

EXPLORING HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS' POSITIVE LIVED EXPERIENCES WITH
SCHOOL AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITIES THAT MAKE GOOD TEACHERS:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Carissa AnnMarie Flook

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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Abstract

There is no shortage of evidence that portrays high-school students' overwhelmingly negative perceptions about schools and teachers today. Negative student perceptions profoundly impact students, educational systems, communities, and society. To address and reverse the detrimental cycle, research must explore the positive elements of student experience so that practices can capitalize on the positive and change the trajectory of education in America. My study explored high-school students' perceptions of qualities that make good teachers. This hermeneutic phenomenological study utilized positive psychology as its conceptual framework, allowing the five elements of the PERMA model to guide student perception data analysis. Participants included 12 high-school seniors from Lincoln Jr/Sr High School. Data were collected through individual interviews, focus group interviews, and student questionnaires. Then, the qualitative data were analyzed and synthesized using structural coding, pattern coding, and thematic analysis. The findings of this study emphasized relationships as foundational to learning environments, demonstrated the power of student feedback opportunities, and gave meaning to the universal phenomenon of a "good teacher." Furthermore, the implications of this study include an educational use for the PERMA model and a new approach to focus groups called the ASE Focus Group Method. Utilizing these findings will be instrumental in redesigning school improvement efforts and research techniques in a way that directly aligns with students' positive lived experiences.

Keywords: hermeneutic phenomenology, negative perceptions, positive psychology, student perceptions, teacher-student relationships, student voice, school improvement, PERMA model, focus groups

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband and my sister, who were not well-served by the educational system. I will never forget the stress and discouragement you endured throughout your school years solely because the rigidity of traditional, teacher-driven education did not celebrate your strengths and abilities. To two of the smartest people I know, who never deserved to struggle, it was never you that needed changing. For years to come, I will passionately explore students' lived experiences in honor of you and all students who feel negatively towards school, until educational decision-makers make it common practice to listen to students and change their practices so that every child can flourish in school, feeling happy, smart, purposeful, confident, and connected. What a world that will be!

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I would also like to acknowledge my students, past and present, and especially those who volunteered as participants in my study. You are each so uniquely passionate, talented, and beautiful, and you are my daily inspiration. The fire each of you has in your soul gives me hope, and I pray the results of my study help educators learn how to fuel and feed your fire rather than put it out.

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List of Abbreviations

Check In / Check Out (CICO)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The mass media allows humans no room to ignore public schools' problems and controversies. Heinous student behaviors constantly flood the news, including school shootings or video footage of TikTok challenges carried out by students, such as destroying school property or physically assaulting their teachers. Therefore, it is no secret that today, students' perceptions of school and teachers are overwhelmingly negative. Although countless initiatives exist that aim to improve schools for students, students are rarely invited to contribute feedback or participate in school improvement endeavors. The following sections in this chapter provide background on the evolution of the problem, state this study's problem, purpose, and significance, list the research questions, and explain important definitions. Overall, chapter one introduces and frames the study.

Background

The background section describes how the problem has evolved (historical context), how contemporary society is affected by the problem (social context), and how theoretical concepts have helped researchers understand the problem (theoretical context). These three background sections will prove that the problem exists, matters, and is worthy of being researched further.

Historical Context

Problems in education do not surface overnight. Instead, educational issues expand, evolve, and impact schools over time. The historical background relevant to this study is two-fold. First, the history of public education's interest in and consideration of students' perceptions is explored. Second, the history of students' perceptions towards school and teachers becoming increasingly negative is discussed.

Student Perceptions in Education

School systems have not historically been interested in students' perceptions. Delpit (1988) studied cultures of power. She analyzed historic power imbalances in educational institutions, including the power of teachers over students. The researcher reported that teachers had systemically denied students the opportunity to be sources of knowledge for what they need to succeed. School rules, policies, and procedures often reflect the control and interests of teachers (Drew, 2020). Historically, students had to adapt to the culture of those in power to succeed (Delpit, 1988). Such a power imbalance and teacher-driven school culture led to authoritarian teaching styles, direct instruction teaching techniques, and silenced students.

Growing publicity and urgency in the last twenty years is a movement to consider student voice and position students at the center of educational reform (Conner, 2022; Cook-Sather, 2006). Lundy and Cook-Sather (2016) stated that student voice is the missing link to school transformation. Providing students with opportunities to provide feedback helps shape their own education and teacher professional development and practice (Mayes et al., 2021). This shift in mindset and educational practice has resulted in the emerging terms, student voice and student-centeredness. Student voice encompasses the importance of listening to students' opinions, feelings, concerns, and ideas, as well as responding to such feedback by allowing student choice, interest, and passion to drive their education (Cook-Sather, 2020). Student-centered education includes learning that is driven by the interests and needs of students (Torrison-Steele, 2020). This is a shift from the historical teacher-centered education, in which the interests and authority of teachers drive learning. Since the increase in student-centered education, several student-centered learning approaches have been developed, such as active learning, flipped classrooms, and inquiry-based learning (Torrison-Steele, 2020). Each of these student-centered approaches has

in common that students are the drivers of their learning, and teachers are facilitators of learning, also known as the guide on the side (Weston, 2015).

Despite increasing awareness and appreciation of student-centeredness, schools are still far from reaching the goal of keeping students at the center of their education (Black & Mayes, 2020; Jones & Bubb, 2021). Although student-centered approaches are more common and increasing in popularity, their implementation is often piecemeal (Torrissi-Steele, 2020). In other words, teachers might incorporate one student-driven activity into a unit, or student feedback might be collected through a survey at the end of a school year. Such approaches are isolated and separate. Another challenge of student-centeredness is the ambivalence of teachers to engage in the complexities of student voice (Black & Mayes, 2020). Therefore, historical teacher-driven approaches are still heavily evident in educational curricula, teaching practices, and school reform efforts (Torrissi-Steele, 2020). The goal is for students' perceptions to be a fully-integrated aspect of school improvement so that student voice directly impacts students' day-to-day educational experiences (Jones & Bubb, 2021). Therefore, research that explores student perceptions and lived experiences helps move the field of education closer to this goal by highlighting the voices of those who have been historically disregarded.

Student Perceptions as Overwhelmingly Negative

Historical background that highlights the development of the second aspect of this study focuses on the history of students' perceptions towards school and teachers becoming increasingly negative. Townsend (2014) reported on trends in student perception data collected in public schools yearly. A clear trend has surfaced that the percentage of students agreeing to positive statements about their schools and teachers has decreased each year. For example, 10th-grade students were asked if what they learn in school will help them beyond high school. In

2012, 83% of students agreed; in 2013, 73% of students agreed; in 2014, 68% of students agreed, showing a 15% decrease over three years (Townsend, 2014). Many other statistics from this survey indicate increases in negative feelings from students toward school and teachers. In 2014, only 18% of 10th-graders thought school rules were fair, 50% thought their teachers were encouraging, 40% thought their teachers helped them to be successful, 59% thought their teachers believed they were good students, and 7% thought the work they do in class is interesting (Townsend, 2014). Students' perceptions of their schools and teachers have been becoming overwhelmingly negative.

A more recent historical factor contributing to increasingly negative student perceptions is the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the last five years, Chu and Lake (2021) analyzed COVID-19's impact on students' perceptions of schools, teachers, and education. The researchers found that negative student perceptions have further increased since the pandemic. Fewer students report learning something at school each day, fewer students report giving effort in school, and fewer students report having at least one adult at school who is willing to help them. Haderlein et al. (2021) stated that the pandemic sparked unimaginable consequences for schools and teachers by igniting public and politicized debates about public education. Public education's well-publicized, controversial aspects have increased and intensified students' and parents' negative emotions, reactions, and perceptions. Therefore, research focused on the positive aspects of schools and teachers is necessary to highlight what works and inform proactive school improvement. Educational reform efforts can capitalize on such invaluable insights to positively impact the social context of the problem.

Social Context

The problem's social context includes how students' negative perceptions of school and teachers impact school systems, communities, and society. Students' negative perceptions of schools and teachers initiate a detrimental social cycle. The cycle begins with negative student perceptions of school, which lead to poor student mental health, such as depression, anxiety, feelings of isolation and loneliness, suicide ideation, and substance abuse (Soria et al., 2021; Weight & Bond, 2022). Poor mental health leads to negative student behaviors, such as disruption, defiance, truancy, and physical aggression (Houchins et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2022). Negative student behaviors lead to teacher burnout, causing teacher shortages and producing poor-quality schools (Wiggan et al., 2021; Wink et al., 2021). Poor-quality schools yield more negative student perceptions of school, repeating the detrimental cycle. Such issues create a harmful barrier between students, schools, and communities because students and families lose trust in the system's efficacy (Regional, 2019). To interrupt the cycle, educational leaders must address where it all begins: students' negative perceptions of schools and teachers. Therefore, this is the problem of focus for the present study, grounded in the theoretical context surrounding the issue.

