of verbal reminders and redirection and praise and I'm just, I'm not afraid to be
>
> a little absurd or outside of the box or over embellished to get the point across. And of
>
> course, repetition, repetition, repetition.

Teacher 3 described what teaching excellence looks like in her classroom by describing

how she interacts with her students. She explains, "I am just involved. I'm talking. I answer

questions, I am available to the kids in a non-threatening way. I'm there as a presence." Teacher

4 stated I would see students "actively engaged in what we're learning." He stated, "I think that

it's important to have students all engaged. You would see students not afraid to be wrong, not

afraid to try new and different things." Students inquire, they ask questions, they explore.

Teacher 4 extends support and engages with each student throughout the day. He

explains, "You would see short one-on-one contacts with students as much as possible

throughout the entire day." He stated,

Even though they know there are all these kids in the room, students know they are specifically important. You would see me moving around a lot talking to individual students. I think you would not see me planning, grading, entering, data checking or any of those things.

Teacher 5 stated different times of the day bring about the need for different types of attributes to support teaching excellence. She explains,

We do a lot that requires a high level of independence, especially near the end of the year. I do a lot of partner work. A lot of the partner work I have them move somewhere on the floor where they can work, but it's like if I ring my little chime they know exactly what to do.

Teacher 6 displayed a bit of a different approach to interacting with students. She explained her approach:

Well, I am not the most outgoing personality so it's not going to be like over the top excitement, but I try to keep that positive attitude, show the kids that I am excited about things, but it is not over the top dramatic.

Question 7. Charlotte Danielson (2012) noted that wisdom comes from self-knowledge and used this idea as a basis for her definition of reflective practice. Thus, for this question, teachers were asked to define what it means to be a reflective practitioner. All respondents described some type of reflective activity which allows them to reflect on teaching practices, student interactions, and communications throughout the day and over the course of the school year. Reflection through thoughtful considerations, dialogue with colleagues, and written notes were the most prominent types of reflective practices. Teacher 1 described teaching excellence as "taking time to reflect on your own strategies and how you teach. I think that I am one of my

hardest critics." She described her reflective process as thoughtful consideration on her drive home. She explained,

> And I'll just think to myself about the day, that did not turnout the way I wanted it to. The kids didn't respond and then I think, like what could I have done differently? What could I have said differently? How could I have explained it in a better way so that they were more receptive to what I'm saying.

> Teacher 2 described reflection in terms of cognitive ability. He explained,

> I think it's just familiarity with the tools and also knowing your students. I mean, you have to know where they're at and know, okay, this is where I have to get them or this is typically what we do. How do I get from there?

He also discussed how reflection is a big part of their annual teacher evaluation and sometimes reflecting can be difficult:

> My biggest problem, I think that's very true and an honest way of reflecting, but it also requires a lot of trust and respect for those models to work. You need an environment for those models to work to where an individual can be honest about what they need to work on and not have punitive things taken against them. If you want someone to be honest about this is my weakness and I need to move forward, you have to give them that opportunity and they have to feel safe enough to be able to say that.

> Teacher 3 reflects on a daily basis to determine what strategies and approaches are being effective. She explains her process:

> I have to take the time to reflect on what's happening. I have to do it on a daily basis and sometimes in the middle of the day. I need to be able to reflect quickly and on the spot. And I think having that knowledge and that ability to do that is something that really

helps with reflection. I force myself to take the time to reflect on prior experience and

just knowing what the kids are capable, especially at certain points in the year.

Teacher 4 uses multiple approaches to reflection, both through large and small lenses. He

described his reflection process as this:

I mean on a small level, looking back at lessons each year that I do, I kind of keep like a

daily journal basically of what happened on this day that I could have done different. Or

I make myself a quick note on the lesson plan or something like I'll never start with glue

again. I'm honest with myself and my administrators.

Teacher 5 explained her reflection process:

Every lesson, I make notes. So that next year when I pull that lesson, because it's all in

this binder, so when I pull that lesson I can go oh yeah that worked a lot better this year

than last year. I think sometimes I'll target a lesson too high for a beginning lesson so I'll

note for myself to break it down into two lessons next time. Sometimes I'm over-

confident in what their abilities are compared to what they really can do. Mostly my

reflections are all in my lesson plans. That's where I know where things work and when

things don't. So there's the intimate knowledge of education that I can look at and go

okay that unit was really hard for the kids every year. What can I do in smaller pieces

with my morning meeting so when it gets to that they already have the base knowledge.

Those are the, you know, big things that I do.

Teacher 6 indicated that thoughtful consideration is the approach she takes to reflecting

on her teaching. She stated,

Well, I definitely think about the lessons after I teach them, thinking about what went

well, what didn't go well. I have a running document on my computer that says ideas for

next year. So, if I know something that's not working this year, I can make sure that I

make a note of that and before next year, I'll look at that say okay, this didn't work last

year. So I need to change for next year. I make notes in my lesson plans of what to

change and I always am constantly grabbing the binder from last year to look at that and

make sure whether or not something worked or didn't work. I make sure that I talk to my

colleagues, the other teachers about what's working in their classrooms.

Question 8. Teachers were asked to describe their perceived level of self-efficacy. All

teachers responded highly favorable to this question and with quick authority. Teachers 1-6

described their level of self-efficacy as very high. They felt confident in their ability to not only

meet, but exceed required expectations. Family upbringing and life experiences were two of the

major factors the teachers felt influenced their high levels of efficacy. Teacher 1 described her

self-efficacy as high. She credits sports and her parents as major influences in her high level of

confidence in her ability to meet the tasks set forth before her:

I did gymnastics in college and so that was a job. You show up, you listen to your boss

and when he tell you to run, you run. When you sprint, you sprint, when you squat, you

squat and that was kind of it. The whole athletic area made me the perfectionist I am and

it made me really reflective. I was the perfect kid probably like super stereotypical, but I

never missed school, I was never late, never did a detention. That was just how I was

raised. Both of my parents are teachers so that was just kind of engrained at a very young

age. That anything less was unacceptable.

Teacher 2 related high self-efficacy to an understanding of clear expectations. He

described a clarity and authenticity in knowing what he knows and what he does not know:

If I know the expectation, the end, it's very easy. Okay, that's what I have to do to get

there. But I think some of that comes from teaching experience and the years I've been doing it. I attribute confidence to my personality, because I find that teaching especially young children, building the whole child, is one of the most important aspects of society.

Teacher 3 also cited a high level of self-efficacy and attributed it to being real about her strengths and weaknesses. She stated,

I am pretty confident because I'm confident enough where I know if I'm not strong in an area, I am willing to go out and seek the answers or figure it out. Even if I am not super knowledgeable on something, I am willing to go out and do that.

She also attributed her high self-confidence to her upbringing: "I think honestly my mom has built me to be a very independent person and a very strong woman. Her goal for me and my siblings was you have to go to college." Teacher 3 credited her passion for helping to boost her self-confidence in her teaching. She explains, "My kids said the other day, something like 'you're so loud', and I said, 'yes, because I have something I want you to hear, I have no problem voicing my opinion and telling you how I feel." Teacher 4 replied that his self-efficacy is "very, very high." He explained,

I feel like there's not, I don't think there's a task that I've been handed that I haven't immediately been excited to undertake and without seeming overconfident, it usually turns out. If it doesn't turn out, I'm here late at night working on it, trying to make it better and I know that if I set a goal, or if the district sets a goal for me, that I feel I will generally achieve it.

He credited his passion and care for the school district as a driving force in his goals to achieve the highest level of excellence.

Teacher 5 stated her high level of self-efficacy is why she gets chosen to sit on

committees, because she will get things done. Her upbringing and life experiences are the

foundation on which her confidence rests. She stated that she was a young mother, but "never

once doubted that she could do it." She also explained, "I don't have any problem standing up

for what I believe in, but also for somebody else, for what's right and wrong. I have a very

strong family."

> Teacher 6 provided specific attributes to describe her level of self-efficacy. She stated,
>
> I am a very motivated person. I am kind of a go-getter so I would say my self-efficacy is
>
> pretty high in that aspect. I would say my self-efficacy though in other aspects like being
>
> outgoing, that's a little bit lower. I'm not as confident in that type of thing.

She also explained,

> I just feel like I've always had that drive to succeed through, I don't know, I guess I've
>
> just always had it. Just seeing my parents growing up and their working hard and they
>
> kind of encouraged us to always work hard. So I think that has kind of made me who I
>
> am.

Administrator interviews. Three administrators, who were direct supervisors of the

teachers identified as excellent, participated in individual interviews using the same semi-

structured interview guide (see Appendix B). Their questions were worded slightly different

based on their association with the teachers; however, in relation to the research questions, they

were similar. The interviews took place in the administrators' offices. Because the

administrators had interaction with one or more teachers, their responses were not coded

individually, but in aggregate form. Likewise, their responses were coded together. The

building administrators explained how long they had worked with the teachers, and if they were

responsible for the hiring and placement of the teachers. Of the six teachers identified as

excellent, four teachers were hired by their current principal and two were not. The emerging

patterns from the administrator interviews were that this group of excellent teachers was

knowledgeable and relational, they set clear expectations for their students, were communicative

and encouraged positive interactions, went above and beyond what is required, and possessed a

true passion for the teaching and learning process. Initially, for Question 1, the administrators

were asked to share whether or not they hired the teachers being identified as excellent, and how

long they had worked as their direct supervisor. After that, administrators were asked questions

specific to attributes and dispositions displayed by the teachers that influence teaching

excellence.

Question 2. Administrators were asked to describe cognitive (knowledge) attributes that

lead to positive interactions with the teachers identified as excellent. The administrators

indicated excellent teachers have high levels of intelligence and content knowledge. All three

administrators discussed organizational skills, efficiency, and high levels of content knowledge

of the identified teachers as strong cognitive attributes.

When asked to describe how these attributes influence teaching excellence, one

administrator stated, "A variety of experience are used in class so that every ten minutes or so,

students have an opportunity to become involved." Another administrator stated that a teacher

was so knowledgeable about content area material that "she could teach it all." Additionally, an

administrator pointed out that one of the teacher's cognitive attributes was the "ability to adapt

content and synthesize information into a format that is easy to understand." Being comfortable

enough with the content and subject matter allows teachers the opportunity to practice the art of

teaching. As one administrator stated, "I think different people teach to their styles and they

teach very differently because they're very different people, but they teach to their style and can

be very successful."

Often individual styles are reflected in how teachers structure their classrooms, differentiate their instruction, and meet the individual needs of students. An administrator pointed out that one of the excellent teachers is very organized: "Everything is very well planned out from the beginning to the end of a lesson." All three administrators pointed out that each of the identified teachers have their own style and their style works for them in their classrooms with their students. An administrator described one of the teachers by saying,

> He is dramatic, let me say that. He's almost theatrical. And it just really engages the kids and with literacy especially. He takes on a different persona and he'll put on these almost sort of shows and that kind of stuff and gets the kids talking and asking question and then which takes it to the next level about, well do you think that person is excited? Does this sound right? Does that sound right? And the kids feel it's okay for them to use a lot of meaningful voice and have personality in their writing.

In contrast, another administrator described a different type of environment that works just as well. He stated,

> I think the kids find her nurturing. I think they find her very organized. She's very consistent. Excellent classroom control. But you look at [other teacher's classroom] and there is just so much energy in that classroom. You go in her classroom and there's sometimes, 'Why does this work so well?' And it shows in the scores of her students and the growth of her students.

Question 3. Additionally, administrators described affective attributes that lead to positive experiences with _____ (teacher). A highly visible theme throughout the principal interviews was the compassion and genuine care teachers have for their students. Each

administrator pointed out that the teachers were caring, empathetic, and genuinely interested in their students. One commented how teachers "go above and beyond consistently." Another administrator described how a teacher attends games, plays, and other outside activities to show support to students: "Well, she cares about the students" and "She is a member of the community." She also stated,

> She is always involved with them and knowing them and doesn't have any difficulty talking with parents about this or that. Kind of befriends them I want to say or maybe the parents feel friendly towards her more than a regular teacher interaction, more so as somebody they can just really talk to and just have a heart to heart. That kind of her personality.

Another administrator described how a teacher builds relationships by saying, "You can just tell by the way he talks to the students. When he talks to the students, he gets down on one knee at eye level. Rarely does he stand up and talk down to a child."

Question 4. Administrators pinpointed specific traits or characteristics that are common for _____ (teacher) to exhibit on a daily basis both inside and outside the classroom. High levels of communication and positive interaction were noted as attributes of teaching excellence in the administrator interviews. Each administrator discussed how the teachers are engaged in classroom activities, capture the students' attention, and communicate in highly effective ways that create deep meaningful interactions in the classroom. One of the administrators described how one of the teachers communicates via email and text, and another administrator stated that a teacher "Sends out classroom pictures and snapshots via text to parents right in the moment." Additionally, an administrator described how one teacher uses technology to engage students in such a way the students have their "mouths wide open and both

eyes on him."

During the interviews, all three administrators discussed how the teachers identified as excellent set clear expectations for students and held high standards for meeting the expectations. One administrator stated, "I think there are high levels of participation expected, but the teacher also expects that from herself." Another administrator pointed out that the teacher has "high expectations from the very beginning of the year, which is a great quality, as long as you know when to pick your battles."

Question 5. Administrators were asked to define teaching excellence. All three administrators described teaching excellence differently. One administrator described classroom management as a main identifier of teaching excellence by stating,

Once you've developed as teacher, once you've developed a solid classroom environment being the creating the environment of respect and rapport, establishing the culture, managing classroom procedures, getting routines down, all of those things, once you have that in place especially early in the school year, then you can see a classroom run so much more smoothly and so much more time and attention can be spend by a teacher on other things. I don't think I've seen an exceptional teacher that has all of these qualities, but does not have classroom management skills.

Another administrator defined teaching excellence by explaining,

I think teaching excellence means you have to be an excellent learner, and you have to be open and willing to explore and try new methods in your classroom. You cannot be stuck in doing what you've always done because it always used to work. I think if you're an excellent teacher, you're willing to look at what you can do to improve.

Additionally, another administrator defined teacher excellence as "a teacher that goes above and beyond consistently."

Question 6. For the sixth question, administrators were asked to describe how a teacher is differentiated between effective and excellent. All three administrators described excellent teachers as those going above and beyond required expectations. Effective teachers meet the required expectations and excellent teachers consistently exceed expectations. Teachers who are excellent do more, not only for the good of their classroom, but for the district overall. An administrator explained it this way,

> I need a teacher who is willing to put in time and effort and work outside of their
>
> classroom for school improvement. Not just grade level, but building-wide improvement,
>
> because if they are not involved in that, they don't understand the decisions that are being
>
> made and the importance of it.