Theoretical Context

Before the development and awareness of modern educational theories such as constructivism and positive psychology, other theories have fallen short of explaining why student perceptions and student lived experiences matter. For decades, behaviorism dominated the educational field, conceptualizing students as blank slates, teachers as authoritarian lecturers, and schools as factories (AlDahdouh et al., 2015). Educational practices grounded in behaviorist theories have yielded low levels of college-readiness and poor international academic ratings for America's schools, in part because behaviorism prioritizes adult convenience over the needs of

children (Jeong, 2020). The influence of behaviorism has resulted in ineffective reform efforts that disregard what is now known about children and learning. Behaviorist learning theories ignore the importance of students' thoughts and feelings and the active role they must play in education. Despite the recent popularity of more modern educational theories, behaviorism is still engrossed in current educational practices. In order for real, systemic change to be possible, newer theories that incorporate modern research findings and comprehensive perspectives must be authentically implemented in practice, not merely discussed. Therefore, educational research is needed that utilizes modern theories and understanding, highlights student perceptions, and explores opportunities to inspire real change in schools.

Problem Statement

The problem is that students' perceptions of their schools and teachers are overwhelmingly negative (Belli, 2020; Chu & Lake, 2021; de Saxe & Favela, 2018; Demaray et al., 2022; Égalité & Kisida, 2018; Haderlein et al., 2021; Karpinski, 2012; Laurito et al., 2019; Patel & Hamlin, 2017; Soria et al., 2021; Townsend; 2014; Tuominen et al., 2020). For instance, in a study that collected student perception data from nearly 22,000 high-school students in the United States, researchers found that over 75% of students reported negative feelings toward school (Belli, 2020). Negative student perceptions are vital to study and address because they can lead to mental health issues, problematic behaviors, teacher burnout, teacher shortages, and poor-quality schools. The consequences are already visible; for example, there have been steady increases in youth depression, anxiety, and suicide (Demaray et al., 2022). Furthermore, students' negative feelings and perceptions are harmful to more than their school and academic lives. Over 15% of American children have reported a major depressive episode in the past year,

over 2.5 million youth have severe depression, and rates of adolescent substance abuse have continued to increase yearly (Mental, 2022).

There is much work to be done to bring positivity and happiness into education so that students can feel purposeful, motivated, and capable of overcoming the complex challenges they face, simultaneously improving teaching conditions and the quality of public education (Gordesli & Sunbul, 2021). Therefore, this phenomenological study highlighted students' positive experiences with school and teachers. Van Manen (1997/2016) stated that phenomenological research aims to humanize human institutions so humans can be more thoughtful and better prepared to navigate situations. Therefore, this study added to the human understanding of students' lived experiences because such action-sensitive knowledge will lead to intentional reform.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand students' perceptions of qualities that make good teachers at Lincoln Jr/Sr High School (a pseudonym). At this stage of the research, the phenomenon of a good teacher was generally defined as teachers whom students report had the most positive impact on them. The results pinpointed what students are looking for in teachers and, therefore, are instrumental in helping with school improvement initiatives, especially initiatives that prioritize the holistic development of students, student-teacher relationships, and promoting student voice.

The conceptual framework that guided this purpose was Seligman's theory of positive psychology. In his theory, Seligman et al. (2005) proposed that humans are capable of happiness, positive well-being, and positive emotions, and that positivity can transform institutions. Seligman (2018) added the PERMA model to his theory of positive psychology, which names

five elements of happiness and well-being: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. These elements were utilized to analyze students' perceptions of qualities they believe make good teachers.

Significance of the Study

Significance refers to importance. If a study is significant, it is worthy of conducting because it will likely have a powerful impact on people or systems. This study of high school students' perceptions of the qualities that make good teachers is significant because it yielded implications for improvement and growth in education. More specifically, this study is theoretically, empirically, and practically significant.

From a theoretical perspective, this study is significant because it will add to the understanding and cognizance of the theory of positive psychology, a new and emerging framework (Seligman et al., 2005). The specific use of Seligman's PERMA model to analyze and organize student perception data introduced a new practical use of the five elements of happiness and well-being (Seligman, 2018). Furthermore, the resulting student perception data on qualities that make good teachers provided specific recommendations for making schools more positive spaces for students and improving the quality of teacher-student relationships.

From an empirical perspective, this study is significant because it built on and extended the work of similar studies. Much of the existing literature on teacher qualities offers quantitative answers from adults' perspectives, such as college students or school administrators (Carlos-Guzmán, 2021; de Saxe & Favela, 2018; Reagan et al., 2019; White, 2009). Furthermore, the literature has mainly focused on the negative qualities of teachers with the purpose of punitive evaluation (Bullough, 2020; de Saxe & Favela, 2018; Karpinski, 2012). In contrast, this study maintained a positive approach by exploring students' lived experiences of good teachers. While

discussing phenomenological research, van Manen (1997/2016) explained the phenomenological nod, an agreeable reaction of humans when they understand and can relate to the phenomenon being discussed. Likewise, everyone can nod when they hear about the phenomenon of a good teacher. Humans can remember a teacher they recall as good, inspiring, or life-changing (Breault, 2013); however, this phenomenological study explored what the good teacher phenomenon means to students. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, the student perception data is rich and indicative of proactive school improvement.

From a practical perspective, this study is significant because it gives students a voice. More specifically, this study gives high-school students a voice in the qualities they appreciate and want most in teachers. By yielding insightful and practical implications, this study showcased to educational leaders the power of student perception data (Bartholomew & Reeve, 2018; Cukurbasi & Kiyici, 2018; Egalite & Kisida, 2018; Ryan & Mosher, 2021). Eventually, with enough research highlighting how students' feedback helps improve schools, communities, and society, an educational shift will begin that utilizes student feedback regularly and with fidelity. For example, student feedback might become integral to teacher evaluation, school improvement initiatives, or curriculum decisions. When the value of student perceptions is fully realized, students will work alongside teachers and educational leaders to constantly improve and adapt their school systems. The possibilities of educational reform in which student perceptions are capitalized on inspired the creation of this study.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided and organized this study. The research questions align directly with the previously discussed problem statement, purpose statement, and theoretical framework. First, a central research question named the overarching question and

phenomenon being explored. Then, the sub-questions considered the specific elements of the theoretical framework that helped shape the understanding of students' lived experiences with the phenomenon. Because Seligman's PERMA model named five elements of positive well-being, each element was explored in one of five sub-research questions.

Central Research Question

What are high-school students' lived experiences of good teachers?

Sub-Question One

How do students' perceptions of good teachers inform positive emotion?

Sub-Question Two

How do students' perceptions of good teachers inform engagement?

Sub-Question Three

How do students' perceptions of good teachers inform relationships?

Sub-Question Four

How do students' perceptions of good teachers inform meaning?

Sub-Question Five

How do students' perceptions of good teachers inform accomplishment?

Definitions

Terms that are pertinent to this study are defined below. All definitions are drawn from relevant literature to clarify their meanings concerning this study's context.

1. *Good teacher*- an educator that is inspiring or life-changing (Breault, 2013)
2. *Teacher quality* - often narrowly defined by performance terms, but in this study refers to specific, personal, and positive traits that describe a teacher from students' perspectives (Smith & Holloway, 2020)

3. *Positivity*- not naïve to reality, but optimistic and hopeful; a lens through which to view life, humans, or any particular situation (Seligman, 2018)
4. *Student voice*- inviting and utilizing student feedback opportunities for decision-making; an educational strategy that engages and empowers young people to advocate for change (Nelson, 2022)
5. *Happiness*- an authentic, multidimensional state of well-being comprised of five sub-dimensions: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman et al., 2005)
6. *Positive emotion* – feelings of pleasure, enthusiasm, and comfort (Sahin et al., 2019)
7. *Engagement* – feelings of intense self-immersion in or to a purpose, job, organization, or activity (Sahin et al., 2019)
8. *Relationships*- quality of healthy social relations; level of immersion in society (Sahin et al., 2019)
9. *Meaning*- an individual’s understanding of the meaning of life and their own purpose in life (Sahin et al., 2019)
10. *Accomplishment*- feelings of competence (Sahin et al., 2019)

Summary

After hearing of another school shooting or student act of violence on the nightly news, people wonder why and how children can commit such cruelties within, what should be, the safest of environments. The contents of this chapter highlighted the brokenness of education, in which students feel so negatively towards school that such acts of violence are made possible. This chapter’s background sections detailed the increased awareness of student-centeredness yet the current failure to allow students to be instruments of change in education. Consequently, this

student-driven study framed this nationwide problem in a proactive approach by exploring high-school students' perceptions of qualities that make good teachers. This study demonstrated the power of student voice and highlight students' lived experiences of what it means to experience a good teacher. Only when students' positive lived experiences are accentuated will schools have the data needed to improve schools, communities, and society and end the educational era in which school violence is a frequent feature of the nation's daily news.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of the literature was conducted to explore high-school students' perceptions of the qualities that make good teachers. This chapter offers a review of the research on this topic. Seligman's (2018) theory of positive psychology and his PERMA model of happiness and well-being are discussed in the first section, providing a conceptual framework for the study. In addition, the five elements of the PERMA model organizes and guides the collection and analysis of student perception interview data. The following sections review the recent literature on teacher qualities, student perceptions, the impact of student-teacher relationships, the developmental age of high-school students, and the good teacher phenomenon. Finally, a gap in the literature is identified that there needs to be more research on high-school students' positive lived experiences and their perceptions of specific qualities they believe make good teachers. This study addresses a critical gap in the literature and illuminates the universality of a critical human experience.

Conceptual Framework

According to Claxton and Dolan (2022), a conceptual framework provides research studies with structure and rationale. Conceptual frameworks support why a study matters and how researchers predict their study will contribute to the field. Because established theories provide a perspective on terminology and methodology, research may appear random, unorganized, or meaningless without a consistent conceptual framework (Ashour, 2020). The following conceptual framework sections identify and explain the theory that supports, guides, and organizes this phenomenological study of high-school students' positive lived experiences

with good teachers. The overarching conceptual framework is based on the principles of Martin Seligman's theory of positive psychology and his PERMA model of well-being.

Seligman's Positive Psychology

The conceptual framework for this study is the theory of positive psychology, one of the newest fields of psychology to emerge (James & Walters, 2020). Pioneered by Seligman et al. (2005), positive psychology is a conceptual lens through which to view the positive aspects of the human experience. Historically, scientists, researchers, and psychologists have disproportionately focused on negative human experiences, like corruption, illness, and suffering (O'Connor & Kirtley, 2018; Patel & Hamlin, 2017; Vdovychenko, 2019). Conversely, positive psychology requires a shift in thinking, focusing on positive emotions, positive character, and positive institutions (Seligman et al., 2005). When such positivity exists within schools, a culture of proactiveness, resiliency, innovation, and growth mindset is created (Kapasi & Pei, 2022). This conceptual framework aids in understanding the importance of student perceptions and positive student-teacher relationships that create conditions that allow people and institutions to flourish. Furthermore, the framework provides consistency that grounds the entire research process.

Henry and Thorsen (2018) provided one example of a previous study that utilized positive psychology as its conceptual framework. In this qualitative study, researchers used an ethnography approach to explore the relationship between student-teacher relationships and student motivation (Henry & Thorsen, 2018). Drawing on one of the principles of positive psychology, that positive relationships motivate people, Henry and Thorsen (2018) explored how interactions encourage behavior (Seligman, 2018). From interviews and observations, one common theme suggested that strategic self-disclosure from teachers motivated student behavior.

Likewise, Kromka and Goodboy (2021) reported that teacher self-disclosure also increases student engagement and learning retention. In these studies, one can see how positive psychology provided direction and consistency throughout the research process. Positive psychology was utilized to form a research question that focused on human strengths, to analyze the data for specific conditions that allowed students to grow, and to report findings that conceptualized positive aspects of the human experience. Similarly, the following study about high-school students' perceptions of the qualities that make good teachers will utilize the positive psychology perspective to explore students' lived experiences in hopes that the research will highlight additional ways to bring positivity and growth to students' lives and educational institutions.

Seligman's PERMA Model

Since the original introduction and explanation of positive psychology, Seligman (2018) added the PERMA model to his theory. The PERMA model identified five specific constructs that improve well-being. The elements are positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments (Seligman, 2018). Seligman proposed that when these five elements exist in one's life, one will likely experience happiness, purposefulness, and healthy well-being (Hurst, 2021). In other words, these five elements are the recipe for a positive life. James and Thorsen (2020) called positive psychology a scientific exploration of human strengths, virtues, and reasons that make life worth living. Overall, Seligman's (2018) theory of positive psychology suggests that happiness and a positive life result from choices and are composed of measurable, scientific elements. Humans can intentionally create and maintain well-being. For this research study, Seligman's PERMA model provides an evidence-based structure for organizing, conceptualizing, and synthesizing student-perception interview data

about their positive lived experiences in school and the positive qualities they believe make good teachers.

Connection Between Theory and Topic

Positive psychology is a suitable conceptual framework for this study of students' perceptions of good teachers because it supports the assumption that quality student-teacher relationships matter. Unlike many traditional educational theories that focus on content and compliance, positive psychology emphasizes students' holistic experiences and development (Pérez-Ibáñez, 2018). Holistic considerations include exploring students' social, emotional, and relational experiences at school. Therefore, the main principles of positive psychology and the five elements of the PERMA model will guide the literature review, inform the data collection procedures, and organize themes from student interviews during data analysis. Ultimately, Seligman's (2018) theory of positive psychology provides a research-based conceptual lens through which to view this study. This phenomenological study will add to the growing body of research that focuses on the positive aspects of the human experience, the power of student-teacher relationships, the impact of student voice, the phenomenon of good teachers, and specific avenues for improving educational institutions.

Related Literature

Each aspect of this phenomenological study was intentionally chosen based on theory and past research. The significant decisions, informed by existing literature, resulted in a research study to explore high-school students' perceptions of the qualities that make good teachers. Note that teacher qualities and student perceptions are the two main concepts selected for exploration. First, research surrounding these topics is discussed. Then, teacher-student relationships are introduced and analyzed as the third relevant theme because the purpose of fostering quality

teachers and considering students' perceptions is to build strong relationships between teachers and students. Next, existing literature about the target population, high-school-age students, is explored. Last, because this study is phenomenological and therefore interested in students' lived experiences of a phenomenon, existing research on the phenomenon of a good teacher is examined. The analysis and synthesis of research related to these five overarching topics will demonstrate gaps in the literature and how this study will help address the need for additional research. Positive psychology is intertwined throughout the discussion, focusing on human strengths and education's limitless power and potential. A concluding summary offers a final synthesis.

Teacher Qualities

Teacher quality and specific teacher qualities are vital research topics because of their profound influence on student learning (Hollar, 2020). Corwin (2018) summarized John Hattie's contributions to educational research, including which factors influence student learning most. As a result, Hattie created a visual depiction of the 250 most influential factors on student achievement and ordered them based on their effect size. Among the highest-ranked contributing factors to student learning are collective teacher efficacy, teacher feedback, classroom discussions, and classroom management (Corwin, 2018). In these four examples, one can see the clear connection between teacher quality and student achievement. For this reason, the following study further emphasizes pinpointing specific qualities that make good teachers because such information is needed to inform educational improvement efforts. Throughout a review of existing literature on teacher qualities, four overarching subthemes surfaced. Much of the current literature focused on teacher qualities that are negative, quantitative, and judged by either administrators or higher-education adults. An analysis of these subthemes demonstrates the need

for a qualitative study that evaluates high-school students' perceptions of the qualities that make good teachers.

Negative Focus

One subtheme that surfaced from the existing literature on teacher qualities is a focus on negative attributes. Current literature and media portray a narrative that schools are failing and public education is broken (Bullough, 2020; de Saxe & Favela, 2018). Often, teachers are de-professionalized, blamed, criticized, and attacked for the current problems and issues surrounding education and youth (Karpinski, 2012). Bullough (2020) added that efforts to reform education further promote the negative view of teachers because such reform efforts downgrade the role of teacher intellect. For example, historical legislation, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), decrease teacher autonomy and increase teacher accountability (de Saxe & Favela, 2018). Consequently, emphasis is placed upon remediation, test preparation, and intensive accountability measures for teachers, all of which take away from teacher qualities that Corwin (2018) explained are the most influential for student achievement. Thus, there is a need for more research that considers the positive impact of teachers and focuses on qualities that make good teachers. The results of such studies can provide proactive solutions for school improvement and educational reform.

A plethora of old and new research on a variety of topics display that focusing on the negative attributes of schools and teachers is commonplace and has been for decades (Harel-Fisch et al., 2011; Harvey, 2019; Herring, 2013; Jun, 2019; Merianos et al., 2016; Metelski, 2022; Wilkerson & Afacan, 2022; Yang, 2018; Zacharia & Yablon, 2022). Harel-Fisch et al. (2011), Yang (2018), and Zacharia and Yablon (2022) studied school bullying, reporting on the shockingly high prevalence of bullying in schools and the detrimental impacts bullying has on

children. Herring (2013), Metelski (2022), and Wilkerson and Afacan (2022) studied negative school climate, highlighting systemic inequities in educational systems such as disproportionate dropout, suspension, and failure rates of marginalized populations. For instance, unequal numbers of African American males are suspended from school each year, and twice-exceptional students experience academic failure far more than neurotypical peers (Metelski, 2022; Wilkerson & Afacan, 2022). Last, Jun (2019) and Merianos et al. (2016) studied the prevalence and detrimental effects of mental health issues experienced by school-aged children, including depression, anxiety, behavior disorders, and substance abuse addictions. When existing literature focuses on such negative attributes of schools and teachers, people can easily perceive education as broken, schools as failing, and teachers as ineffective. Clearly, research exploring students' positive lived experiences with schools and teachers is needed to establish balance and rebuild society's overall positive perceptions of education and educators.