One administrator described how some of the teachers "volunteer for committees and are willing to come back and teach new things to other teachers." Another comment related to the difference between effective and excellent is the attention excellent teachers pay to individual students. The administrator commented, "I think attention to the individual needs [of the students] rather than the class as a whole [makes her highly effective]." Excellent teachers are constantly thinking about how to meet the next level. An administrator summed this up by saying, "You don't want to be like 'well this is good enough and let it be good enough' because growing and changing is part of what we do."

Question 7. Please tell me anything else about this teacher that you perceive as important in influencing a level of excellence in teaching. One administrator described a teacher's effort by saying,

She works hard to try to find a way to help them demonstrate that they understand the

material and they can know what it is they're supposed to demonstrate and they're able to

do it, and she's very good at that I think. She makes the extra effort.

Additionally**,** all three administrators described how the identified teachers have a passion for

teaching and this passion comes through in their commitment to their students' success. One

administrator described passion in teaching excellence this way:

Teaching excellence goes beyond the classroom walls. I think you've got to make sure

that you're teaching the best you can but the student are learning. So that whole teaching

and learning thing has to be in place…yet, that's not all of it. You've got to make sure

that you are also outside of the classroom being with the community, being involved in

activities. Helping for the different evening events and those sorts of things because the

students need to know and the parents as well that the teacher that there's more to a

student than just within that classrooms.

Each administrator described how these teachers invest in the lives of their students outside of

class because they love their jobs and love their students.

   Focus groups. The focus groups were much smaller than anticipated, so for that reason,

the information was also analyzed in the aggregate form. There were resounding similarities in

the parents' perspectives related to attributes and dispositions that influence teaching excellence.

   Question 1. Parents were first asked to describe their experiences with regard to a

specific, excellent teacher. The parents participating in the focus groups were asked to describe

their experiences with a teacher identified as excellent. Each parent shared a bit of history about

their child and the ways in which their teacher had made an impact in their education. One

parent explained,

(The teacher) identified her as maybe she could do some extra things or whatever and she provided my daughter, with extra material like maybe if she wants you could have her read these because she is kind of you know, a little beyond where we are at this point or whatever, without asking, but no pressure to, you know no pressure to, but like she made me feel like my daughter was super important. I mean and as a parent, I can't say enough about that. I was like she really cares about my daughter.

Another parent described how her child's teacher educational history and compared it to the impact of the current school year,

I have an attention deficit disorder child that suffers anxiety and I'm pretty hell-bent on making sure that he is taken care of. In the same note, I don't want him disrupting other children in class and stuff like that and he is in now fourth grade and in first grade I tried to do something about it. In second grade, I tried to do stuff about it. In third grade, I tried to do something about. By the time I got to fourth grade, I found somebody who did something about it. And so he's kind of taken [my son] under his wing, but not in a favoritizing way. He saw what [my son] needed and he did what he needed.

Additionally, a parent explained how her child's teacher had made a big impact this year in comparison to her previous years of school:

My daughter she has, they haven't diagnosed her with a learning disability, but she is in Title I. She has been in Title I since I fought to get her in Title I finally in second grade and she does out of school tutoring, but within the first two weeks of school, [the teacher] knew her strengths, her weaknesses, and was on top of them.

Question 2. Parents were asked to describe cognitive attributes that lead to positive interactions with a specific, excellent teacher. All parents stated the teachers were highly

knowledgeable in their subject area content and explained information in a way that was meaningful and easy to understand. One parent explained,

He tailors the learning to make each one understand. He understands what each kid needs to learn that subject and he can teach it in a couple of different ways to make them all understand it. You know he's got to understand the content to be able to teach it in a few different ways to make everybody get it.

Another parent describes her daughter's teacher as "extremely knowledgeable about teaching. She knows best practice and is very intelligent." She stated she taught

out of the box. So, the curriculum might say one thing and she's going to get the kids there, but she doesn't necessarily have to do the work book or the reading book or whatever the math books is. The kids will learn the same information, but they won't do it from a reading text.

Parents in both focus groups highlighted how teachers who are excellent pay attention to the individual needs of their students. One parent stated, "What I'm concerned about, he's concerned about which makes me feel like we have the same interest." Another parent explained how the teacher "within the first weeks of school knew my daughter's strengths and weaknesses and was on top of them. He tailored her learning to make sure she understood what he was teaching the rest of class." One parent stated that the teacher knew a lot about her daughter and "would make time to specifically answer any questions she may have." Another parent explained how the teacher provided individualized attention to students in a very patient way. She stated,

Because like I feel like she takes the time to get to know each of the kids and she's really good with very needy kids, whereas I personally am like not a super patient person which

is one of my biggest faults and I know that. She might not be patient, but you would

never know. Like she doesn't let on. She doesn't talk down to the kids. So I feel like

she's patient. I feel like she seeks out individual solutions.

Question 3. For the third question, parents were asked to describe affective attributes that

lead to positive experiences with the identified teacher. All parents described classroom

environments that were safe and accepting, led by teachers who were invested in relationships.

Excellent teachers are caring and compassionate and allow their students to make mistakes. One

parent described a situation where her child had gotten in trouble in class and had to meet with

the teacher. The teacher responded,

> Does this mean I don't like you? No. Does it mean I don't like your behavior? Yes.
>
> But I think you're important enough that we're going to take care of this this way. If I
>
> didn't think you were important I wouldn't care. This has been a huge turning point for
>
> us, having him as a teacher that way.

Another parent described how the teacher really knows the students and knows their

likes, which makes the students feel important. She stated the teacher, "always asks [student's

name] about football because he knows he likes it. It makes [student's name] feel noticed." One

parent described how the teacher made a decision that upset her child, but the teacher explained,

"This is to help you," and took the time to share why the decision was made. Using real,

authentic compassion to connect with the students is an important attribute according to parents.

One parent explained how a teacher interacted with the students by demonstrating

empathy and understanding. She said,

> I think, I feel like she maybe she looks at the same things the other teachers look at, but
>
> she takes so much else into consideration so she might look at a writing you know like

the kids did on whatever or a math score, I don't know, and so maybe my daughter did

better than my daughter's friend, but my daughter's friend's parents are going through a

divorce or my daughter's friend just got glasses so [the teacher] might say, and this didn't

happen, but this is my opinion, she would say oh you just got glasses, can I run through

these questions with you one more time and then [the teacher] would notice that well

gosh she couldn't read it before. Or she, not that she would allow another student to like

retake it or, she would just take more into consideration so I know the student's parents

are getting divorced and so this girl or by or whatever really needs you know a stuffed

animal today.

Question 4. Parents expounded on how a teacher builds relationships with students that

encourage positive feelings towards school. All parents highlighted relational attributes, such as

humor, compassion, empathy, and respect, when answering how relationships are built in the

classroom. One parent responded,

He teaches respect. He teaches respect for everyone. And he doesn't beat around the

bush. He doesn't say it's going to be okay. He likes this is what it is, this is how I felt,

you know how I felt, I told you from the beginning this is how it's going to happen, you

didn't do it, I told you what would be the consequence. I wish I had his composure.

Furthermore, parents discussed authentic communication as a tool for creating a classroom

environment that encourages positive relationships. One parent described an example of real,

authentic communication by explaining,

There's humor, they know they can have, but there is a line. If you cross it, there are

consequences. The teacher has the students knowing somehow they can have, it can be

very, very funny, but you can't cross the line. It makes them respect the teacher in that

regard. He knows how to make each individual child or person feel like they are

important.

Another parent described a teacher's real interaction with students in this way:

She doesn't try to hide anything from the kids, so she lets them see when she is upset or

when she gets sad or when somebody does something, she'll express a bit of emotion. I

feel she demonstrates what she wants the kids to give her back. She won't ask the kids to

be honest with her if she's not honest with them first.

Question 5. What types of practices does he/she implement to motivate, engage, and

encourage? Differentiated instruction was the instructional practice that reoccurred over and

over in the focus group discussions. Parents appreciated when teachers individualized

instruction and met the individual needs of their student. Parents recognize this as an attribute of

teaching excellence. One parent stated the teacher seemed, "very invested in her daughter".

Another parent described how different spelling tests were used or flexible seating was

implemented to encourage and motivate students.

When asked about how a teacher motivated students, one parent described the teacher as

energetic and stated, "I feel like she demonstrates what she wants the kids to give her back." An

example of how a homework tracker was used to motivate a student was followed up with a

story by one parent, who stated,

My daughter bawled when she got put on a homework tracker. She thought it was a

punishment. So the teacher had come in and talked with her to explain it wasn't a

punishment. She finally got it and got to get off the homework tracker. It was like she

won the prize of the day. I think the teacher not only gets them to earn his respect, but he

has their respect back. They want to keep it that way. And so they want to impress him.

However, he got it to work both ways. Instead of just you have to respect your teacher,

he respects them back and it makes them want to please him and do well."

Additionally, when describing how a teacher motivated students, a parent shared,

She builds their self-confidence by, I've never seen or never even heard of her like, she

doesn't tear the kids down like you did that wrong, blah, blah, blah. It's always, it's more

of a well okay, here's the outcome whatever they're looking at and maybe a kid is not,

like doesn't want to read or whatever. She'll go with the kid and try to find something

that is interesting to them in order to turn them on to a book. Like I could picture her

totally driving to [city] or [city] to find a book for one kid. Like I feel like she would do

that. Or she shares a lot of, I think she shares a lot of personal experiences with the kids

and she's had a lot of, like a huge variety of experiences and she has also had a lot of

medical issues so I think maybe, I don't know if she's vulnerable, but like she just kind of

like, I don't have time to put on airs, I don't have time to. Here's what it is. Like she's

very real.

Question 6. Parents were finally asked to define teaching excellence. Parents stated that

thinking outside of the box and creatively engaging students in the learning process is what

defines teaching excellence. One parent described a teacher by saying,

One thing I admire about her most is that she is out of the box…so, the curriculum might

say one thing and she's going to get the kids there, but she doesn't necessarily have to do

the workbook or reading book…it keeps it very interesting for the kids.

Another parent described teaching excellence as being able to differentiate teaching practices to

meet each individual student right where they are. The parent explained,

I think what makes a teacher excellent, not just their education, I mean they definitely

need to know their ins and outs, but the way they can tailor it to specific students. You

know there's different ways that everyone learns and to be able to know that about your

students and to be able to see it in them, they don't have to tell you, you can see it in

them.

Question 7. For the seventh interview question, parents were asked to identify specific

traits or characteristics that are common for the excellent teacher to exhibit on a daily basis both

inside and outside the classroom. All parents described the teachers' interactions with students

as meaningful. The parents described how teachers use humor and animation to bring the

learning process alive. One parent explained,

I was in the class one day and when he was reading to the kids and his voices that he uses

and the way he told the story you could tell every single one of the kids was watching

him. He had them on the hook with the way he was telling the story.

Another parent described how a teacher brought a parachute into the classroom so that the

students could read under it and explained, "So all they [the students] were doing was reading,

but she just made it a little bit different and it seemed like a big deal. She does it a lot. A lot of

things are special."

Question 8. As a parent, how does this teacher influence your feelings about the type of

education your child is receiving? Is it different from other years? If so, what is the difference?

Parents relayed complete confidence in the type of education the students were receiving and this

was directly related to the current classroom teacher who had been identified as excellent. One

parent described her child's teacher "as the best teacher in the district," while another explained

her perspective on the type of education her child was receiving by stating,

I definitely feel like she's getting one of the best educations, not just, you know in the

area, but for this grade compared to other grades even. It's clicking in this classroom.

And it is also going to make it hard because now that I see what she can be with the right

teacher, it's going to make it hard for the next teacher because I am going to expect it.

Additionally a parent followed up with, "I'm finding teaching excellence in this community. I'm

amazed at where my kids are right now because of the teaching."

Question 9. Please tell me anything else about this teacher that you perceive as important

in influencing a level of excellence in teaching. One parent stated about her child's teacher,

> In my opinion, she's doing it better because for some reason she thought this was a better
>
> way to get the children to know this information and if she thought enough to find
>
> something else. She enjoys being responsible for what they're supposed to know that
>
> year. I think she takes that pretty seriously. I think she's very lighthearted. She is very
>
> easy to talk to. She is very easy to like. But she's very honest also. She always has the
>
> students' best interest and she's always striving for them to become higher order thinkers,
>
> not just to regurgitate information.

Another parent followed about her child's teacher:

> You can just tell he wants to be a teacher. This isn't just a job. This is something he's
>
> very passionate about. You can see it just by watching him, which makes you feel very
>
> hopeful. I just think you can tell he wants to be here.

Artifacts. Teacher artifacts included weekly newsletters, lesson plans, and varied parent

communications, such as emails, and were collected as supporting documentation. I hoped to

gain access to additional documents, but even after multiple attempts to gain access to additional

documents, I was unsuccessful. The artifacts helped to further substantiate the data collected in

the interviews and focus groups. Content analysis was used to generate codes from individual

documents based on evidence presented. The list of common codes was small due to the limited amount of artifacts provided by each teacher. I made a list of codes (See Appendix D) and then used categorical aggregation to identify which codes aligned with cognitive attributes, affective attributes, and professional dispositions.

Lesson plans. Four of the six teachers provided lesson plans. Two of the lesson plans consistently showed examples of teaching excellence based on Danielson's (2007) Domain 1: Planning and Preparation. All lesson plans included content standards and detailed explanations of lesson activities along with daily schedules. However, the content provided in two plans was more in-depth and could be easily implemented by someone other than the teacher. Two teachers identified varied instructional strategies to include whole group and small group instruction, the use of technology, and opportunities for students to make choices in daily activities. The information presented was clearly organized and thorough.

When analyzing the lesson plans, it was noted that there was such inconsistency in the types of information and amount of information presented. This was evidenced with directions clearly showing differentiated instruction and opportunities for students to engage in small group and independent work. The inclusion of technology was also identified: "Students will rotate between math stations. Group 1 will be working with the teacher at the back table while Group 2 completes (computer program) activities. Group 3 will be working independently at their desks." Another example of directions provided on a lesson plan in the area of reading would read,

> Student will do the round they pick (Listen to Reading, Writing, Working with Words or Read to Someone). Mark the round on the accountability sheet. Between 1-3rd rounds do mini lesson. See the next box for mini lessons. Explain Writing and Work with Words

before first round.