Quantitative Focus

While much research has focused on negative teacher qualities and issues within education, some researchers have explored qualities that make good teachers, but the results are quantitative. For example, White (2009) invited student participants to share their perceptions of qualities that made good teachers; however, the response options were pre-determined, quantitative, and external. Participants were introduced to a list of 21 teacher qualities and asked to rank the qualities from the most critical teacher quality to the least. Options included the teacher's ability to explain, the teacher's use of feedback, and the teacher's content knowledge (White, 2009). Overall, the quantitative data collection allowed students to express a limited number of external qualities of their teachers; however, Bullough (2020) explained that such simple, surface-level information could not begin to demonstrate the complexities of the role and

the influence of a teacher. Again, there is a clear need for qualitative, open-ended approaches to the exploration of the good teacher phenomenon from the student perspective. Van Manen (1997/2016) described the ability of qualitative research to capture the essence of people's lived experiences and make the meanings of lived phenomena understandable.

Along with the infamous work of van Manen, a large body of additional research supports the use of qualitative methods when exploring human experiences (Chrastina, 2018; Clare, 2022; Hong & Francis, 2020; Pugach et al., 2014; Waite, 2011). Compared to quantitative data, qualitative data yields thick descriptions of lived experiences that lead to deeper understandings (Hong & Francis, 2020). Unlike the limited nature of quantitative answers, participants in qualitative studies respond to why and how questions, leading to new insights that support improvement and innovation (Chrastina, 2018; Clare, 2022). For example, Korumaz and Eksioglu (2022) explored why technical education students dropped out, pinpointing specific reasons that vocational students fail to complete their education. Likewise, Anderson and Connors (2020) explored how adult daughters of abused mothers persevere and complete postsecondary education, highlighting specific protective and resiliency factors. Such examples demonstrate how qualitative research yields valuable and applicable insights into questions that quantitative data cannot achieve. Similarly, this qualitative study of students' lived experiences with good teachers will yield rich insights and examples that add depth to the preexisting quantitative findings.

Administrative Focus

Another subtheme that surfaced from the existing literature on teacher qualities is a focus on adult perspectives. The study from White (2009) is one of few exceptions that utilized high-school students as participants to gain their unique perspectives. Most teacher evaluations and

constructive criticism come from other adults (de Saxe & Favela, 2018; Kim et al., 2019; Reagan et al., 2019). Reagan et al. (2019) discussed how teacher quality is typically assessed by administrators using a variety of evaluation measures, most of which miss the crucial aspects of good teachers. For example, many teacher evaluations assess educators based on one pre-planned lesson observation. Kim et al. (2019) argued that meaningful evaluation measures must assess the social quality of teaching in an authentic, contextualized manner. This is why, perhaps, some of the most meaningful assessment information about teacher quality comes from students. As members of a teacher's classroom each day, student insight is invaluable to teacher growth and school improvement (Walker et al., 2020). All in all, there is a further need for consideration of student perspectives.

Two other ways that educational administrators evaluate the quality of teachers are through test scores and rubric-based instruments (Snyder & Pufpaff, 2021). In other words, teachers are labeled as good, proficient, or distinguished when their students score highly on standardized assessments or when teachers themselves score highly on evaluation rubrics (O'Donnell & Sireci, 2022). Nevertheless, these attempts to measure teacher quality or the qualities of good teachers yield little meaningful information (Dee et al., 2021). When teachers are evaluated through test scores, the evaluation fails to fulfill the intention of improving teacher quality because test scores do not provide specific, proactive information that helps teacher improve their practice (Lillejord & Børte, 2020). Likewise, when teachers are evaluated through universal criteria of rubrics, data has minimal usefulness because every teacher, student, school, district, and community is different (Snyder & Pufpaff, 2021). A universal rubric cannot account for the uniqueness and humanness of education, teaching, and learning. Although administrative evaluation practices for teachers have been the norm, their lack of efficacy has been realized

within the last decade (Dee et al., 2021). The most relevant, specific, and informative data will come from students because they are the consumers of teaching, and they experience their teachers every day. Accordingly, this phenomenological study considers students' perceptions of the qualities that make good teachers.

Higher-Education Focus

In addition to the literature on teacher qualities that focuses on the perspectives of administrators, the other most prevalent pattern is for researchers to consider the views of adult learners, such as college and university students (Carlos-Guzmán, 2021; de Saxe & Favela, 2018; Reagan et al., 2019). For example, Carlos-Guzmán (2021) studied qualities that make good teachers informed by the perspectives of higher-education students. Results included that good teachers have strengths in content-area mastery, didactic abilities, relationships with students, and commitment to their teaching role. A limitation of this study, and others that utilize higher-education students as participants, is that the valuable results and implications cannot necessarily be generalized to students of younger ages. In addition to their differences in age and development, data from high school and higher education students are also not comparable because of differences in ability level. While public high schools educate all children, higher education typically encompasses only the most persistent and academic individuals from the overall student population (Giersch et al., 2021). Furthermore, Hanel and Vione (2016) explained that higher education populations also yield significant differences in socioeconomic status compared to other groups. Although there is great value in the studies conducted with higher-education participants, the results cannot be generalized to all populations. Research focused on more general student populations is needed.

Peterson's (2001) work added to the argument that more studies are needed that utilize non-college students as participants. In his research, data collected from college students and non-college students were significantly different and incomparable, indicating that higher-education students can only represent other higher-education students, not the general population. Hanel and Vione (2016) suggested several reasons that higher-education students are chosen as research participants at such high frequency. College students can be conveniently accessed and recruited at a low administration cost. For example, researchers can avoid the costs of advertisements, mailings, and expensive incentives. Furthermore, most higher-education students are over the age of eighteen, making consent and approval processes simpler (UCLA, 2020). Nevertheless, a simpler, cheaper, and more convenient process does not equate to a better process. This phenomenological research that explores the perceptions of public high school students, in particular, will further address these gaps in the existing literature, giving voice to a population whose voices are not commonly pursued in educational research.

Student Perceptions

The second central theme of this research study is student perception. Countless research studies have explored student perceptions on various topics, demonstrating the power of listening to student voices (Bartholomew & Reeve, 2018; Conner et al., 2022; Cukurbasi & Kiyici, 2018; Egalite & Kisida, 2018; Kahne et al., 2022; Ryan & Mosher, 2021). The following sections summarize and synthesize existing literature on student perceptions to show that collecting student perception data is a beneficial, research-based technique that provides accurate, authentic, and applicable data. The first section discusses the literature surrounding why student perceptions matter, followed by several examples of student perception research studies that

impacted the field of education. These explanations and examples provide a rationale for creating this qualitative study on high school students' perceptions of qualities that make good teachers.

Power of Student Perception Data

Student perceptions have recently become a common focus for data collection in educational research (Bartholomew & Reeve, 2018; Cukurbasi & Kiyici, 2018; Egalite & Kisida, 2018; Ryan & Mosher, 2021). Many researchers and theorists have explored why student perceptions matter and why they should be collected and considered. Traditionally, educational research focused primarily on perception data from educators because traditional schools of thought felt teachers and adults to be masters of content who delivered direct instruction to students, who passively received and learned the given information (Bartholomew & Reeve, 2018). However, recall that newer educational theories, such as positive psychology, require a shift in thinking (Seligman et al., 2005). According to Seligman's (2018) positive psychology, education aims to create positive institutions through positive interactions with positive people. Through the development of positive psychology research, educational leaders have realized that students must have positive thoughts and feelings to maximize their learning and potential (Hurst, 2021). When students' perceptions of themselves, their teachers, and their school are positive, they are more motivated, engaged, and successful (de Loof et al., 2021). For these reasons, student perceptions must continue to be studied and considered to guide and inform educational reform.

Similar to positive psychology, the work of John Hattie also explains the imperativeness of utilizing students' perceptions. The Visible Learning Limited Partnership and Cognition Education Group (2017) provided a comprehensive list of the 250 most significant influences on student achievement, informed by a meta-analysis of nearly 100,000 studies. This data from

Visible Learning supports the importance of student perceptions because several of the most significant influences on student achievement include how students view themselves, their teachers, and their school. For example, students' ratings of the quality of their teachers have the potential to accelerate student achievement (Visible, 2017). Furthermore, a category including concentration, engagement, and persistence was also highlighted as having a significant influence on student achievement (Visible, 2017). Seligman et al. (2005) explained that such focus and determination result from students' positive perceptions of their teachers and school. Overall, it is clear that collecting student perception data is worthwhile because the data is applicable to best practices that lead to student achievement. Penuel et al. (2016) summarized that student perception data is the key to improving schools.

In addition to improving student achievement, more current research demonstrates another reason that exploring student perceptions is powerful and necessary. The world of education has recently undergone a transformative shift away from test accountability and toward holistic approaches, such as social-emotional learning (Allbright & Marsh, 2022; Kasikci & Ozhan, 2021; Khazanchi et al., 2021; Rosenberg et al., 2021; Thomas et al., 2022; Willis, 2021). Social-emotional learning includes prioritizing skills such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Rosenberg et al., 2021). This new educational priority indicates a shift in key beliefs about what is important in education (Allbright & Marsh, 2022). Thomas et al. (2022) explained the increased demand for establishing systemic efforts to support students' social and emotional development in schools. The ultimate goal is to shape future adults who are competent, empathetic citizens with long-term happiness and positive well-being (Rosenberg et al., 2021). Thomas et al. (2022) specified that efforts to promote social and emotional learning rely on educators' ability to allow

student data to guide decision-making. With this new shift toward social-emotional learning in schools, the collection of student perception data becomes all the more vital. In addition to explaining why collecting student perception data is crucial, research has also demonstrated specific examples of when student perception data has been influential in educational decision-making.

Impacts of Student Perception Data

When student perception data is collected, educational researchers receive the information needed to improve their school's quality and climate (Penuel et al., 2016). Without student perception data, educational leaders make school improvement decisions based on what they believe students think, want, and need, which may differ from students' realities (Conaway & Goldhaber, 2020). For example, due to the increased controversy over whether or not students should have access to cellular devices during the school day, Bartholomew and Reeve (2018) conducted a study about middle-school students' perceptions of mobile device usage during the school day. Ultimately, middle schoolers' cellular device usage was correlated with higher distractibility and lower grades, suggesting that it may be beneficial to structure or limit device usage in middle-school classrooms (Bartholomew & Reeve, 2018). In this example, students' perceptions revealed that cellular device usage might impact middle-schoolers achievement because student engagement is a strong indicator of student success (Ryan & Mosher, 2021). This is one of many research examples demonstrating how student perception data helps inform educational decision-making that maximizes students' feedback and needs. Then, educational improvement efforts have a direct, intentional impact on students' school experiences, learning, and success.

Two other studies displayed the power of student perception data utilizing high-school students as participants. Cukurbasi and Kiyici (2018) explored tenth-grade students' perceptions of a flipped classroom, and Egalite and Kisida (2018) explored high-school students' perceptions of teachers who were demographically similar and different from them. Results from both qualitative studies provided insight for educational reform, particularly on how to help students have a more positive experience at school. Cukurbasi and Kiyici (2018) found that many tenth-graders felt more motivated and engaged in a flipped classroom environment. The flipped classroom also helped students feel closer to and more connected with their teachers. Egalite and Kisida (2018) found that students reported great benefits when they had teachers who were demographically similar to them, primarily when similarities existed in gender and race/ethnicity. Notice the power of the lessons that are learned from student perceptions. As educators work to support students, student perception data provides direct insight into what students want and need.

While the previous examples represented isolated collections of student perception data, Nishida and Hanson (2020) offered an example of a longitudinal study in which students' perceptions were collected frequently over a long period of time, allowing the practice to become embedded in the school and classroom culture. The Student Perception Project was a two-year collection of student perception data on teaching practices and school climate (Nishida & Hanson, 2020). As a result, the data allowed teachers to continuously adapt practices and make immediate changes that improved learning. Furthermore, students were empowered as they took ownership of their own learning (Nishida & Hanson, 2020). This study, like the previous examples, demonstrated that students have valuable perceptions and helpful feedback to give; however, they need an opportunity to share, a platform to express themselves, and adults willing

to listen. In addition, this study provided a prime example of student perception practice, where student perception data is not simply collected once and then ignored. Instead, this student perception data was collected continuously, embedded in the school's processes, and utilized intentionally and authentically to improve student learning.

This second section of the related literature review, which discussed existing literature on student perceptions, further supports the need to study high-school students' perceptions of qualities that make good teachers. The theory of positive psychology and John Hattie's list of factors that impact student achievement demonstrate why student perceptions are important, influential, and beneficial (Seligman et al., 2005; Visible, 2017). Furthermore, the work of Bartholomew and Reeve (2018), Cukurbasi and Kiyici (2018), Egalite and Kisida (2018), and Nishida and Hanson (2020) provided four examples of when student perceptions have provided insight that informed school improvement efforts to create a more positive school experience for students. Accordingly, this study about qualities that make good teachers will utilize student perception data. As young learners, their positive relationships and experiences are crucial for success in school and beyond.

Student-Teacher Relationships

In addition to teacher qualities and student perceptions, the third central theme of this research study is the relationship between teacher and student. Research about the influence of the teacher-student relationship is abundant (Chiu et al., 2021; Corwin, 2018; Henry & Thorsen, 2018; Kittelman et al., 2018; Laurito et al., 2019; Pham et al., 2022; Raufelder & Kulakow, 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Tuominen et al., 2020; Visible, 2017; Zhang et al., 2022). The following sections summarize and synthesize the existing literature and demonstrate how the research supports a phenomenological study on high school students' perceptions of qualities

that make good teachers. The first section discusses the literature surrounding why teacher-student relationships are crucial, followed by several examples of their impact on schools and education. Finally, the uniqueness of adolescence is described to demonstrate why high-school students were chosen as this study's participants.

Power of Student-Teacher Relationships

Three overarching subthemes from the literature seem to explain the power of teacher-student relationships. Teacher-student relationships are significant because they fulfill the fundamental human need for connection, spark student motivation, and promote vital life skills (Chiu et al., 2021; Corwin, 2018; Henry & Thorsen, 2018; Kittelman et al., 2018; Laurito et al., 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Tuominen et al., 2020; Visible, 2017). Henry and Thorsen (2018) described the need to connect as an essential, psychological prerequisite to human satisfaction and fulfillment, which explains why students innately seek relationships with their teachers. On John Hattie's list of factors that affect student achievement, teacher-student relationships have an effect size of .52, demonstrating a powerful and positive influence (Visible, 2017). Conversely, students feeling disliked by teachers has an effect size of -.19, negatively impacting student achievement. The apparent influence of teacher-student relationships on student success aligns with the principles of positive psychology. In his PERMA model, Seligman (2018) named positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments as the five elements of happiness and well-being. Healthy, strong relationships with teachers provide students with the relationship element, which likely leads to increased feelings of positivity, meaningfulness, engagement, and success (Umucu et al., 2021).

The second common subtheme in the research on teacher-student relationships is motivation. Positive teacher-student relationships spark student motivation, leading to student

success and achievement. Chiu et al. (2021) argued that motivation is the most critical factor in student learning, and motivation is created through teacher-student interactions. Ryan and Deci (2000) added that the type of motivation sparked by teacher-student relationships is intrinsic. In other words, when relationships with teachers are strong, students are internally motivated to engage, learn, and persist. Teachers who make students feel welcome, safe, accepted, and supported foster the most intrinsic motivation in students (Chiu et al., 2021). On John Hattie's list of factors that influence student achievement, deep motivation yields a strong potential to accelerate student achievement (Visible, 2017). In simple terms, when students like their teacher, they will try harder and exert more effort, leading to increased growth in various aspects of development (Lin et al., 2022).

The third common subtheme in the research is that teacher-student relationships teach and promote vital life skills that students need to live happy, healthy, successful lives (Endedijk et al., 2022; Li et al., 2022; Longobardi et al., 2021; McKittrick, 2022; Walker & Graham, 2021; Yao & Wong, 2021; Zhang et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2020). Countless researchers have found correlations between teacher-student relationships and the development of a plethora of such crucial life skills. For example, healthy teacher-student relationships promote self-determination and self-efficacy in students (Zhang et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2020). Building self-determination and self-efficacy in students over time leads to young adults who are confident, self-aware, independent, and capable of facing challenges (McKittrick, 2022). Furthermore, teacher-student relationships teach students interpersonal skills necessary for building and maintaining healthy relationships (Endedijk et al., 2022; Yao & Wong, 2021). Such prosocial behaviors and relationship skills include communication, emotional regulation, empathy, and self-control (Li et al., 2022; Walker & Graham, 2021). Last, exposure to positive teacher-student relationships

helps students develop a positive mindset (Longobardi et al., 2021). Learning to think and feel positively helps humans maintain hope and persevere through life's challenges. These vital life skills that students gain from teacher-student relationships are another reason that more research is needed that explores ways to further develop positive interactions between students and their teachers.