Additionally, all assessments and rubrics included multiple modalities and several aspects to measure mastery of identified skills. For example, one of the writing rubrics highlighted the major skills of writing a paragraph: "topic sentence, main body/supporting details, conclusion, and conventions." The rubric was clearly organized and written in a grade-level appropriate tone. For example, "The conclusion wraps up the paragraph fairly well and refers to the main idea"

Parent communication. Multiple variations of parent communications were provided. Three of the six teachers provided letters or emails representing direct communication with parents. The communications were mostly used to inform parents of changes to classroom procedures, expectations, or content, and to enhance the teaching and learning process with additional guidance and support being offered. One of the letters to parents described a new reading structure called the "Daily Five." The letter provided parents with the background information necessary to understand a change in teaching reading, and encouraged parents to engage their child in conversations about this new strategy. Evidence of content knowledge and pedagogical expertise was present as the teacher described how the students may feel about the Daily Five. She stated,

> Ask your child about Daily Five and see what he/she has to say. I anticipate your child will tell you about the class stamina, how we are working towards independence, and maybe you will even hear about some of the fantastic things your child has written, read, or listened to during our structured reading time.

Discipline policies from two teachers were also included as parent communication. One of the discipline policies was written out with clear expectations and both rewards and

consequences were listed. The other discipline policy consisted of smiley, straight, and sad faces which reflected students' behaviors. The discipline policies reflected both cognitive and affective attributes in that they were developmentally appropriate based on the age of the child and clear expectations were defined. Affective attributes were present in the wording of the policy.

Weekly newsletter. Four out of six teachers presented a weekly newsletter that highlighted upcoming skills being addressed in class. One teacher provided a running record of what students were learning in class and how they would progress. The math section read:

> We will continue to make progress in money and time and adding new coins. In groups we are working on all mixed amounts of coins. Independently kids are adding mixed amounts of dimes, nickels, and pennies. We are also working to tell time to the quarter hour and identifying the quarter hours.

As evidenced in this short sample, the teacher demonstrated differentiated instruction and varied instructional strategies by allowing students to work both independently and in groups. Another teacher sent home a weekly newsletter that highlighted the spring carnival and included pictures of carnival games and families. The message "families come join the fun" was conveyed. Another newsletter included an email format that highlighted accomplishments and fun things happening in the classroom. This teacher also included real-time pictures of the students and a quick summary of the activity. The email stated,

> We had the honor of having _____ an official dance instructor come to our class today and teach the kids about her job and actually teach them some dance moves. It was so fun and it got our hearts racing in these days of indoor recess.

Another teacher ended a newsletter with encouragement and support for both parents and

students. It stated, "Great job helping your child in March Reading Madness! I will be checking their charts again Friday. The more you read, the more they grow!"

Field notes. Field notes were taken during and after the recorded interviews and focus groups and allowed for additional reflection on the time and place of the interview, specific statements made, and the body language and facial expression of the participants. Field note forms were used to take notes and record observations (see Appendix C and Appendix D). The amount of field notes reflected the amount of significant statements, nonverbal communication cues, and observations of the classroom environment. Small words or phrases were written down to assist me in remembering important ideas within context of the discussion.

Teachers. Passion was frequently noted in the interviews with teachers. In three of the teacher interviews, I noted "A strong emotion related to a story being told about a particular student. Two teachers teared up when discussing particular students or events which were very meaningful." A sense of excitement was present in the same teachers' voices when describing how all students can learn. One teacher even said, "Heck yeah, they can learn." I noted the excitement in her voice and the squaring of her shoulders when she proclaimed all students could learn. Another one of the teachers became quite quiet when asked the same question, and it was noted that she seemed "reflective" when deciding exactly how to answer the questions, in which she stated, "Well, yeah, all students can learn. Can they learn the same amount? No."

Teacher 1. I entered the school office at the beginning of a school day and was directed to the classroom of Teacher 1. Teacher 1 greeted me at the door of her classroom with a bright smile. Her energy was palpable. We took a seat at two desks in the back row of her classroom. As I looked around, I noticed grade appropriate instructional materials posted on the walls, and notes to students on the board. Teacher 1 seemed extremely comfortable discussing her planning

and preparation strategies. She readily discussed content and how she connects what she is doing in the classroom to real-life for her students. She gave several examples of how she interacts with her students and I noted a few times that she became quite emotional when discussing specific situations where she worked to meet the individual needs of students. As the interview progressed, Teacher 1 displayed enthusiasm. As she spoke, she smiled, clapped her hands, and pointed to different items around the room to show examples of her and the students' work. When asked several questions, she would sit up in her seat and lean forward indicating her passion for the topic. At one point in the interview, Teacher 1 was asked how she persists in the classroom and her response started with, "I was born to be a teacher," and it was noted that she was wiping tears from her eyes as she spoke about how she always does what is best for her students so that they can be successful.

Teacher 2. The interview with Teacher 2 was scheduled for after school hours, and I was directed to the classroom by the school principal. As I walked into the room, I noted bright, colorful posters and student work papering the walls. The room was filled with words, words on the tables, words on the board, words on the walls, and I recorded evidence of a large focus on language development. Teacher 2 greeted me with a firm handshake and offered me a seat by his desk. He was finishing up some lesson plans, so he asked me to wait a moment. When asked the first few questions, it was noted he seemed a bit uncomfortable with the process, but his answers were presented confidently. During the interview, Teacher 2 made a statement I wrote down. I concluded after the interview it was something that resonated throughout the remainder of the interview and was woven within all of his answers. He stated, "We are in the people business." Although he stated this in a very matter-of-fact manner, he seemed extremely passionate about this idea.

Additional notes, taken after the interview, reflected a sense of calm in Teacher 2's demeanor and a quiet confidence which was evidenced by the tone in which he spoke, the clarity of his answers, and the way he described his interactions with students. I noted his demeanor and tone was validated when he said, "Well I think it's about sincerity. I think it's about kids are experts at knowing when you're just blowing smoke at them, especially at this age." I also concluded, after the interview, there was something natural about the way he approached answering the interview questions, and noted his "calm manner" and "soft tone of voice." I also noted that he used humor to enhance the discussion and engage with the interview process. Having a calm demeanor and quiet confidence demonstrated affective skills needed to be relational. Being confident and seemingly natural when responding to questions further validated the cognitive attribute of high levels of self-efficacy.

Teacher 3. Teacher 3 met me in the office and led me down to her classroom after the last bell of the school day. She spoke to me about the different classrooms as we walked down the hall. I noted she was easy to talk to and nonverbal signs of smiling and nodding made it comfortable to begin the interview. Additionally, I noted Teacher 3 seemed "very confident talking about her content area expertise," and I noted how she worked to increase her knowledge such as "spending time in the summer learning the curriculum." I also jotted notes about her level of enthusiasm when discussing a recent volcano project. She stated,

> We didn't know it was going to turn out, they were asking me what was going to happen, and I told them I didn't know. And I really didn't. I had spent time reading about it and learning about volcanos, but as for the result of the project, I just didn't know.

Field notes reflected a laughing smile and increased excitement in her voice as she described this particular situation.

As the interview progressed, I made a note that she seemed very comfortable talking about content knowledge and she also provided a rich, in-depth picture of how she relates to the students. One statement that I wrote down was, "You will see me with them" when she was referring to what I would see when I walked past her classroom. Another note that I made was that she was very candid in speaking about her interactions; the words that came to mind were real and communicative. Throughout our conversation, I noted a decrease in nonverbal signs and concluded after the interview during my reflection that although her communication skills were good, there was somewhat of an emotional disconnect when speaking to me.

Teacher 4. I met Teacher 4 at the end of the school day at his door and could immediately feel a sense of urgency in his movements. He walked quickly and spoke with an excitable tone. He was the first teacher to invite me into his classroom, and I noted he seemed very eager to commence with the interview. The conversation started quickly and flowed easily because he was "confident in his answers and willing to expand the discussion with specific examples." He talked about engaging students with humor and I noted "a sparkle in his eye" when he talked about some of the things like "using crazy voices" to capture his students' attention. When asked about developing rapport with his students, some of the previous nonverbal signs I had noted seemed to lessen and he got very serious. He very directly explained how he "gets respect, but also gives it." In my reflection after the interview, I noted that he takes his responsibility of educating children very seriously.

Teacher 5. Teacher 5 was scheduled to be interviewed right after school and when I arrived at the office, I was asked to sit and wait for her to come and escort me to her room. When she first approached and addressed me, she spoke with a very "calming tone and quiet voice." I noted a very calm demeanor. She spoke with a soft voice and her answers were very

straightforward. When asked about what the perfect classroom would look like, I noted she talked about both cognitive and affective attributes being present. She explained,

> A perfect classroom would be one in which all students are learning and all students feel valued. In a perfect classroom I would have the resources and time to teach what students needed and be able to differentiate to meet every student's needs. In a perfect classroom I would also be able to focus on things like character education that are pushed aside now due to all the content that needs to be taught.

Two phrases noted as important were equal education and respecting of diversity, and during the interview, I went back to these ideas and asked for clarification. She stated,

> My classroom environment is one in which students can trust me and hopefully one another. I make sure that I deal with issues that come up in a fair and timely manner so that students know that I do care about them. I try to model a caring attitude in the way that I deal with student behavior. I talk to students individually and always give multiple chances. In my classroom we discuss differences whenever we get a chance or whenever it comes up and students know that these differences are what makes our class so special. I am aware of the differences in ability, talents, learning styles, and home lives. I take these differences into account when writing lesson plans and when communicating with students and parents. Students know that in our classroom we respect these differences.

One statement she made that I recorded was, "I think teaching excellence in any context depends on the teacher" which reflects the overall purpose of this study.

Teacher 6. As I met Teacher 6 in the parking lot, I noted her liveliness and a "fun" dynamic to the way she interacted with me. We sat down at a small table at the side of the room

and I noted that the classroom was filled with stuff. The classroom was very busy, but I noted it seemed "productive". There were books and papers, pencils and crayons, posters and charts, and multiple samples of student work. When the conversation first started, I was writing notes quickly because there were so many important ideas I wanted to capture. "Quick thinking and speaking" were also used to describe the interaction, but this was quickly followed by "emotional and relational" as she described a story about a young boy who had suffered a profound loss and the way she helped the family. I wrote down that she "tells real stories, about real issues" which allows her to demonstrate "empathy and build relationships." She shared life experiences that "changed the look in her eyes from happiness to reflection and sometimes sorrow." A common pattern found in the field notes from this particular interview was the changing emotions all related to aspects of the interview focused on relationships.

Administrators. Administrator interviews were conducted in the school office inside each administrator's office. To protect the identity of the teacher participants, field notes were logged, but included only information about the discussion. Key words or phrases identified as important were recorded, but were not attached to any one particular participant. Because the office environment of the administrator did not reveal meaningful information about teaching excellence, notes pertaining to this were not recorded.

Administrator 1. Initially field notes pertaining to the interaction with Administrator 1 revealed she knew a lot about her teachers. I noted she "had several examples" she used to answer each question. I also noted she was able to discuss "both content knowledge and personal relational skills" of her teachers. Nonverbal signs included laughter and smiling when she described teacher-student interactions. She gave specific examples of "student-teacher interactions" and described ways "excellent teaching goes outside the classroom walls." One

thing I noted is that she did not have an "array" of descriptors and often used similar descriptions

when answering multiple questions. Multiple mentions of "going above and beyond" were

notated during the discussion.

Administrator 2. The interview with Administrator 2 was held at the end of the school

day, and I first noted that he seemed distracted. When asked about attributes and dispositions of

excellent teachers, he referred to the "evaluation tool" and discussed its similarity to the

Danielson (2007) model. He also discussed how "this tool helps him to know what he is looking

for." I recorded this as important because he was the first administrator to make mention of the

evaluation tool as a way to measure teaching effectiveness. He described his teachers as

"knowledgeable" and "innovative" and often referred to his "own teaching experiences" to

describe what attributes and dispositions were present in excellent teachers.

Administrator 3. The interview with Administrator 3 seemed to move along quickly, so

notes regarding the interaction were written after the interview. As I sat down to write about the

experience, I noted she was "very direct in her answers", but that she was able to "clearly convey

the level of knowledge" and "relational skills" possessed by the excellent teachers. I also noted

several times where she referenced a "best practice" when identifying answers to interview

questions. She seemed "genuinely pleased" with the work of her teachers.

Focus Groups. Focus groups were held in a classroom and library. Obtaining enough

participants proved to be difficult, so one of the focus groups turned into individual interviews.

For the first focus group, there was "strong and consistent dialogue about teacher traits and

qualities." Parents used words like "fun, humorous, respectful, and caring" which reflected

affective attributes. Parents also highlighted the "teacher's expertise in tailoring instruction and

level of content knowledge" which demonstrated cognitive attributes. The reoccurring nonverbal

cue recorded was "parents look across the desks at other parents." One note from a parent

answer included the phrase "teaching is more than just a job" when asked to explain the

professional dispositions of the teacher displayed both inside and outside of the classroom.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed and summarized by instrumentation as individual teacher

interviews, artifacts, and field notes were categorized within the specific instances (within-case

analysis) for each teacher participant, and then a cross-case analysis was conducted with

administrator interviews, focus groups, artifacts, and field notes (Stake, 1995). Data

triangulation was used to increase the validity of the study and to merge together the various

perspectives of the multiple stakeholders. Identification of emerging themes by me, through

coding, allowed for data to be opened up and meaning to be explored through the identification

of important patterns and themes (Stake, 1995).

Within-Case Coding

I began the process by reading through each of the transcripts and listening to the

recordings of each interview and focus group three times. Notes in the margins of the transcripts

were made and subsequent readings were done to continue a formal coding process within-case

using highlighters of different colors to identify phrases or statements related to teacher attributes

and dispositions. During the within-case analysis, a list of codes from each of the teacher

participant interviews, administrator interviews, focus groups, artifact reviews, and field notes

was created. Key words or phrases that were supported in previous research (Hattie, 2003;

Schulte et al., 2004) and in Danielson's (2007) Framework for Teaching were used as a baseline

for identifying important information in context. A three column graphic organizer was used to

classify individual codes specific to teacher attributes and dispositions (see Appendix D).

Code lists included words or phrases representing reoccurring ideas related to the research questions. For example, codes from teacher interviews were "knowledgeable about content, engaging, gets to know their students and goes above and beyond expectations." Additional reoccurring codes in the teacher interviews included "empathy, driven, sincere, respecting of individual differences, meets student needs, tailors instruction, encourage and inspires learning."

Administrator interviews were combined to protect anonymity of participants, and reoccurring codes included "extremely knowledgeable, relational, set clear expectations for their students, communicative, encouraged positive interactions, went above and beyond what is required, and possessed a true passion for the teaching and learning process." Likewise, focus group transcripts were also combined due to the low number of respondents and reoccurring codes included "empathy, individualization, attention, interaction, emotion, humor, respect, and honesty" as the major identifiers of an excellent teacher. Field notes were coded and reoccurring codes focused on the "natural ease" in which the teacher talked about teaching, "passion" which was exhibited by participants when reflecting on students, and "preparedness and confidence" of answers related to pedagogy and content. Artifact codes represented the "importance and relevance" of the documents, "support" for the teaching and learning process, and "communicative" nature of the content (Hattie, 2003; Ingersoll, 2012; Schulte et al., 2004).