Overall, the power of teacher-student relationships is vigorous because they fulfill the psychological need for human connection, spark motivation, and teach life skills necessary for a happy, healthy life. When students feel connected and motivated, their likelihood of success is heightened. Increased awareness of the power of teacher-student relationships has resulted in greater frequency and intensity of teacher-student relationships as a research topic (Pham et al., 2022). In the examples in the following section, one can see through specific studies of the impact of student-teacher relationships that students learn, feel, and do better when they like their teachers (Visible, 2017).

Impact of Student-Teacher Relationships

Many research studies on teacher-student relationships demonstrate their influence. For example, Kittelman et al. (2018) studied the impact of a behavioral intervention called check-in / check-out (CICO). CICO involves pairing students with teachers to “check in with” at the beginning of each school day and to “check out with” at the end of each school day. The ultimate purpose of CICO implementation is enabling a consistent teacher-student relationship to form. The results of the CICO intervention include decreases in problem behaviors and dropout rates, as well as increases in academic engagement and attendance rates (Kittelman et al., 2018). As the research from Chiu et al. (2021) and Ryan and Deci (2000) suggested, teacher-student relationships developed through the CICO intervention filled students' need to connect and

instilled motivation. It appears that dedicating educational minutes and research efforts to relationship-building yields not only social and emotional growth but also academic and behavioral development in students. Thus, more studies are needed that demonstrate various strategies and practices that help grow relationships between students and educators.

Laurito et al. (2019) offered another research study demonstrating the teacher-student relationship's significance. In this study, researchers measured school climate, which includes students' perceptions of their teachers, their school, and the quality of teacher-student relationships (Konishi et al., 2022). The study focused on schools with high crime and poverty rates. Researchers found that schools with high crime and poverty rates, paired with poor school climates, yielded poor test scores (Laurito et al., 2019). In these schools, students reported feeling unsafe and disconnected. Nevertheless, Laurito et al. (2019) discovered that high crime and poverty rates did not significantly affect student test scores in schools with a positive school climate. In other words, when students were positively connected to teachers and school, they could succeed and achieve regardless of their disadvantaged circumstances. This example aligns with the principles of positive psychology, demonstrating how positive relationships create positive institutions where students can learn, grow, and reach their utmost potential (Seligman et al., 2005). Evidently, research that explores high-school students' perceptions of qualities that make good teachers is needed. When these qualities are identified, teacher-student relationships can improve and multiply. The power of such positive teacher-student relationships can transform schools.

One final demonstration of the power of teacher-student relationships is research on the widespread, deep-rooted tradition of academic tutoring (Fitzsimmons et al., 2022; Guill et al., 2022; Walker, 2022). Fitzsimmons et al. (2022) conducted a phenomenological analysis of one-

on-one tutoring and suggested that the relationship between tutor and pupil was fundamental to students' commitment and engagement to learning. In other words, one of the main reasons that tutoring works is that students have the opportunity to build a personal relationship with the person teaching them. When the human need for connectivity is not fulfilled, students do not learn to their utmost potential. In fact, Okoro et al. (2021) found that private tutoring can be ineffective if tutors and students are disconnected on a personal level. A solid relationship between teachers and students is a prerequisite to effective teaching and meaningful, long-lasting learning.

Although the powerful impact of teacher-student relationships has become evident in the world of research, further research is needed. One problem with the existing literature on teacher-student relationships, including the study by Fitzsimmons et al. (2022), is that most studies rely on adults' perceptions of the relationships, whether it be a teacher or a tutor (Pham et al., 2022). This limitation was also evident in the research on teacher qualities. In order to expand on and enhance the literature on teacher-student relationships, this study will prioritize the perceptions and lived experiences of the students. Their perceptions of teacher-student relationships, a largely untapped source of knowledge, will be invaluable to building stronger connections.

High-School Students

Another aspect of this study that must be discussed is the rationale for choosing high-school students as research participants. Tuominen et al. (2020) explained that motivation and connectivity to school significantly decrease during the transition from elementary school to high school. In elementary school, significant attention is placed on social and emotional learning and teacher-student relationships; however, in high school, the focus largely becomes academic

content (Estrapala, 2021). Nevertheless, adolescents still need positive relationships and personal interactions to continue shaping a positive well-being (Seligman, 2018). There is a clear need for high schools to continue measuring and considering students' perspectives, happiness, and holistic development at the secondary level. Research-based best practices should continue even when students reach older ages.

Second, participants in this study are secondary students because protective factors such as positive teacher-student relationships are crucial during such a difficult stage of life (Agyekum, 2019). Kittelman et al. (2018) named some of the complex challenges and obstacles faced throughout adolescence, including academic failure, peer rejection, peer pressure, substance abuse, violence, delinquency, mental health issues, and school dropout. Negative interactions with teachers lead to instability, hostile environments, and dissatisfaction from both teachers and students (Agyekum, 2019). On the other hand, positive relationships with teachers, which motivate and inspire students, help high-school students overcome difficulties (Zhang et al., 2022). Thus, this study exploring students' positive lived experiences with teachers will provide insight into how educators can cultivate more positive interactions that support teenagers. Such insight can directly impact teacher education programming, professional development, and school improvement initiatives.

A third reason this study will focus on high-school students as participants is their increased cognitive development. Chaku et al. (2022) explained that adolescence is a time of rapid brain development. In particular, adolescence is characterized by rapid growth in executive functioning skills, including cognitive flexibility, organization, inhibitory control, self-monitoring, and working memory (Chaku et al., 2022; Scott et al., 2020). For most neurotypical students, age yields maturation of executive functioning and other cognitive processes (Kray et

al., 2021). Choosing high-school students as participants, who are approximately eighteen years of age, will increase the maturity, reflectiveness, thoughtfulness, and accuracy of their responses. With increased cognitive abilities and additional years of school experience, data collected from high-school students about their lived experiences of good teachers will likely be more trustworthy than data from younger students with less-developed cognitive skills. This is why the following study seeks to understand the perceptions of high-school students about what qualities they believe make good teachers.

More specifically, the grade level of students chosen for this phenomenological study are high-school seniors. Van Manen (1997/2016) explained that narratives of human lived experiences with phenomena must be reflective because people cannot truly separate themselves from experiences enough to conceptualize them while still actively experiencing them. Because this study is phenomenological, aiming to understand high-school students' lived experiences with good teachers, the high-school participants must be seniors. Seniors are at the end of their high-school education journeys, so they can reflect upon their experiences more deeply than students still in the middle of their high-school years. Kolluri (2022) provided one example of a study that utilized high-school seniors as participants to share their perceptions of their college readiness during the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. For such studies that seek participant reflectiveness on school experiences, seniors are the best choice for target populations.

Good Teacher Phenomenon

At its core, the purpose of this study is to explore students' lived experiences, specifically high-school students' perceptions of qualities that make good teachers. Thus, this final literature review section synthesizes existing research that has investigated some aspect of the

phenomenon of a good teacher. Little research exists on this specific human experience, solidifying the gap in the literature this study will address; however, a few researchers have briefly explored or introduced the idea. The subthemes from their work provide a foundation and guidance for the current study.

Themes from Various Works

The first subtheme apparent from the literature on this phenomenon is that researchers have focused on the phenomenon of good teaching rather than good teachers. For example, Kember et al. (2004) collected students' perceptions of good teaching, focusing on teaching practices. The results were divided, as half of the students favored traditional, didactic teaching practices, while the other half preferred student-centered, interactive practices (Kember et al., 2004). Similarly, Yung et al. (2011) collected perception data on good teaching from both students and teachers. The researchers found significant differences between teacher and student perceptions of several dimensions of good teaching. The results of these studies showcase how different students prefer different teaching styles and practices; however, this current study explores more specifically the good teachers themselves. This study will explore whether there are universal aspects of lived experiences of good teachers, not according to the teaching methods they employ, but by their very presence and way of being with students.

The second subtheme apparent from the literature is that the phenomenon of a good teacher is ever-changing. Obiakor (2000) called perceptions of good schools and good teachers outdated, as many still connect the phenomena with high test scores and unrealistic expectations of perfectionism. Souto-Manning (2019) added that the good teacher phenomenon is biased as well as outdated, representing only perceptions of the dominant culture. Yung et al. (2011) explained how the good teacher phenomenon changed throughout each decade, influenced by

and reflective of changes in society. In their study's conclusions, each of these researchers called for future studies that pave the way for a more complete picture of the phenomenon of a good teacher (Obiakor, 2000; Souto-Manning, 2019; Yung et al., 2011). Souto-Manning (2019) stated that research that helps clarify a definition of good teachers is needed to redefine and improve teacher preparation in transformative, inclusive ways. Poorly-defined criteria for good schools and good teachers leads to the inequity, controversy, and failure to meet needs evident in education today (Obiakor, 2000). Systemic change is made possible when the good teacher phenomenon is further explored and defined by students themselves. The creation of this study is a direct response to the need for a better understanding of what students mean when they use the term "good teacher."