Within-case coding was an integral part of the data analysis as it set the foundation for the interpretation phase when patterns were generated and themes began to emerge across the cases, further validating the commonalities of the multiple perspectives. Each of the codes from the teacher interviews, focus groups, artifacts, and field notes were categorized as a cognitive attribute, affective attribute, or teaching disposition as defined by previous research (Hattie,

2003; Schulte et al., 2004).

From Codes to Emerging Themes

In order to confirm the emerging themes, codes from each stakeholder perspective, the artifacts collected, and the field notes taken by me were compared. Using categorical aggregation (Stake, 1995), I categorized and compared data codes between the multiple stakeholders, the artifacts, and the field notes. In support of the initial themes identified during the within-case analysis, triangulation of multiple perspectives and data points confirmed similar ideas and patterns amongst each theme. Additionally, perspectives from the multiple stakeholders, coupled with evidence from the artifacts and field notes, were reported to further validate the themes.

Once the analysis of the cases was completed (within-case analysis of teacher and administrator interviews, focus groups, artifact reviews, and field notes), codes from participant interviews and focus groups, artifact collection, and field notes converged to enhance the validity of the study and corroborate findings. Through content analysis and constant comparison, an inductive approach was used to move from specific codes to more general themes. I recorded recurring words from the teacher interviews, administrator interviews, focus groups, field notes, and artifact reviews to identify "core consistencies and meanings" (Patton, 2002, p. 453). Key words found in the within-case codes were sorted and categorized into the three columns, cognitive attributes, affective attributes, and professional dispositions (see Appendix D) based on similarities of key words in context and multiple occurrences. The codes recurring most frequently were chosen to assist in identifying the major themes. Table 3 displays the number of recurring words or phrases which support the identification of one of the five themes.

Frequency of Codes Across Data Points

Themes	Occurrences Across Data Points	
Design Effective Instruction	Knowledge	20
	Planning and Preparation	25
	Innovation	7
	Technology	8
	Engaging	16
Know Their Students	Individual Needs	25
	Empathy/Sincerity	15
Know Themselves	Confidence	13
	Self-Aware	26
	Reflective	9
Focus on Relationships	Rapport	29
	Relational	23
	Communicative	9
Exceed Job Expectations	Inside/Outside Classroom	16

Each theme was then aligned with the guiding research questions. Table 4 Cross-Case Analysis Framework displays the identified themes in relation to the overarching codes and the guiding research questions.

Table 4

Cross-Case Analysis Framework

Research Question	Theme	Stakeholder Perspectives
What specific instructional (cognitive) behaviors influence teaching excellence in teachers as reported by teachers, administrators, and parents?	Excellent teachers know how to design effective instruction.	Teacher Responses: 1.1: Fosters Critical thinking 1.2: Challenge, motivate, and engage learners 1.3: Scaffold instruction 1.4: Meet students where they are 1.5: Flexible lessons 1.6: Develop instructional scope and sequence 1.7: Align content, standards, and assessments 1.8: Research-based strategies 1.9: Use varied instructional approaches effectively Administrator Responses: 1.1: Know best practices 1.2: Take time to validate learning process 1.3: Innovative 1.4: Think outside of the box 1.5: Instills confidence in the teaching and learning process 1.6: Creates thinkers 1.7: Individualizes learning 1.8: Tailors instruction 1.9: Grade level appropriate 1.10: Technology as best practice to enhance learning Parents Responses: 1.1: Engaging, interactive lessons 1.2: Differentiates instruction 1.3: Multiple modalities for reaching learners 1.4: Efficient with varied instructional approaches 1.5: Ability to synthesize 1.6: Attention to detail 1.7: Thorough, prepared, flexible 1.8: Knowledge of multiple

		subject areas
		Artifact Review: 1.1: Varied instructional strategies 1.2: Detailed 1.3: Thorough 1.4: Aligned Field Notes: 1.1: Knowledgeable 1.2: Confident in content 1.3: Innovative
What specific relational (affective) behaviors influence teaching excellence in teachers as reported by teachers, administrators, and parents?	Excellent teachers know their students.	Teacher Responses: 2.1: Recognize developmental milestones 2.2: Need to develop whole child 2.3: Maximize opportunities to understand interests 2.4: Perceptive 2.5: Make individual needs of each student priority 2.6: Know the collective personality of the class 2.7: Know to encourage independence Administrator Responses: 2.1: Respect students as humans and individuals 2.2: Sees a child's need and responds 2.3: Considerate of students' individual stories 2.4: Respecting and trustworthy 2.5: Student views and opinions Parent Responses: 2.1: Care about their interests 2.2: There is more to a child than just school 2.3: Understand differences and encourage individuality 2.4: Do what's best for kids Artifact Review: 2.1: Meaningful 2.2: Relevant 2.3: Important

Field Notes:
2.1: Sincere
2.2: Emotional

Excellent teachers know themselves	Teacher responses:
	3.1: Know strengths and weaknesses

Excellent teachers know themselves

Teacher responses:
3.1: Know strengths and weaknesses
3.2: High levels of self-efficacy
3.3: Transparent
3.4: Genuine
3.5: Authentic
3.6: Sincere
3.7: Personally invested in their jobs
3.8: Passionate about teaching
3.9: Independently driven
3.10: Natural desire to be a teacher
3.11: Self-reflective
3.12: Always willing to try something
       New

Administrator Responses:
3.1: Extremely knowledgeable
3.2: Real with students

Parent Responses:
3.1: Open for feedback
3.2: Reflective
3.3: Teaching is not just a job

Artifact Review:
3.1: Communicative

Field Notes:
3.1: Self-aware
3.2: Real

Excellent teachers focus on relationships.

Teacher Responses:
4.1: Create a safe classroom
      environment
4.2: Clear expectations
4.3: Strong communicators
4.4: Inspire learning
4.5: Humorous
4.6: Develop a strong rapport
4.7: Treat students with respect and as
      individuals

		4.8: Take time to know students outside of school
		4.9: Caring and compassionate
		Administrator Responses:
		4.1: Shared victories
		4.2: Patient
		4.3: Empathetic
		4.4: Understanding
		Parent Responses:
		4.1: Relational
		4.2: Accommodating
		4.3: Natural
		4.4: Animated
		4.5: Passionate
		4.6: Share expectations in a relatable way
		4.7: Inviting environment
		4.8: Treat all students the same way
		Artifact Review:
		4.1: Encouraging
		4.2: Supportive
		Field Notes:
		4.1: Communicate
		4.2: Builds relationships
What professional and personal teaching dispositions do excellent teachers possess as reported by teachers, administrators, and parents?	Excellent teachers exceed the expectations of their job.	Teacher Responses:
		5.1: Go above and beyond what is required
		5.2: Willing and able to provide more than what is asked of them
		5.3: Lifelong learners, independently engage in professional development
		5.4: Collaborative
		Administrator responses:
		5.1: Goes above and beyond what is expected
		5.2: Gives students multiple opportunities for success
		Parent Responses:
		5.1: Always one step ahead

5.2: Additional time for tutoring
   mentoring, etc.
5.3: Goes above required duties
5.4: Excellence goes beyond
   classroom walls

Artifact Review:
5.1: Multiple attempts to communicate
5.2: Detailed expectations

Field Notes:
5.1: Outside classroom walls

Triangulation of Data Points

The triangulation of data is the most important aspect of qualitative data analysis and is used to determine what data stays constant in varying contexts (Yin, 2009). Triangulation was used in this study to determine what attributes and dispositions remained the same across multiple perspectives and within varied evidence collection such as artifacts and field notes. I also used triangulation to identify major themes consistently present in all forms of data collected. Stake (1995) defined triangulation as "mostly a process of repetitious data gathering and critical review of what is being said" (p. 34). All four data points, interview and focus group transcripts, and artifacts were reviewed critically using both a within-case and cross-case analysis. Codes were categorically aggregated, and themes were formed based on multiple occurrences of important words and phrases found in the codes.

Themes

Multiple sources of data were collected to create a rich, in-depth narrative regarding the cognitive and affective attributes and teaching dispositions of excellent teachers. Teacher interviews, administrator interviews, parent focus groups, teacher artifacts, and field notes were used to triangulate the data collected from these multiple sources. "Data source triangulation is an effort to see if what we are observing and reporting carries the same meaning when found

under different circumstances" (Stake, 1995, p. 113) and was used to reflect on the multiple perspectives of the stakeholders. Therefore, further trying to determine whether the themes and trends amongst the varying data sources and multiple stakeholders can be substantiated and further meaning can be clarified. In triangulating the data from the sources described above, the following themes emerged:

(a) Excellent teachers design effective instruction.

(b) Excellent teachers know themselves.

(c) Excellent teachers focus on relationships.

(d) Excellent teachers know their students.

(e) Excellent teachers consistently exceed the expectations of their job.

Triangulation of Themes by Research Questions

Within-case analysis was conducted and then a cross-case analysis was conducted to develop and identify major themes found in the data collected from all stakeholders. From the analysis, five major themes were identified, and the results were used to answer the guiding research questions. Stakeholder perspectives, artifact collection, and field notes were used to further support the themes and triangulate the various data points collected. The data collected from these sources were used to validate the theme identification and were then used to answer the guiding research questions.

Sub-question 1

The first sub-question focused on the specific instructional (cognitive) behaviors that influence teaching excellence in teachers as reported by teachers, administrators, and parents. High levels of content knowledge and an in-depth understanding of best practices allow teachers to be flexible in their planning and preparation, instructional delivery, and differentiation to meet

student needs.

Excellent teachers design effective instruction. The teacher participants shared similar perspectives when describing the attributes excellent teachers possess. The majority of the teachers described high levels of content and pedagogical knowledge. Teacher 3 identified her content strengths as "Whatever she is teaching" because she "spends her time getting to know what she is teaching." Teacher 5 described her content strength as being the area of reading because she "participates in professional development and conferences to keep current in the research." Teacher 4 stated,

Math is definitely something I'm very comfortable with and I feel like I have a lot of very different experiences that I bring into each lesson. So I feel like I can teach any math topic three different ways. I usually do pretty well with social studies trying to reteach Michigan history, and I try to teach kids that it's a story and I don't have them worry about dates and times and names. I have them worry about the story. What was going on in Michigan in the 1810's, 1820's, and making social studies more interesting. I think I do pretty well with that.

All of the teachers also described designing, developing, and implementing instruction that aligns the activities and assessments with the standards. Teacher 2 referenced "knowing where the students are and where they need to go" when planning and preparing the learning scope and sequence. Teacher 3 stated, "I spend a lot of time in the summer working on aligning my curriculum with the standards and the core content and that sort of thing." Teacher 1 also discussed how the integrity of planning and preparation was intact:

It all kind of comes together and it's coherent. That's what I look for. And of course standards and I look at what type of kids that I'm working with. It's different for all of

my classes. I try to gear them specifically for like my third hour or my fifth hour. You know are these, do I have a class full of 35 boys and I need to approach it a little differently than my third hour where it is all girls. It's very, very different so I try to look at the students. Are they better talking, are they better moving? Are they better with working with partners or in small groups. That's what I try to divide the class into. Those are all factors that I try to take in.

Administrators and parents alike discussed how excellent teachers possess a genuine understanding for the teaching and learning process. One administrator described the expertise of a teacher by stating she, "Had it all curriculum and instructional wise." A parent explained how her child's teacher "tailored the learning process and provided multiple opportunities for students to be successful." All stakeholders agreed that excellent teachers are knowledgeable about their subject matter, they understand and implement research-based practices to meet the individualized needs of their students, they differentiate instruction, and they vary their instructional practices to ensure that all students have the tools they need to learn.

Evidence of this theme was also identified in the majority of the teacher lesson plans collected as I noted standards being covered, multiple intelligences being addressed, and varied instructional strategies being used. Interview field notes included comments regarding the teachers' "understanding of what is needed at their grade level" and also "classroom environments exhibiting grade level materials and opportunities for creativity."

All stakeholders agreed that excellent teachers engage students in a variety of meaningful ways to encourage interactive learning. One administrator reflected on how the teacher "is extremely animated and captures the students' attention," while one parent described how another teacher even "captured her attention with his humor" when she was in the class.

According to teachers, administrators, and parents, excellent teachers have a sincere buy-in to the teaching and learning process and this is evidenced when "students' individual needs are being met."

High levels of content knowledge and in-depth understanding of best practices allow teachers to be flexible in their planning and preparation, instructional delivery, and differentiation to meet student needs. Teachers, administrators, and parents all discussed how excellent teachers possess a genuine understanding for the teaching and learning process. One administrator described a child's teacher as one who "uses technology and instruction better than anybody I've ever seen and he's always a step ahead and always willing to share as a team person or a person in the district." All stakeholders agreed that excellent teachers are knowledgeable about their subject matter, they understand and implement research-based practices to meet the individualized needs of their students, they differentiate instruction, and they vary their instructional practices to ensure that all students have the tools they need to learn. Because they are subject matter experts, they are flexible and understand that teaching is not just a science or an art form, but both.

Stakeholders perceived that excellent teachers engage students in a variety of meaningful ways to encourage interactive learning. One administrator described a teacher's room by saying, "There's just so much energy in there." Innovative strategies were used to gain the attention of students and motivate learning. Parents in one focus group discussed how a teacher used motivational tools like a "homework tracker to encourage responsibility and organization." The idea of differentiation was addressed by every teacher, administrator, and parent. One parent described how "different levels of spelling tests are used for different student groups" and one administrator described how a teacher meets the students "right where they are at."

Sub-question 2

The second sub-question focused on the specific relational (affective) behaviors that influenced teaching excellence in teachers as reported by teachers, administrators, and parents. Excellent teachers were described as empathetic, authentically relational, passionate, honest, open, communicative, caring, compassionate, and genuine. They value more than just the academic success, but value each child as a whole, unique individual. Excellent teachers have high levels of self-efficacy born from a tremendous amount of support both personally and professionally.

Excellent teachers know themselves. Excellent teachers were described as empathetic, authentically relational, passionate, honest, open, communicative, caring, compassionate, and genuine. Artifacts, such as parent newsletters and email communications, clearly displayed teachers' personality characteristics as the teachers shared ideas, confirmed successes, and provided encouragement. One administrator spoke of how a teacher consistently communicated with parents via email and text to help them feel involved in their child's learning. Artifacts provided from one teacher showed multiple email pushes including encouraging notes and pictures of students engaged in classroom activities. A specific field note related to this read, "Values teamwork with parents and uses communication to develop relationships and show interest."

A parent in one of the focus groups described how a teacher "not only expected respect from the students, but he gave respect as well." Field note data led me to conclude that because teachers are confident in their abilities, they are willing to take risks to do what it takes to meet the needs of their students. Several mentions of being innovative, accommodating, flexible, and understanding were scattered throughout the field notes.