The third subtheme apparent from the literature helps combat a potential argument against collecting students' perceptions of the good teacher phenomenon. Critics might say that students should not dictate schools or education (Black & Mayes, 2020; Jones & Bubb, 2021; Mayes et al., 2021). Critics argue that if adults take student perceptions too seriously, results will be detrimental. For example, the power relations between students and teachers may be challenged, or students might propose solutions that are questionable, different, transformative, or unorthodox (Black & Mayes, 2020). Yung et al. (2011) clarified that exploring students' perceptions of the good teacher phenomenon does not mean that student perception data is treated as a direct mandate for action. Instead, data collected from students promotes understanding and creates a dialogue between students and their teachers (Yung et al., 2011). In other words, the consideration of student perceptions about what makes teachers good sparks a culture in which negotiation, compromise, understanding, and flexibility are valued. When both students' and teachers' perceptions are heard, shared perceptions are built. When shared

perceptions are the basis of decision-making, school experiences become more positive, representative, and beneficial for all.

Of all the existing literature, Obiakor (2000) and Mariani (2015) offered the most similar studies to this phenomenological research, as each defined specific qualities that make good teachers, explicitly exploring the good teacher phenomenon. From a meta-analysis, Obiakor (2000) listed specific qualities of good teachers, including authenticity, flexibility, fun, motivation and reward. From phenomenological interviews with individuals labeled as good teachers, Mariani (2015) named the following qualities that make good teachers: showing emotions, expressing openness through self-disclosure and acceptance of ideas, and being passionate. The following study will directly extend on the work started by researchers like Obiakor (2000) and Mariani (2015), but the phenomenological insights will come directly from high-school students themselves. As existing literature has shown, the good teacher phenomenon is a universal human experience that must be explored further to capitalize on its positive impacts (Obiakor, 2000; Souto-Manning, 2019; Yung et al., 2011).

Themes from van Manen's Works

Finally, one last mentionable body of existing research about the good teacher phenomenon comes from Max van Manen's research career. As a phenomenological expert and the father of hermeneutic phenomenology, his works provided a foundation for future phenomenological studies (van Manen, 1997/2016). Amidst numerous topics, van Manen spent time exploring the phenomenon of good teaching (Kansanen, 1999). Because of his distinction in and impact on the field of educational research, a synthesis of van Manen's work about the good teacher phenomenon receives its own section.

Past Research. Early in his career, van Manen (1982b) realized how much easier and more common it was to talk about bad teachers than good teachers, likely because people better understood what constitutes bad teaching. To explore this discrepancy, he dedicated his attention to research that would give meaning to the phenomenon of good teachers. In his early works, van Manen (1982a) expressed that good teaching is a phenomenon that is beyond words. The knowledge of what exactly makes a teacher good is not measurable, surveyable, communicable, or accessible (Kansanen, 1999). Nevertheless, instead of perceiving this challenge of understanding good teachers as an impossible task, van Manen felt even more called to explore the phenomenon. He stated that what is beyond speaking demands to be heard (van Manen, 1982a). Although van Manen admitted that human language cannot adequately describe the essence of a good teacher, he believed that explorations of the good teacher phenomenon could tap into the secret domains of this unique way of being with students (Kansanen, 1999). This is how van Manen's good teacher phenomenological research began, sparking interest from countless researchers after him.

Current Research. Since then, Max van Manen has highlighted various phenomenological insights about the lived experience of a "good" teacher. For example, van Manen reported that good teachers are far more than effective deliverers of content (Kansanen, 1999). He stated that to be a good teacher, it is not enough to lecture on science or mathematics because good teaching is defined by the "how" rather than the "what" (van Manen, 1982b; van Manen, 1997/2016). Instead, teachers are humans, moral agents, and influencers responsible for and committed to the growth of children (Kansanen, 1999; van Manen, 1994). The qualities that make a good teacher consist of everything teachers do and do not do, how they act and feel, and how they understand and perceive students and learning (Kansanen, 1999). Conclusively, van

Manen (1997/2016) claimed that naming these specific qualities of good teachers is missing in the existing professional knowledge base of teaching and teacher education programs.

Educational research is typically focused on academic content and teaching techniques or strategies, missing the vital attributes that make teachers “good” in the eyes of students. Rather, research is needed that explores good teachers’ ways of being (Kansanen, 1999). This personal, qualitative knowledge could be the secret to outstanding teachers that the educational field has not yet accessed.

Since he discovered the research gap, van Manen (1997/2016) has dedicated time and attention to filling the gap of what it means to refer to an adult as a good teacher. Van Manen (1982b) explained the human interest in answering this question because the answers provide direction, guiding how to act, what to do, or how to be. Humans innately seek to differentiate between what is good and not good (van Manen, 1997/2016). Van Manen’s approach to uncovering insight into the good teacher phenomenon is to possess a pedagogic thoughtfulness, allowing themes to become experientially understood (van Manen, 1997/2016). Through this qualitative approach, van Manen has suggested various themes of the universality of the good teacher phenomenon (Kansanen, 1999; van Manen, 1982a; van Manen, 1982b; van Manen, 1994; van Manen, 1997/2016). From student anecdotes, van Manen (1999) discovered that students described good teachers as fair, patient, committed, approachable, and kind. Good teachers employ improvisational immediacy, virtue-based normativity, and pedagogical thoughtfulness (van Manen, 1994). Another reoccurring theme is that good teachers guide and shape students’ growth toward adulthood (van Manen, 1982b; van Manen, 1994). Amidst all of van Manen’s insights into the good teacher phenomenon, the ultimate and most-prevailing theme is that good teachers know their students (van Manen, 1994). In other words, good teachers are

deeply relational and committed to students. Good teachers understand children, how they view the world, what they think about, and how they are each unique and remarkable (van Manen, 1994).

Future Research. Despite the valuable insights van Manen has contributed to the pedagogical understanding of good teachers, he clarified that the good teacher phenomenon has only begun to be understood (Kansanen, 1999). Much more research is needed that reveals the essence of good teaching that is largely still beyond words (van Manen, 1982a). Van Manen (1994) specified that when students are asked about their lived experiences with good teachers, their anecdotes reveal specific relational qualities of the educators who were the most impactful in their lives. Van Manen called for future researchers to be open to new research that explores the elusive dimensions of good teachers and teacher qualities to tap into the untapped domains of the phenomenon (Kansanen, 1999). The development of the following study directly responds to van Manen's call for future research, interviewing high school students who will bring further life and meaning to the good teacher phenomenon. This qualitative, phenomenological study that explores students' perceptions of the qualities that make good teachers will make the good teacher phenomenon more reflectively understandable, revealing both the uniqueness and universality of this human lived experience.

When educational leaders and researchers ask students to define good teachers and their specific qualities, they empower students to redefine good teaching according to their unique generation and cultural circumstance. Many groups of people have provided their opinions on what makes good teachers, including teachers themselves, supervisors, administrators, and higher-education adults; however, few have extended the same opportunity to students. Furthermore, many researchers have explored qualities of good teaching, including content-

based instructional strategies; however, few have explored the relational ways of being with students that make a good teacher- the kind of teacher a student never forgets because of the impact they had on their life. The following study allows high-school students at a particular school to share how they experience good teachers and what a good teacher means to them. The results will be relevant, authentic, and specific and have unique implications for improving students' lived experiences with school.

Summary

Robust research is grounded by the work accomplished by researchers before them. In the preceding sections, each dimension of this study was grounded in the existing literature to demonstrate where the idea for this study originated and how it will contribute to the advancement and progress of the field of educational research. In summary, research on teacher qualities was reviewed, demonstrating clear gaps in the literature. Existing literature has focused on the negative, external, and quantitative qualities of good teachers from adult perspectives. Accordingly, the following study explores the phenomenon through high-school students' perceptions. Next, research supporting the power of students' perceptions and positive teacher-student relationships was synthesized, demonstrating that research exploring students' perceptions of improving positive teacher-student relationships is worthwhile and necessary for school improvement. Then, research regarding the unique age of high-school students was explored, indicating why high-school seniors are the best participants for this study. Finally, research surrounding the good teacher phenomenon was reviewed. Implications from this section include that many researchers, including Max van Manen, have begun to explore the good teacher phenomenon, but the existing literature is only the beginning. All of this related literature demonstrates the need for a qualitative, phenomenological study that explores high-school

students' positive lived experiences and their perceptions of the qualities that make good teachers. Grounded in positive psychology, the results of this study provide insight into how to provide high-school students with positive experiences within positive educational institutions that promote positive growth and result in a positive life. Combining student interview data and the five building blocks of the PERMA model, this researcher hopes to shine a light on high-school students' meanings of the phenomenon of a "good teacher."