Excellent teachers have high levels of self-efficacy born from a tremendous amount of support both personally and professionally. Teachers specifically identified high levels of self-efficacy based on upbringing and life experiences and administrators and parents further corroborated high levels of confidence as seen through communication and interactions with colleagues, parents, and students. High levels of self-efficacy and self-reflection allow excellent teachers to know their strengths and weaknesses. All six teachers described their self-efficacy as high. Teacher 1 stated, when asked to rate the level of self-efficacy,

High. I think high. I mean I'm human. I make mistakes, maybe things take me a little longer to do, but then I look at everything that I have to do and I think that I do a pretty darn good job juggling."

When asked about self-efficacy, Teacher 4 responded,

Very, very high. I feel like there's not, I don't think there's a task that I've been handed that I haven't immediately been excited to undertake and without seeming overconfident, it usually turns out. If it doesn't turn out, I'm here late at night working on it, trying to make it better and I know that if I set a goal, or if the district sets a goal for me, that I feel I generally will achieve it.

Teacher 6 also described her self-efficacy as, "High. I mean that's why I'm picked to be on these committees and stuff because I'll get it done."

The teachers agreed that knowing their students was a top priority in order to engage in meaningful interactions that inspire learning. Teacher 1 described how she herself questions when trying to get to know her students. She stated,

If I had to sit in the desk, would it be fun for me? Because if they're not enjoying it, and I'm not saying every day it has to be a parade or super exciting, but that's not it, would I

want to listen, would I want to pay attention? Would I want to do the work? Would it be important to me as a student? So I always try to put myself in their seats because they have to go to seven classes and sit in a desk and listen to people talk all day. And I've done that when I have observed other teachers and it's hard. So, that's the first thing that I think of. Because they know themselves and know their students, they are able to create learning environment that is motivating, challenging, and safe.

Teacher 6 described the character of a classroom and how she gets to know her students:

So if a kid is misbehaving during selected reading time, chances are it's because they're struggling with reading. So what can you do? How can you set them up? Instead of going oh he's misbehaving I'm marking him down. What is the motivation? You know. So to slow yourself down a little bit as a teacher and go, 'okay let me think about this kid and why he's doing these behaviors. If he's getting into fights at recess, why? What's going on?' And so to pull them aside and have a discussion with them. 'You know. I found out you're like really getting in trouble at recess. What's going on?' Sometimes you find out there's something going on. You know that there is.

Teacher 3 described some of the ways she gets to know her students:

So it's really building that safe atmosphere and just talking to them. We had a conversation this morning about spring break. What did you do? They saw I got a haircut and I was talking about my haircut and how I was nervous, and they talked about their stuff. You have to reach them in a non-educational level, I think if that makes sense. Talk to them about soccer and their games and their broken leg, and their new baby sister. I think that kind of makes them a lot more comfortable coming and talking to me about a reading question or a math problem.

Excellent teachers focus on relationships. The perspectives of stakeholders reflected the idea that excellent teachers are relational. One administrator described how a teacher goes to functions and sporting events outside of school to support her students. When describing how one teacher related to her students, an administrator stated, "Students find her nurturing." Being real and building strong relationships creates a rapport that allows students to feel safe in the learning environment. One teacher described his safe classroom environment and his positive relationships with his students in a simple statement: "And I see that environment I think is in place because the kids feel very comfortable being around me." Another teacher described how she builds trust in the relationship with her students:

> They have to know when they come to me I'm not going to judge them. I'm not going to call home and tattle on them. I'm not going to send them to the principal's office unless those steps are taken. They know. They know when you push me too far, when you've had too many strikes, if you will, I'm going to call mom and dad and they're going to be involved. But I guess it's never a secret. I never secretly meet with mom and dad and not tell the child.

Parents noted that excellent teachers are real and that their relationships with students are give and take. One parent described how a teacher expects a lot from her daughter, but makes it clear her daughter can expect a lot from him. Field notes connected to this statement highlighted non-verbal signs of approval such as a smile and excitement in this parent's voice when sharing of how the teacher praised her daughter for her effort, even though she did not pass the test.

All three administrators described how excellent teachers care about students and care about what is happening in their lives both inside and outside of the classroom walls. One administrator stated, "Teaching excellence happens both inside and outside of classroom walls."

Additionally, field notes taken me included the words "values relationships" in each and every instance. One teacher stated the first thing she does to set up her classroom is "make sure the students feel connected to her." My field notes captured the emotion of the statement by noting the teacher made the gesture of hugging herself when describing the importance of being connected to her students.

Excellent teachers know their students. Excellent teachers are passionate about teaching. They view being a teacher as part of the fiber of their being and not as a job. A common pattern in my field notes was mention of the statement "I love coming here" by teachers. Administrators and parents supported this idea by describing how teachers look when they are working with their students or how dedicated they are to their students. One administrator described how an early elementary teacher does not speak down to the students, but gets down to eye level when having conversations. One of the parents described how her student looked when receiving recognition from her teacher. She stated, "Her eyes lit up" when describing how her daughter felt when the teacher recognized her effort and accomplishment. This same parent described what the teacher did to show how well he knew her daughter:

> He never made her feel you know, out of place, or embarrassed about it. You know, he made her feel like she was one of the rest, even though she had to do it a little differently. And I always felt like he has just been completely on top of what she needs. The main thing, too, is not making her feel, you know, separated from the rest of the class and he's constantly telling her, 'you know, yeah you might have gotten a C on this, but you know what you tried harder than anyone else in here, to me that means more.'

Three of the six teachers demonstrated strong emotions when describing what their role is in the teaching and learning process. Field notes identifying nonverbal emotions, such as

excitement, smiles, and teary-eyes, supported the importance relationships have in the classroom. All teachers stated that they want their students to be successful in life and that the skills they are teaching help students be a good person and be successful in life. Teachers also discussed how it is important to know their students so that they can help them achieve adequate growth. One teacher stated,

> I make sure that every student is doing something, which doesn't always show up very well on paper, but it always, you can just tell. So a lot of anecdotal like student measurement tools, just seeing this teacher was afraid to speak to me at the beginning of the year about anything. If I asked what book they were reading, they knew I was going to tell them they were at the wrong level and they weren't smart enough. Now when I say, 'Hey, you think you can read a different level?' They say, 'Yeah, what do you think I should read?' That's growth to me.

Artifacts like classroom newsletters provided additional evidence that excellent teachers know their students with the inclusion of homework reminders, studying tips, and notes of encouragement.

Sub-question 3

The third sub-question focused on the professional and personal teaching dispositions that excellent teachers possess as reported by teachers, administrators, and parents. Excellent teachers go above and beyond required expectations because teaching is not just a job. Excellent teachers believe that being a teacher is what defines them. They are fair and equitable, respectful of diversity, collaborative, and they hold the belief that all students can learn.

Excellent teachers exceed the expectations of their job. Exceeding instructional expectations and professional responsibilities was a common pattern identified from all

stakeholders. A common notation in field notes included the code "exceeds job requirements" or "goes above and beyond." I noted several instances where teachers provided additional assistance to colleagues and students outside of normal job expectations. Artifacts, such as email communications, provided evidence that excellent teachers exceed communication requirements to help parents feel involved in what is happening in the classroom. Artifacts, such as newsletters and lesson plans, provided examples of teacher dedication to a high quality education by including clear expectations such as classroom rules, homework guidelines, and detailed instructions encouraging student success.

Each teacher also discussed district provided professional development, but followed up with some explanation of how they seek out opportunities to advance their skills on their own time. Teacher 4 excitedly described how he enjoys learning new techniques and bringing them back to share with his colleagues. He stated,

And so if I feel very strongly about a new way of doing things, I have to do a lot of background work, get research for it, show that it's good, use it in my classroom, pilot it, teach everybody else.

Teacher 6 also described a situation where she went above and beyond to train teachers. She stated,

I want to be the one that's taught. You know and then I can immediately implement it in my room. I can teach others and then I know it better because I'm teaching other people and I always know something better when I teach it. So I bring a lot of things to my grade level that I read over the summer and the daily five was one that school-wide we use now, but it was one I read in the summer and, you know, brought in.

A parent newsletter addressing the implementation of this new strategy demonstrated a connection between learning in the classroom and encouraging parental involvement with the learning process outside of the classroom.

In addition to exceeding job expectations professionally, excellent teachers take their responsibility outside of the classroom walls. One teacher recognized that students are "more than just a student six hours a day", and so they take an interest in their students' lives outside of school. Excellent teachers attend sporting events, church plays, and dance recitals. Teacher 6 talked about how she wanted her students to see her there and that she would "take pictures and share them with the class." They make an effort to get to know their students' likes and dislikes, and provide opportunities for students to connect their learning through book choices, recess opportunities, and classroom discussions. One of the parents in a focus group discussed how her son's teacher didn't really like football, but would make an effort to talk to her son about his favorite team.

Excellent teachers participate in professional development, encourage change, and are collaborative leaders. Administrators noted excellent teachers participate in district level training, collaborate with peers, and strive for exceedingly high levels of investment to the success of their students. They do more than just what is expected of them because they love their job.

Excellent teachers understand that each individual student is unique and has individual needs. According to my field notes, all six teachers reflected on the individual needs of their students and how they have to make adjustments to be sure to meet these needs. Field notes also supported that excellent teachers are those who do not follow the same mold each year, but adapt to meet the needs of each new class and each new student.

Results

Data were collected from a variety of stakeholders to include teachers, administrators, and parents. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups generated lengthy discussions which provided rich, thick, narrative text used to identify attributes and dispositions displayed by excellent teachers. Artifact and field note reviews were used to further validate themes and trends revealed in the interviews and focus groups. The findings of the study informed five themes related to specific cognitive attributes, affective attributes, and professional dispositions as reported by teachers, administrators, and parents, and as evidenced by teacher artifacts and my field notes. The five themes are

(a) Excellent teachers design effective instruction.

(b) Excellent teachers know themselves.

(c) Excellent teachers focus on relationships.

(d) Excellent teachers know their students.

(e) Excellent teachers consistently exceed the expectations of their job.

Summary of Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

I chose to include both a theoretical and conceptual framework to provide the foundation for this study because of the focus on both cognitive and affective attributes. The social learning theory focuses on the behaviors of teachers as people and the Danielson (2007) framework focuses on the aptitude and dispositions of teachers as professionals. Using two frameworks provides dual structures for understanding the phenomena of teaching excellence.

The theoretical framework for this study provided a systematic guide for better understanding how self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994) and reciprocal determinism (Bandura, 1978) inform the findings of this study. In identifying attributes and dispositions of excellent teachers,

the theoretical analysis of the findings suggest a connection exists between teaching excellence and high levels of self-efficacy. All six teachers provided rationales for the rating of high self-efficacy to include both personal and professional life experiences. Additionally, the analysis suggests that in fact, the classroom environment is influenced by a teacher's cognitive and affective attributes and dispositions and these attributes influence the behaviors exhibited by teachers.

Danielson's (2007) Framework for Teaching was used as the conceptual framework to assist me in better understanding preferred indicators of excellent teaching. The conceptual framework provided key performance criteria used to assist in the identification of valid cognitive and affective attributes and professional dispositions. Danielson's evaluation tool is research-based and is widely used in schools across the nation. Schools that do not use the Framework for Teaching oftentimes have an adapted version that included the same components (Superintendent, personal communication, April 8, 2014).

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

Increased accountability measures have placed teacher evaluation in the forefront of educational debates. Teacher quality and effectiveness are commonly linked synonymously with student achievement results (Akbari & Allvar, 2010), and teaching effectiveness is often defined through measures of academic achievement. In order to move away from forced mediocrity and move into a climate of academic excellence, a focus on excellence is needed (Gates Foundation, 2013; Hattie, 2003; Huntly, 2008). Understanding what attributes and dispositions foster teaching excellence allows institutions of higher education and school districts to highlight strategies for growing and developing teachers in these areas. Ingersoll (2012) noted teachers who have solid support systems in place are more successful and have a greater chance of longevity in the field of education. In identifying specific attributes and dispositions of excellent teachers, the focus becomes on how to connect this understanding to practice and to encourage highly skilled teachers to persist in the classroom (Chen et al., 2012).

In education, much discussion is focused on highly effective teaching and how to measure the quality of a teacher. Studying the attributes of teachers identified as excellent provided insight into practices and behaviors that can be emulated to encourage excellence among all educators. Prior research (Hattie, 2003; Huntly, 2008; Grieve, 2010; Grant et al., 2011) suggested that expert teachers possess certain attributes which influence highly effective teaching and learning. Grieve (2010) reported teachers have clear perspectives of characteristics associated with teaching excellence and identified 44 characteristics including both cognitive and affective attributes. Some similar attributes with the current study were: "Establishes good relationships, knows pupils well, and shows great commitment to work" (p. 272). Findings from

this study confirm these attributes as ones that are important to teachers, administrators, and parents when identifying the presence of teaching excellence. Grant et al. (2011) also found teachers with higher levels of cognitive and affective attributes generated higher levels of achievement in students. Hattie (2003) studied differences among experienced and expert teachers and identified five major dimensions of expert teachers. The five dimensions of expert teachers were: can identify essential representations of their subject, guiding learning through classroom interactions, monitoring learning and providing feedback, attending to affective attributes, and influencing student outcomes. The five themes which emerged as a result of this study support prior research by reflecting the influence cognitive and affective attributes and professional dispositions have on excellent teaching. The multiple stakeholder participants in this study identified attributes related to planning and preparation expertise, relational focus, and exceeding job expectations to influence student outcomes.

Discussion

The purpose of this collective case study was to identify specific cognitive and affective attributes and professional dispositions of excellent teachers as reported by multiple stakeholders. The theoretical framework was built on Bandura's (1978) social cognitive theory. Two components of this theory were used to structure the foundation of the study: reciprocal determinism and self-efficacy. Reciprocal determinism posits that human interaction is based on personal, behavioral, and environmental factors influencing one's behaviors and, therefore, impacting desired outcomes (Bandura, 1978). In teaching, Grieve (2010) stated, "teachers learn how to be a teacher by living in the teaching world and by learning the routines of teaching" (p. 273). School climate and classroom climate impact how a teacher responds in certain situations and in turn, influences how students respond in certain situations.

Likewise, results of this study extend knowledge of social cognitive theory with respect to the identification and practice of excellent teachers. Both self-efficacy and reciprocal determinism, within the social cognitive learning theory, were evident in the descriptions of excellent teachers as the teachers themselves, administrators, and parents discussed how personal, behavioral, and environmental factors influenced teaching practices (Bandura, 1978). Administrators and parents alike described how the teachers were strategic when delivering instruction and interacting with students. An administrator described one teacher's classroom as "A variety of experiences are used in class so that every ten minutes or so, students have an opportunity to become involved." Both stakeholder groups also described how this impacted the classroom environment by building relationships, creating trust, and motivating learning. Teacher driven dynamics such as humor and dramatic presentation had profound impact on the classroom environment which elicited positive responses from students. One administrator described how a teacher uses "dramatic voices" to capture students' attention when reading aloud. A parent discussed the use of humor in classroom interactions, "There's humor, they know they can have fun, but there is a line. If you cross it, there are consequences."

Self-efficacy, another aspect of the social cognitive learning theory (Bandura, 1977), is one's belief in their ability to successfully complete a task which is important in the ever-changing field of education where teachers are asked to learn something, and then learn something new, and then learn something even newer. Findings from this study support high levels of self-efficacy in excellent teachers. All participants maintained they possessed above average to very high levels of confidence in their ability. When asked to rate their level of self-efficacy, teachers enthusiastically responded using descriptors such as "above average, high, and very high." These descriptors were followed by explanations of both personal and professional

accomplishments leading to the increase in self-knowledge, self-awareness, and self-confidence. Several of the teachers discussed the importance of knowing and being confident in addressing strengths and weaknesses. Teachers described how their personal background impacted their drive and confidence. Multiple teachers described childhood upbringing as a major factor influencing both their cognitive and affective skills. One teacher said, "I honestly think my mom has built me to be a very independent person and a very strong woman." Another teacher stated,

      I was the perfect kid, probably stereotypical, but never missed school, I was never late, never did a detention. That was just how I was raised. Both of my parents are teachers so that was just kind of engrained in a very young age. That anything less was unacceptable.

      Danielson's (2007) Framework for Teaching tool includes multiple facets of interaction between the teacher and the environment, the teacher and the content, the teacher and the student, and the teacher and other stakeholders. Human knowledge and behavior were the foundation for the study as the perspectives of multiple stakeholders were explored regarding cognitive and affective attributes and dispositions of excellent teachers. Reciprocal determinism reflects the idea that interaction stimulates further interaction; therefore, positive interactions between behaviors, people, and the environment should produce positive effectives. Excellent teachers create a positive cycle of interactions that produce highly effective classroom climates and relationships. One parent described how the teacher "demonstrates what she wants the kids to give back her back." Additionally, one administrator described the interaction cycle in the classroom as "theatrical" and "it just really engages the kids." The administrator also stated, "He takes on a different persona and he'll put on these sort of shows and that kind of stuff gets the kids talking and asking questions."

Brekelmans, Wubbels, and den Brok (2002) studied the influence of teacher-student interactions and found throughout the life of one's teaching career, relationships stabilize as teachers' skill progress. Implications noted a need for professional development and training to assist teachers in choosing appropriate cognitive and affective skills in different situations (Brekelmans, Wubbels, & de Brok, 2002). With regard to the current study, teachers, administrators, and parents alike discussed cognitive characteristics, such as content knowledge and high levels of self-efficacy, along with behavioral (affective) characteristics, including being relational, empathetic, and honest when describing interactions with excellent teachers. Teaching is focused on interactions, and the findings of this collective case study reflect how personal and behavioral attributes influence the classroom environment.

Professional dispositions related to the classroom working environment were described using phrases such as "collaborative" and "safe learning environment", responses that are reflective of Domain 2, classroom environment, Danielson's (2007) framework. According to Poulou (2009), teachers must first create the classroom environment, in which students feel a sense of belonging, so that they can demonstrate their abilities, further validating the importance environment has on behavior especially in the classroom setting. The teachers identified as excellent in this study iterated that knowing their students and focusing on relationships are ways to creative positive classroom climates. Critical attributes noted in Domain 2 of the Framework for Teaching evaluation tool were evident in multiple stakeholder descriptions of affective attributes influencing an inviting classroom environment. Some of the common attributes were respect, genuineness, and caring. Valenta (2010) studied the impact of teacher interaction and engagement on student learning, and results showed teachers who focused on the instructional environments yielded positive progress towards gains in math and reading. Stakeholder

perspectives discussed in this study provided descriptions of excellent teachers. Interview responses from teachers, administrators, and parents highlighted interactions between teachers and students, parents and teachers, and teachers and administrators that exemplify excellence. Artifacts both displayed and encouraged interaction.

Common patterns emerged during the coding process that led to the formation of five major themes. While cognitive attributes were identified, affective attributes and professional dispositions appeared to be more abundant from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory, more specifically self-efficacy and reciprocal determinism, represents how personal characteristics of excellent teachers influence situations, and are also influenced by situations. The themes reflected in the results demonstrate a relationship between multiple stakeholder perspectives on what attributes influence the teaching and learning process, and also how the teaching and learning influences teacher attributes and dispositions.

Summary of Findings

A collective case study of the cognitive and affective attributes and professional dispositions of excellent teachers from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders was conducted. Six teachers identified as excellent and three administrators participated in individual interviews. Two parent focus groups were conducted. Various artifacts from teachers were collected and field notes were analyzed. Five major themes were identified:

(a) Excellent teachers design effective instruction.

(b) Excellent teachers know themselves.

(c) Excellent teachers focus on relationships.

(d) Excellent teachers know their students.

(e) Excellent teachers consistently exceed the expectations of their job.

Once data were collected, inductive analysis was used to "discover pattern, themes, and categories in one's data" (Patton, 2002, p. 453). First codes were identified for each interview, focus group, artifact, and recorded field note. Within-case analysis was conducted to discover an "intimate familiarity" with the individual case (Paterson, 2010, p. 971). Then a cross-case analysis was conducted to determine common patterns among all cases (Creswell, 2007). The following research question informed the study: What are the attributes and dispositions of excellent teachers from the perspectives of administrators, parents, and teachers? Additional sub-questions were:

- What specific instructional (cognitive) behaviors influence teaching excellence in teachers as reported by teachers, administrators, and parents?

- What specific relational (affective) behaviors influence teaching excellence in teachers as reported by teachers, administrators, and parents?

- What professional and personal teaching dispositions do excellent teachers possess as reported by teachers, administrators, and parents?

The findings indicated that teachers do in fact possess specific cognitive and affective attributes which are seen by multiple stakeholders as contributing factors to teaching excellence. The findings are discussed in detail in the following sections.

Connection to Prior Research

The data from the interviews, focus groups, artifact reviews, and field notes concluded that excellent teachers possess common cognitive and affective attributes and dispositions that are recognized by multiple stakeholders. The five themes: Excellent teachers design effective instruction, excellent teachers know their students, excellent teachers know themselves, excellent

teachers focus on relationships, and excellent teachers consistently exceed the expectations of their job, align with the results of prior studies which focused on teacher self-efficacy (Chen et al., 2012; Hoi et al., 2013), and specific cognitive and affective attributes and professional dispositions of excellent teachers (Hattie, 2003; Huntly, 2008; Katz, 1993; Schulte et al., 2004).

Furthermore, the findings of this study add to prior research by further validating specific cognitive and affective attributes and professional dispositions displayed by excellent teachers. Cognitive attributes such as content and pedagogical knowledge, planning and preparing highly effective lessons, and addressing the individual needs of students were evident in the data collected from this study and are further validated in Danielson's (2007) Domain 1 and 3. Affective attributes focused on teachers' self-knowledge, knowing the students, and building relationships was present and clearly aligned with Danielson's (2007) Domain 2. The final theme focused on exceeding job expectations and data collected was validated in Danielson's (2007) Domain 4. The gap, which was originally identified as multiple perspectives of various stakeholders regarding teaching excellence, was addressed, and the findings support common themes were evident in the perspectives of teachers, administrators, and parents as well as in teacher artifacts and my field notes. Four main contextual factors impact the success of a school. These include teachers, students, family, and community (Thompson & Cuseo, 2012). The findings of this study authenticate the importance of understanding the perspectives of all stakeholders when exploring the attributes and dispositions of excellent teachers. The data collected, identified themes and findings of this research study are discussed in light of prior research on this topic.

Excellent Teachers Design Effective Instruction

One of the dimensions identified in Hattie's (2003) study was that expert teachers

"identify essential representations of their subject" (p. 5). With regard to the current study, all six teachers identified as excellent, perceived they possessed high levels of content knowledge and the ability to differentiate instruction. Two of the administrators described how the teachers in their building, who were identified as excellent, had extremely high levels of subject matter expertise and described as "very intelligent." Likewise, parents noted that teachers were subject matter experts, but could still present instruction in a creative and compelling manner.

Teacher 2 described how he is always focused on long-term goals and makes instructional decisions based on the benchmarks students need to reach. He assesses student ability levels and makes adjustment to instruction to move students from one point to another. He explained that when he is teaching, if he realizes his students are not at a particular point or need additional time, he asks himself "So, what can I do to make sure they get that? What do I have to add in, or what can I do, or how can I fit more time for us to go over this or practice skill more?"

Likewise, teachers expressed confidence in their ability to differentiate instruction. Teacher 1 demonstrated expertise in differentiation, when she stated: "I look at what type of kids I am working with. It's different for all of my classes. Are they better talking or moving? Are they better working with partners or in small groups?" Teacher 2 noted, "Individualized groups allow more time to work on things, allowing different students to ask for help, whether it's from me or from a peer, whatever's comfortable." Recognizing that individual students possess different needs, Teacher 2 allows students to take academic risks by providing a safety net in which he is always willing to "discuss their mistakes and show them ways to approach it in a better way." Teacher 3 discussed how teaching practices are constantly changing, so she must be flexible enough to implement updates or changes to curriculum, and district requirements, all

aspects of being a pedagogical expert. She shared how she spends a great amount of time learning and perfecting content area knowledge. Teacher 3 explained, "Whatever content I am teaching, I always spend a ton of time getting to know the information. I don't feel comfortable teaching students about things unless I know that I will be able to answer their questions." Teacher 3 described how even though one may spend a great deal of time planning and preparing, students' individual differences impact how an excellent teacher delivers instruction.

One parent highlighted teacher content expertise by stating,

"One thing I admire about her most is that she is out of the box…so, the curriculum might say one thing and she's going to get the kids there, but she doesn't necessarily have to do the workbook or reading book…it keeps it very interesting for the kids.

Another parent stated,

they definitely need to know their ins and outs, but the way they can tailor it to specific students. You know there's different ways that everyone learns and to be able to know that about your students and to be able to see it in them, they don't have to tell you, you can see it in them.

A final parent highlighted this point by stating the teacher presents instruction effectively: She's doing it better because for some reason she thought this was a better way to get the children to know this information and if she thought enough to find something else. She enjoys being responsible for what they're supposed to know that year. I think she takes that pretty seriously.

Hattie (2003) stated, "...experts develop automaticity so as … to deal with other more complex characteristics of the situation, whereas experience non-experts do not optimize the opportunities obtained from automaticity" (p. 8). The excellent teachers in this study showed evidence of the

ability to do this.

The Planning and Preparation domain of Danielson's (2007) Framework for Teaching, describes a distinguished level of content knowledge when a "Teacher displays extensive content knowledge, with evidence of continuing pursuit of such knowledge" (Component 1a). Grieve (2010) noted that teachers who appropriate instructional strategies, foster student learning. In this study, teachers and administrators used terms, such as "knowledgeable, subject matter expert, differentiated instruction, and varied instructional strategies," when they described cognitive attributes related to designing effective instruction. Focus group participants did not use educational terms associated with content and pedagogical practices, but described how their teachers were able to "tailor the learning" environment and teach students skills in a variety of ways.

A study conducted by Heck (2009) found that highly effective teachers do impact student achievement, and one aspect of being a highly effective teacher is the use of effective teaching practices. Two aspects of Huntly's (2008) study on beginning teacher perspectives of competence included "thorough preparation and a sound knowledge base" (p. 1). Both of these studies are significant because regardless of years of experience, highly effective teachers must be able to design effective instruction in order to impact student learning. Teachers, administrators, and especially parents highlighted a multitude of instructional strategies used to differentiate instruction and meet the needs of individual learners. Administrators discussed high levels of instructional knowledge, and parents shared stories of various approaches used to teach various skill sets.

Excellent Teachers Know Themselves

Prior research results determined that teachers with high levels of self-efficacy have great

impact in the classroom (Hoi et al., 2013). All six of the teachers spoke about extremely high

levels of self-efficacy. During the focus group discussions, parents spoke about various

interactions where teachers displayed high levels of confidence in their abilities to meet

individual student needs. Most of the teachers described themselves as willing to try new

strategies because they are confident in their ability to reach the desired outcome (Bandura,

1978). One teacher stated, "I feel like there's not, I don't think there's a task that I've been

handed that I haven't immediately been excited to undertake, and without seeming

overconfident, it usually turns out." Penney (2008) described teacher efficacy as a key factor in

impacting student achievement because teacher perceptions are often reality when looking at

strategies for meeting desired outcomes. Two of the administrators used the term "natural" when

describing the cognitive and affective attributes of the excellent teachers. Parents and

administrators, alike, supported the idea that teachers use their strengths, such as humor and

animation, to make learning relatable. Chen et al. (2012) studied the correlation between a

teacher's conception of teaching excellence and self-reported practices. High consistency (83%)

was determined between the teachers' understanding of excellence and their actual teaching

practice.

Interestingly in this study, parents and teachers agreed that teaching is more than a job for

the excellent teachers. Field note records showed that four of the six teachers told stories about

how they became a teacher and that they just always knew that this was going to be what they

did with their lives. Grieve (2010) reported that teachers do in fact understand the implications

of teaching excellence and are able to identify specific characteristics of highly effective

teaching. Self-awareness and reflection were two common themes reflected in the codes for

regarding excellent teachers knowing themselves. Danielson's (2007) Domain 4 highlights the

importance of instructional reflection and using information gleaned during the reflective process to inform future planning and instructional practices. The teachers identified as excellent in this study shared varying strategies for reflecting, but each one described how their teaching would change based on the results of their reflections. All teachers discussed using daily journals or note taking strategies to reflect on the effectiveness of their instruction, and a common response related to reflection was excellent teachers change based on the individual needs of the students. Multiple teachers explained the process of reflection,

> I have to take the time to reflect on what's happening. I have to do it on a daily basis and sometimes in the middle of the day. I need to be able to reflect quickly and on the spot.

> Akbari and Allvar (2010) described how reflection and self-knowledge allows teachers to

evaluate their teaching decisions and further synthesize the reasons behind the decisions. Excellent teachers take time to reflect on their strengths and are able to transfer the results of their reflection into actual practice. Multiple teachers validated this when discussing how excellent teachers reflect and then make informed decisions to enhance instruction. A common theme was through reflection, excellent teachers do not do the same thing year after year, but they adjust accordingly based on what they have witnessed to meet the individual needs of students. One administrator described excellence as,

> I think teaching excellence means you have to an excellent learner, and you have to be open and willing to explore and try new methods in your classroom. You cannot be stuck in doing what you've always done because it always used to work. I think if you're an excellent teacher, you're willing to look at what you can do to improve.

Excellent Teachers Focus on Relationships

Meaningful interactions require relationships between individuals. The findings of this

study reflected the importance of affective attributes surrounding building relationships. During participant interviews, evidence of teachers interacting with students, with content, with their colleagues and leaders, and with parents was a common pattern. Teacher 3 described interacting with "updates or changes to curriculum, and district requirements" as being a pedagogical expert and spending a "lot of time in the forefront building all of it and then throughout the school year, it's a constant process of changing everything and adjusting while making sure every kid's meeting the standard." Artifacts such as weekly newsletters and email demonstrated interaction between teachers and parents. Hamre, Pianta, Mashburn, and Downer (2007) conducted a study of student-teacher interactions in over 4, 000 classrooms and found "teacher efforts to support social and emotional functioning in the classroom through positive facilitation of teacher-student and student-student interactions, are key elements of effective classroom practice" (p. 466). Three different models were studied and the Teaching through Interactions model showed evidence of more effectiveness than the other two models (Hamre, et al., 2013). This case study validated the important role interactions have in planning and preparation, on the classroom environment, on the instruction, and in exceeding professional responsibilities.

Domain 2 in the Framework for Teaching (Danielson, 2007) described what a distinguished classroom environment reflects:

> Classroom interactions among the teacher and individual students are highly respectful, reflecting genuine warmth and caring and sensitivity to students as individuals. Students exhibit respect for the teacher and contribute to high levels of civil interaction between all members of the class. The net result of interactions is that of connections with students as individuals. (p. 31)

Teacher 6 described balancing a firm foundation with a caring attitude and described making

connections with students of utmost importance. She stated,

> I make sure that I listen to their stories, I make sure I am setting a good example by
> showing my emotional side, showing that I am caring, showing that I care about them.
> And I think they can see that, they know they can trust me.

Danielson (2007), in Component 2c of the Framework for Teaching described what the culture of an excellent classroom looks like:

> The classroom culture is a cognitively vibrant place, characterized by a shared belief in
> the importance of learning. The teacher conveys high expectations for learning by all
> students and insists on hard work. Students assume responsibility for high quality by
> initiating improvements, making revisions, adding detail, and/or helping peers. (p. 35)

Stories of how teachers react when certain things happen in the classroom, or when teachers implement strategies to motivate and encourage students demonstrated passion; passion was a common word used to describe teacher attributes. Teacher stated,

> The most important thing for me in setting up my classroom is to make sure my kids feel
> connected to me. I find I have less behavioral issues because they want to behave for me,
> not because, oh, you're going to get in trouble, but because they want to behave for me
> because we're connected and they love me.

> The key to creating an environment where positive interactions happen is a strong
relationship between individuals. A study conducted by Gehlbach, Brinkworth, and Harris (2012) determined that shifts in teacher to student relationships occur, and one factor of this shift is how the students gauge their similarity to the teacher. The teachers identified as excellent in this study consistently described strategies and techniques for connecting with students. Many times the teachers discussed getting to know the students like and dislikes and attending events

outside of school. Parents also recognized the efforts of the teachers to engage in thoughtful, meaningful dialogue demonstrating the care and attention given to show the students they are important. Teacher 5 described the importance of dialogue in her classroom. She explained,

> I mean, I'll be in the middle of teaching and I have a kid this year that's very witty and funny and he'll say something and instead of me going you know 'no shouting at all', it'll just make me laugh. You know that I enjoy them, I like what I do."

One administrator described how a teacher demonstrates students are important by "[paying] attention to the individual needs of the students rather than the class as a whole makes her highly effective." Focusing on relationships allows teachers to recognize these shifts and intentionally work to strengthen classroom interactions. Juvonen (2006) ascertained teacher-student relationships are foundational in the success of a student both academically and emotionally. Oreshkina and Greenberg (2010) conducted multiple interviews with teachers who work with underprivileged students from three different countries, and the results showed the influence of teacher-student relationship was a common occurrence. Themes related to affective attributes were more prevalent in the findings of this study. Three of the five themes were focused on relational behaviors. Therefore, further corroborating focusing on relationships is a fundamental component of highly effective teaching.

Excellent Teachers Know Their Students

The most prominent theme, and the theme which generated the most frequent codes, between parents, teachers, and administrators was excellent teachers are authentic. Teachers used words like "caring," "real," and "honest" when describing affective attributes, and administrators followed with words like "sincere" and "genuine." Stronge (2007) identified similar affective characteristics of high quality teachers which make students feel important and

cared for. All stakeholders spoke about how the teachers made an effort to really get to know their students. "Compassionate" and "caring" were significant in frequency as each teacher, administrator, and parent explained how excellent teachers really made an effort to know each student individually.

Marzano and Marzano (2003) discussed the key to managing classrooms is getting to know the students. Students need to know that their teachers are invested in the process. Excellent teachers make their students' needs a priority. Parents discussed how teachers would come in early or stay late, modify assignment requirements, or adapt the learning environment to ensure students could learn. Varlas (2009) summarized how attributes of highly effective teachers have to align with the whole child in order to create an education "in which students are healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged" (para 1). Assor, Kaplan, and Roth (2002) studied how teacher behaviors impact student autonomy in the classroom and found teachers who know their students and allow them opportunities to express individualism increase student buy-in.

Parents and administrators highlighted how the teachers really got to know their students so they were able to make appropriate accommodations to meet individual learning styles. Every artifact reviewed displayed information that was student-centered. The common theme among all interviews and focus groups was that excellent teachers do what it takes to make students successful. They considered the whole child and all of the decisions and interactions were based on doing what's best for kids.

Excellent Teachers Consistently Exceed the Expectations of Their Job

Another theme that had recurring codes among teacher interviews, administrator interviews, and parent focus groups was how teachers exceed their required expectations. Prior

research related to this theme was limited, but the data collected from all four points supported this theme. The teachers all spoke about how they did extra work in the summer, or on the weekends. One administrator described excellent teachers as "willing to put in time and effort outside of their classroom for school improvement. All of the teachers explained how they would attend student events outside of school hours, or participate in district workshops, and the other stakeholders substantiated how the teachers went above and beyond what other teachers have done to make sure students are successful in their classrooms. Two of the three administrators used the words "passionate" to describe the excellent teachers, as well as all participants in the focus groups. Another administrator described a teacher's work outside of the classroom when she describes how she attends games, plays, or church events. Field notes substantiated claims of passion with multiple references to teachers showing strong emotion when describing teacher to student and student to student interactions. Three of the six teachers shed tears while describing their role in the teaching and learning process and when describing how important their students were to them.

Artifacts, such as multiple emails, extremely detailed newsletters, and lesson plans, provided evidence excellent teachers exceed expectations. Field notes reflected the phrases, "very thorough, drive to succeed, and one step ahead." Furthermore, in reflecting on the conceptual framework of the study, in order to reach the level of Distinguished in Danielson's (2007) Framework for Teaching, a teacher must exceed the required expectations of proficiency in planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. Additionally national frameworks, such as NBPTS (2014), InTASC (2013), and NCATE (2010), have developed performance indicators for professional practice which align with Danielson's (2007) Framework, and in order to reach the highest level of performance, one

must exceed all of the other required expectations. Excellent teachers do more than what is expected to meet proficiency and strive to be outstanding.

Teachers, parents, and other stakeholders identified that teaching was not just a job. Teachers are student-centered and they go to extended efforts to meet the needs of each individual student by tailoring assignments, providing extra help, being flexible, and getting to know their students' likes and dislikes.

Study Implications

The implications of this study stem from the guiding research question: What are the attributes and dispositions of excellent teachers from the perspectives of administrators, parents, and teachers? The results imply that excellent teachers do in fact share similar attributes and dispositions as identified in the common themes reported by teachers, administrators, and parents. In order to have high quality teachers in the nation's classrooms, it is imperative to fully understand what attributes and dispositions are displayed by excellent teachers. Prior research validated the impact highly effective teachers have on student achievement (Danielson, 2007; Grant et al., 2011; Grieve, 2010; Huntly, 2008; Thompson & Cuseo, 2012), so it only makes sense to be able to identify what knowledge and behavioral characteristics influence teaching excellence. As Hattie (2003) explained, only when there is a deep understanding of the characteristics of teaching excellence, can there be a continual reach for those expectations.

School districts across the nation seek to hire the best teachers because research shows excellent teachers have great impact on both school climate and student achievement (Grant et al., 2011; Hanushek, 2002; Wasserman, 2011). Therefore, this collective case study provided insight into specific cognitive and affective attributes and teaching dispositions displayed by teachers who have been identified as excellent. Educational administrators and leaders in teacher

education programs can provide the necessary training and support to help educators and pre-service educators grow and develop in areas that will influence teaching excellence. As noted, Ingersoll (2012) described how teachers with appropriate training and support are more likely to persist in the classroom. All of the teachers identified as excellent in this study described participation in professional development offered by the district, but also described dedication and commitment to the profession by attending workshops, seminars, and training on their own volition.

Institutions of higher education could benefit from understanding what specific cognitive and affective attributes influence teaching excellence so that program requirements could focus on growing and developing attributes and dispositions of excellent teachers. Strategies for early identification of candidates who possess such attributes would allow the program to retain high quality teacher candidates. Likewise, teacher candidates who do not possess such attributes and dispositions could be required to participate in additional coursework and/or receive career counseling to determine if teaching is an appropriate career choice. Schulte et al. (2004) described how some teachers have the dispositions necessary to be an effective teacher while others do not and need opportunities in teacher preparation programs to develop these dispositions.

School administrators could benefit from knowing what attributes and dispositions influence teaching excellence because specific questions can be asked during hiring interviews to determine whether or not these attributes are possessed by the candidate. Additionally, by understanding what attributes and dispositions are displayed by excellent educators, school administrators would be able to target these specific traits and characteristics during teacher evaluations. Professional development and improvement plans could be focused on

strengthening attributes and dispositions that inspire excellence. Also, recognition opportunities highlighting teaching excellence could encourage teacher candidates and place the spotlight on positive classroom outcomes.

Each year, as school starts, parents hope that their child will be assigned to the classroom of a highly effective, excellent teacher. Having an understanding of specific attributes and dispositions that influence excellence, parents will know what kinds of questions to ask to ensure their student is receiving the highest quality education. Parents who recognize excellence feel more secure in the education their child is receiving and less disenfranchised with the institution of education. Positive support for districts, schools, and teachers could blossom as a result and one parent in a focus described a "sense of comfort that her child was receiving the highest quality of education" because of the work of the teacher identified as excellent. Knowing what attributes and dispositions contribute to teaching excellence allows all stakeholders to emphasize the importance of having the highest quality teachers in the nation's classrooms.

Studies on excellence are equally as important for teachers. Knowing what specific attributes are seen as excellent from the perspectives of administrators and parents also provides teachers with the necessary information to increase performance. When all stakeholders possess the same vision of excellence, it may be easier for teachers to meet high expectations, positively impact student achievement, and merge together the art of teaching with the age of accountability. More studies on excellence will continue to deepen the understanding of what is needed in classrooms to make the largest impact on the teaching and learning process.

Study Limitations

The limitations of the study are far reaching for a collective case study. Several limitations were present in this study. The small sample size of teachers identified as excellent,

along with the small geographical area represented, reduces the generalizability of the results. Originally the research plan included the perspectives of the colleagues of the teachers identified as excellent, but to avoid animosity between teachers on staff, it was decided by administrators that data from these sources could not be collected. Additionally, larger focus groups for each teacher were intended, but due to a lack of parental response, parent perspectives for each teacher were not obtained. Four to five parents for each teacher were contacted by the school administrators and teachers, but only three parents responded forcing the development of two focus groups. Therefore, data collected from administrators and focus groups had to be aggregated to ensure the confidentiality of the teacher participants was maintained and to decrease angst presented by district leadership. Although data was collected from individual cases, this created a somewhat unorthodox presentation of evidence from these two stakeholder groups.

During the interviews, participant responses highlighted additional concerns that may be limitations to the study results. Two participants disagreed with the excellence designation and one participant commented on possible factors with the teacher evaluation system that may have impacted the overall teacher selections. Additionally, although the research questions were previewed by field experts, the participants seemed to find difficulty with the terminology cognitive and affective. A final study limitation is the interpretation of the data collected is subjective to the research as is a limitation with all case study research.

Subjectivity of Analysis

A limitation present in all qualitative research is the subjectivity of the data analysis process (Stake, 1995). When developing the codes, the process of identifying important key words or phrases is subjective. With my level of experience in the teaching field, great attention

was given to triangulation of the data evidence collected for all data points. However, it must be noted that potential bias could be present in analyzing the data collected regarding the attributes and dispositions of excellent teachers. Using bracketing (Merriam, 1988) as a technique to reduce the intrusion of my own personal experiences may have helped decrease potential biases.

Data Collection

The instrumentation used to collect data included interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, teacher artifacts, and my field notes. While multiple data points were used to ensure triangulation, a limitation of the study may be the amount of information collected, especially with the teacher artifacts. Although I requested artifacts at the time of the interview, teachers only provided a few samples of their work. Additional requests were made via email, but no additional examples were provided. A possible issue is I allowed the teacher to choose artifacts to submit, so providing a list of required artifacts may help increase the amount of information gleaned from all data points.

<div align="center">

Recommendations for Future Research

</div>

The data collected as a result of this research study provided valuable information regarding the attributes and dispositions demonstrated by excellent teachers. Specific themes were identified from the data collected; however, several recommendations for future research would strengthen the understanding of the phenomenon that is teaching excellence. As Huntly (2008) pointed out, more studies on excellence will lead to a deeper understanding of what characteristics and traits make an excellent teacher. First, replicating this study at a much larger level would help substantiate the data. Including a larger sample size from various districts would provide greater generalizability and further validate attributes associated with excellence. Secondly, including the perspectives of students may help to corroborate some of the findings as

students are also major stakeholders. Allowing students to identify attributes and dispositions of excellent teachers would further validate what makes a teacher excellent. Additionally, focusing on teachers who teach outside of core subject areas would provide additional insight as to whether or not the same attributes and dispositions of teaching excellence are exhibited by all teachers regardless of specialization. Furthermore, studies linking quantitative achievement results to specific cognitive and affective attributes may assist in determining what effect teacher characteristics have on certain performance indicators.

As an interpretive, inductive study (Stake, 1995), this research also yielded additional questions for future investigation. These questions include: What additional measures could be used to identify teaching excellence? What type of professional development opportunities support growing cognitive and affective traits? What specific life experiences develop one's affective attributes? How does a teacher's perception of excellence impact instructional implementation and practices? This study has identified the specific attributes and dispositions of excellent teachers, so continued research on the impact that each of these dispositions have on educating the whole child would be invaluable.

Conclusions

The goal of this study was to explore the attributes and dispositions of teachers identified as excellent from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. Identifying these attributes and dispositions is important as increased accountability measures place even higher weight on teacher quality when considering student achievement results. The findings provided themes used to assist in identifying specific attributes and dispositions. Teacher preparation programs and school districts alike can use the information gleaned from this research to make informed decisions regarding high quality teacher candidates and teachers. Knowing what attributes and

dispositions reflect excellence will help university faculty and school district hiring committees make accurate decisions when nominating teacher candidates and hiring teachers. Being able to identify signs of excellence may possibly be the difference in hiring a teacher who will have a far-reaching impact and hiring one who will leave within the first five years. Targeting teachers who demonstrate excellence will ensure a high quality teaching staff which not only impacts student achievement, but overall school climate.

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INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Liberty University

Educational Leadership, Ed.D.

Teaching Excellence: A Collective Case Study of Multiple Stakeholder Perspectives

Nicole Frederick

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a doctoral dissertation project being conducted by a researcher from Liberty University. Nicole Frederick, M.A.E.D, N.B.C.T, is conducting a qualitative, collective case study to determine the cognitive and affective attributes and teaching dispositions of teachers that influence teaching excellence.

Description of the project:

- The purpose of this collective case study is to explore the perspectives of teachers who demonstrate cognitive and affective attributes of teaching excellence.

- Additionally, exploring the perspectives of various stakeholders who interact with these teachers will provide a picture of what attributes and teaching dispositions are seen as highly effective within the phenomenon of teaching excellence.

- Demographic questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and artifact collection methods

will be employed to gather rich, thick data to explore the phenomenon of teaching

excellence within its natural setting.

- Data collection will take place over a two month period during March and April in 2014.

- Data will be collected in person using iPad recording software and artifact checklists.

- Data will be analyzed using various qualitative methods to identify overarching themes

   and trends within each case and across all cases categorically.

Benefits and Risks of this study: The benefits of this study are far-reaching as

educational policy makers, institutions of higher education, and school officials will be able

to gain an in-depth look at effective cognitive and affective attributes that influence

teaching excellence in teachers. A focus on these positive attributes can provide

opportunities for preparation programs and school districts to incorporate this knowledge

into both hiring and teacher support systems to ensure that most effective teachers are in

our nation's classrooms. There are no anticipated risks to the participants.

Confidentiality: Ethical considerations will ensure that all information collected is kept

confidential in locked filing cabinets and in password protected computer files that can

only be accessed by the research to protect the integrity of the study. All identifying

information will be replaced with pseudonyms to ensure institution and participant

confidentiality. Because I am acting as a non-participant observer, there are no ethical

considerations based on researcher influence.

Voluntary participation and withdrawal: All participants will be provided with

the Informed Consent form and the option to participate in the study is completely

voluntary. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.

Questions, Rights and Complaints: All participants have a right to the study results.

Questions or concerns about the study can be addressed to Nicole Frederick at 724-884-

7440 or via email at frederick_nicole5@yahoo.com

Consent statement: The signing of the Informed Consent form declares that the

participant is aware of the study requirements and voluntarily agrees to participate in the

study.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Signature of Legal Guardian

_____   _____

Typed/printed Name   Typed/printed Name

_____   _____

Date   Date

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

About the Researcher

Nicole Frederick, researcher, is a doctoral candidate at Liberty University seeking an Ed.D in Educational Leadership. She is a graduate course mentor with Western Governors University and adjunct faculty member at Southern New Hampshire University. As a veteran classroom teacher and National Board Certified teacher, her interests include working with teachers and teacher candidates in creating brain-based learning environments that encourage positive teacher-student interactions and student achievement success.

Purpose

The purpose of this research study is to explore what cognitive and affective attributes and professional dispositions influence teaching excellence through the perspectives of the various stakeholders who interact with these teachers on a daily basis. The nature of the study is a qualitative, collective case study meaning that multiple cases within the natural setting of K-12 schools will be explored to gather an in-depth, rich understanding of the phenomenon.

Confidentiality

Ethical considerations will ensure that all information collected is kept confidential in locked filing cabinets and in password protected computer files to protect the integrity of the study. All identifying information of each stakeholder will be replaced with pseudonyms or numbers to ensure institution and participant confidentiality. Only the researcher and the school district will have access to any data collected. Data will be aggregated within the final written report.

Response Guidelines

This interview is to explore character traits that are present in teachers that demonstrate teaching excellence as perceived by various stakeholders. There are no right or wrong answers as these questions are open-ended and subjective in nature. As the interviewee, all participants have the right to ask questions and seek clarification at any point.

Permission to Record

To ensure accuracy of participant responses, all interviews will be audio recorded using an iPad application called OneNote. Interviewees have the right to decline recording.

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions for Excellent Teachers
Please note that an attribute is defined as: a quality or feature regarded as a characteristic or inherent part of someone or something.

1. Please describe your experiences as a classroom teacher. How long have you been teaching? How many different teaching assignments (grade levels, content areas) have you held? What is your content area specialty?

2. Describe your cognitive (knowledge) attributes that lead to positive interactions between yourself and your students in the classroom? In other words, how do you monitor and direct your own learning process as a teacher (Hattie, 2003)?

   a. What practices do you regularly participate in to strengthen your knowledge of the instructional process, student learning, and content information?

   b. What do you do to measure your level of instructional effectiveness and content

knowledge?

 c. What steps do you take to make instructional decisions in your classroom to meet the learning needs of your students?

3. Please describe affective (emotional) attributes that lead to positive experiences in your classroom (Hattie, 2003; Huntly, 2008)?

 a. What practices do you encourage to develop a safe learning environment for your students?

 b. What dispositions do you demonstrate to build a positive rapport with your students?

 c. How do you relate to students so that their individual stories are understood and their individual needs are met?

 d. How do you motivate your students and encourage engagement?

4. How would you define teaching excellence?

 a. What is the difference between teaching effectiveness and teaching excellence? How would you measure this?

5. Please describe any support (from the district, colleagues, professional development workshops) you have been given that may have influenced the development of personal attributes and professional dispositions to increase your instructional and relational effectiveness?

6. What specific attributes do you believe encourage teaching excellence in your classroom?

7. Charlotte Danielson (2012) stated "self-knowledge is the beginning of wisdom" and uses this idea as a basis for her definition of reflective practice. How would you define what it means to be a reflective practitioner?

8. How would you describe your level of self-efficacy (ability to complete what is set before you) based on the attributes you have already identified?

    a. Do you have any life experiences (upbringing, faith, etc.) that you feel contribute to the attributes you possess?

9. Please tell me anything else about you that you perceive as important in influencing a level of excellence in teaching.

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions for Administrators

Please note that an attribute is defined as: a quality or feature regarded as a characteristic or inherent part of someone or something.

1. Please describe your experiences with _____ (teacher). How long have you worked with him/her?

    a. Did you hire _____?

    b. If yes, what attributes were the most appealing?

2. Please describe cognitive (knowledge) attributes that lead to positive interactions with _____ (teacher) (Hattie, 2003).

    a. How would you describe his/her level of knowledge about the field of education? Content knowledge? Instructional practices? Policy/procedures?

3. Please describe affective attributes that lead to positive experiences with _____ (teacher) (Hattie, 2003; Huntly, 2008).

    a. How would you describe his/her ability to develop rapport with other staff members, parents, students? What behaviors can you identify that would support this?

4. Please describe any support or assistance (mentoring, professional development opportunities, PLC's) that was given to _____ (teacher) that may have influenced an increase in cognitive or affective attributes.

5. Identify specific traits or characteristics that are common for _____ (teacher) to exhibit on a daily basis both inside and outside the classroom.

    a. What might I witness if I walked past his/her classroom?

    b. What do the students say about him/her as a teacher?

6. Please describe how you define teaching excellence.

7. Why would you describe _____ as an excellent teacher and not just an effective teacher?

8. Please tell me anything else about this teacher that you perceive as important in influencing a level of excellence in teaching.

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions for Parents

1. Please describe your experiences with _____ (teacher). How many children of yours has _____ taught?

2. Please describe cognitive attributes that lead to positive interactions with _____ (teacher). In other words, what characteristics does he/she display that give you confidence in his/her instructional and content knowledge?

3. Please describe affective attributes that lead to positive experiences with _____ (teacher). In other words, what characteristics to you recognize as having a positive impact on student rapport?

4. How does he/she build relationships with students that encourage positive feelings

towards school?

5. What types of practices does he/she implement to motivate, engage, and encourage?

6. Please describe how you define teaching excellence.

7. What makes him/her not just an effective teacher, but an excellent teacher?

8. Identify specific traits or characteristics that are common for _____

   (teacher) to exhibit on a daily basis both inside and outside the classroom.

9. As a parent, how does this teacher influence your feelings about the type of education

   your child is receiving? Is it different from other years? If so, what is the difference?

APPENDIX C

Field Note Log

Participant:

Date:

Classroom Environment Notes	Nonverbal Signs	Important Words or Phrases
Question 1	Question 2	Question 3
Question 4	Question 5	Question 6

Question 7	Question 8	Questions 9

APPENDIX D

Teacher 1

Cognitive Attributes	Affective Attributes	Professional Dispositions
Critical thinking	Empathy	Going above and beyond
Engagement	Authenticity	Professional development
Instructional variation	Genuine	
Constantly changing	Natural Rapport	
Use of technology	Determination	
Interactive	Upbringing	
High self-efficacy		

Teacher 2

Cognitive Attributes	Affective Attributes	Professional Dispositions
Engaging	Communicative	Professional development
Relationships	Recognize individual needs	Makes additional effort
Perceptive	Encouraging	Collaborative
Scaffolding	Sincerity	Safe learning environment
Master of scope and sequence	Treats students with respect as an individual person	
Consistent expectations	Natural rapport	
Flexible	Humor	
Above average self-efficacy	Inspire learning	
Teaching is an art form	Know your students	

	In the people business	

Teacher 3

Cognitive Attributes	Affective Attributes	Professional Disposition
Know your content	Know your students	Proactive
Know your strengths	Communication	Professional development
Align content, standards, and assessments	Self-knowledge	Lifelong learner
Frontloading	Motivator	Reflective
Model	Recognizing individual needs	Safety
Research-based practices	Be what the kids need	
Challenge		
Talk at their level		
Developmental milestones		
Clear expectations		
Assessor		
Flexible		
Active involvement		
Engaging		
High self-efficacy		
Confident		

Teacher 4

Cognitive Attributes	Affective Attributes	Professional Disposition
Concrete examples	Meet the individual needs of students	Safe learning environment
Varied instructional practices		Professional development
Know your subject matter	Know your students outside of school	Goal setters
Develop the whole child		Self-reflection
Engagement	Encourager	Willingness and ability to provide more than is asked
Uses technology	Independently driven	Organized
Very high self-confidence/efficacy	Inspires learning	
Innovative	Personal investment	

Teacher 5

Cognitive Attributes	Affective Attributes	Professional Dispositions
Makes connections	Get to know your students	Professional development
Differentiated instruction	Positive interaction	Exceed requirements and expectations
Varied instructional practices	Attention	Reflective
Constantly changing	Caring	Safety
Problem solver	Compassionate	Always willing to try something new
Curriculum developer	Authentic	
Technology as a tool	Know the character of your class	
High self-confidence/efficacy	Transparent	
	Emotional	
	Passion	

| | Communicative |
| |
| Sincerity |
| |
| Encourage independence |
| |
| Non-defensive |

Teacher 6

Cognitive Attributes	Affective Attributes	Professional Dispositions
High level background knowledge	Observant	Independent professional development
Research-based	Caring	Safety
Expectations	Listener	Exceed professional responsibilities
Make connections between standards, lessons, and assessments	Know my students	Reflective
Technology	Care about your students	Driven to succeed
Varied instructional approaches	Communicative	
High self-efficacy		
Ask the right questions		

Administrator 1

Cognitive Attributes	Affective Attributes	Professional Dispositions
Knowledge of multiple subject areas	Communicative	Team-player
	Relational	Collaborative
Able to adapt	Accommodating	One step ahead

Flexible	Natural	Willingness to share ideas and time
Engaging	Animated	Agents of change
Interactive	Passionate	
Differentiated instruction		
Planning and preparation		
Classroom manager		
Innovative		
Clear expectations		
Fluid		
Technological		

Administrator 2

Cognitive Attributes	Affective Attributes	Professional Dispositions
Interactive	Communicative	Open for feedback
High expectations from students	Meets individual student needs	Always willing to try new things
Prepared	Passionate	Gives additional time for tutoring, mentoring
Thorough	Caring	Excellent teacher equal excellent learner
Attention to detail	Relational	
Efficiency with varied instructional practices		Goes above required professional duties and responsibilities
		Reflective

Administrator 3

Cognitive Attributes	Affective Attributes	Professional Dispositions
Understands developmental and gender differences	Natural communicator	Goes above and beyond expected professional responsibilities
Grabs students' attention	Fair	
Knowledgeable	Firm	Collaborative
Varied instructional practices	Kind-hearted	Timely and efficient
Clear expectations	Adapt and change quickly to meet needs of students	Excellence goes beyond the classroom walls
Ability to synthesize information	Passionate	Driven
Flexible	Caring	Team-player
Engaging	Compassionate	
Innovative	Leader	
Users of technology		

Focus Groups

Cognitive Attributes	Affective Attributes	Professional Dispositions
Extremely knowledgeable	Communicative	Tries to do what is best for kids
Knows best practices	Shared victories	Provides opportunities for success
Took time to validate learning process	Patient	
Innovative	Understanding-demonstrates empathy	Goes above and beyond what is expected
Uses technology to enhance learning	Shares expectations in a relatable way	Makes students feel included
Thinks outside of the box	Energetic	Constant presence
Instills confidence in the teaching and learning process	Authentic	Organized

Creates thinkers Develops an individualized plan Tailors instruction Grade appropriate	Honest Builds students' self-confidence Trustworthy Respects students as individuals and human beings Inspires learning Sees a child's need and responds Encouraging Motivating Communicative Personable Relatable Strength Gets to know students Student opinions matter Considerate of students' individual stories Natural desire to be a teacher Passion Teaching is not just a job	Inviting environment Treat all students the same

Artifacts

Cognitive	Affective	Professional Dispositions

Content knowledge	Communicative	Multiple attempts
Clear expectations	Relational	Above and beyond
Organized	Supportive	Exceeding Expectations
Meaningful	Encouraging	
Relevant		

Field Notes

Cognitive	Affective	Professional Dispositions
Content expertise	Emotional	Above and beyond
Ease in talking about subject matter	Passion	Professional development
	Relationships are key	Willingly exceeds requirements
Instructional variation	Stories	
Differentiation	Sincerity	Teaching is not just a job