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand students' perceptions of qualities that make good teachers at Lincoln Jr./Sr. High School (a pseudonym). Consequently, the results pinpoint what students seek in their lived experiences with teachers and will be instrumental in helping with school improvement initiatives, especially initiatives that prioritize the student-teacher relationship. This section on methodology is key to this research purpose because the study must be replicable, as each high-school student population may express varying perceptions of the good teacher phenomenon. Chapter three offers comprehensive and detailed information about the study's research design, procedures, and data collection and analysis methods.

Research Design

Creswell and Poth (2018) defined qualitative research as holistic explorations of human experiences in natural settings. Compared to quantitative research, qualitative research is open-ended, flexible, and constructive. A qualitative research design was appropriate for this study exploring students' perceptions of good teachers because of its emphasis on lived experiences. To grasp a universal understanding of a good teacher from students' perspectives, in-depth conversations with and narratives from participants were necessary. No quantitative calculation could adequately surmise the rich, complex, and diverse experiences of students. Instead, qualitative analyses pinpoint patterns, themes, and meaning that inform solutions and action (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Of the many qualitative research types, this study utilized a phenomenological approach.

Throughout van Manen's (1997/2016) primary text, three significant components described the essence of phenomenological research. The three major components include lived experiences, phenomenological insights, and the science of examples. First, phenomenological research explores individuals' lived experiences, also called their lifeworlds. Van Manen (2017) specified that phenomenologists are concerned with the meanings of such lived experiences of specific phenomena. Phenomenological researchers often ask, "What is it like?" For example, a well-known phenomenological study by Heidegger (2001) explored individuals' lived experiences of what it is like to be bored. Being bored is a phenomenon, and according to phenomenology, one can learn much about boredom by asking individuals about their lived experiences. Specifically, van Manen (2017) explained that lived experience narratives must be descriptive, concrete, reflective, and raw to produce meaningful insights, the second major component of phenomenological research.

The purpose of hearing and understanding an individual's lived experience with a phenomenon is to gain phenomenological insights. Van Manen (2017) claimed that a study has no value without phenomenological insights. Phenomenological insight refers to the authentic meaning of a phenomenon as lived by an individual or individuals. Van Manen further clarified that gaining phenomenological insight requires constant questioning and a strong desire to interpret and understand (van Manen, 1997/2016). For example, Marion (2006) explored the phenomenon of eye contact or meaningful looks. By first listening to countless accounts of lived experiences, Marion gained a phenomenological insight that when people make meaningful eye contact, they focus on the pupil. Phenomenological insights are only possible when phenomenologists pause, reflect, and see things as they are (van Manen, 2017).

In addition to lived experiences and phenomenological insights, the third major component of phenomenological research is the science of examples (van Manen, 1997/2016). Van Manen (2017) described examples as the heart of phenomenology. In other words, examples provide data for phenomenological research and evidence for phenomenological insights. Examples make abstract phenomena understandable, describable, and meaningful, which is the ultimate aim of phenomenology. Van Manen (1997/2016) stated that phenomenology is essentially an example comprised of examples. Overall, based on primary texts from van Manen and other famous phenomenologists, phenomenology has three significant components: understanding lived experiences, gaining phenomenological insights, and utilizing human examples to accomplish these aims.

With these significant phenomenological components in mind, phenomenology was the appropriate research design for a study exploring high-school students' perceptions of qualities that make good teachers. Van Manen (1997/2016) explained that because phenomenology utilizes examples of individuals' lived experiences, phenomenology prompts people to think of similar experiences they have had with the universal phenomenon. For instance, when Heidegger (2001) explored boredom, each study participant could relate to the experience of boredom and attempt to explain their lived experiences with the phenomenon. Likewise, high-school student participants related to the phenomenon of a good teacher. Most people can remember a teacher they viewed positively, and through a phenomenological study, they can describe how they experienced a good teacher. Phenomena are vague, ill-defined concepts (van Manen, 2017). People commonly discuss good teachers, but what does a good teacher mean? What is it like when students experience a good teacher? What qualities make a particular teacher good? This

phenomenological study aims to capture human examples and lived experiences to discover phenomenological insights about what makes teachers good from students' perspectives.

More specifically, this research study was hermeneutic rather than transcendental. El-Sherif (2017) explained that transcendental phenomenology utilizes bracketing, a practice in which researchers intentionally minimize their own biases' impact on the research process to keep themselves out of the research. On the other hand, hermeneutic phenomenology embraces the researcher's role as an essential instrument in phenomenological research. Van Manen (1997/2016) explained that hermeneutic research utilizes the researcher's personal insight, experience, philosophy, and reflectiveness because their role in phenomenological research is incomparable and irreplaceable. Hermeneutic phenomenologists do not attempt to bracket themselves out of a study because their passion for and experience with the phenomenon of study are too personal and valuable to ignore. A hermeneutic approach was appropriate for this study for these reasons. As the researcher, I am an educator with a wholehearted passion for children and a belief that all children deserve a quality education from teachers who love and listen to their students. Because I am actively engaged in the lifeworld of education, students, schools, and teaching, hermeneutic phenomenology is key (van Manen, 1997/2016).

Research Questions

The research questions, as listed in chapter one, are restated below.

Central Research Question

What are high-school students' perceptions of good teachers?

Sub-Question One

How do students' perceptions of good teachers inform positive emotion?

Sub-Question Two

How do students' perceptions of good teachers inform engagement?

Sub-Question Three

How do students' perceptions of good teachers inform relationships?

Sub-Question Four

How do students' perceptions of good teachers inform meaning?

Sub-Question Five

How do students' perceptions of good teachers inform accomplishment?

Setting and Participants

Crucial decisions for researchers include where their study will take place and who will participate. The following sections provide descriptions of this study's setting and participants. In addition, a rationale is provided for why the particular sites and participants were chosen.

Site

The setting for this study was Lincoln Jr/Sr High School, a public school in the northeastern United States. This junior/senior high school serves approximately 300 students in grades seven through twelve. The student population at Lincoln Jr/Sr High School is over 60% economically disadvantaged and over 98% White/Caucasian. The geographical location surrounding the school is vastly rural. Furthermore, Lincoln Jr/Sr High School is part of a widespread school district that is comprised of two high schools and three elementary schools. Lincoln Jr/Sr High School is smaller and more rural than the other high school in the district. Regarding school leadership, Lincoln is led by one principal and one dean of students.

This particular site was chosen for this study because Lincoln Jr/Sr High School is a prime example of a school that provides its students with far more than academic knowledge. Because of the well-known consequences of rural poverty, many Lincoln students come to

school with other basic needs to be met, such as hunger, safety, and love (Harper et al., 2022). Furthermore, this site was selected because of disheartening data from the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS), a biyearly questionnaire administered to public school students that aims to pinpoint risk factors and protective factors that impact students' lives. PAYS data for Lincoln Jr/Sr High School indicated that many students are unhappy with their teachers and school experiences. For example, less than 40% of 10th and 12th-grade students reported enjoying being in school (Pennsylvania, 2021). A similar low percentage of students reported receiving praise from teachers when they worked hard. This study's exploration of students' lived experiences of good teachers will be unique, insightful, and beneficial in pinpointing how to best support Lincoln Jr/Sr High School students to help them feel more connected, positive, and supported in school.

Participants

Participants in this study were twelfth-grade students at Lincoln Jr/Sr High School who were eighteen years of age and had been enrolled in public school for all four years of high school (ninth through twelfth grades). All Lincoln seniors who met these criteria were invited to participate. Participation was voluntary and required parental consent. The number of participants was 12 students, an appropriate sample size for a phenomenological study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Seven participants were male, and five participants were female.

High-school seniors were chosen for this study because adolescents' thought processes and emotional abilities typically mature when students are around sixteen. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021), twelfth-grade students, who are 18 years of age, are likely to have developed independence, critical thinking skills, reasoning skills, and the ability to generate their own opinions. The CDC explains that teenagers at this age are more

interested in developing strong and intimate relationships, including with teachers and other adults at school. In addition, van Manen (1997/2016) emphasized that expressing lived experiences with phenomena is a reflective practice because humans cannot grasp the essential meaning of something until they have lived through it. Participants in this study were twelfth-grade students because, developmentally, most high-school seniors have the cognitive and affective abilities needed to recognize qualities that truly make good teachers and express their lived experiences. Furthermore, this student population could reflect on their lived experiences with good teachers because they were at the end of their high-school education journeys.

Researcher Positionality

Various aspects of a researcher's positionality must be discussed in qualitative research because qualitative researchers are crucial instruments in a study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Miller and Zugic (2022) described researcher positionality as the social/political stance or the way the researcher sees the world. Researcher positionality creates the researcher's identity and includes potential biases which must be brought to the attention of readers for consideration. A researcher's positionality, described by the components in the following sections, influences every qualitative research phase.

Interpretive Framework

Social constructivism best aligns with my research worldview. Dahl (2018) explained the fundamental constructivist belief that individuals actively construct knowledge based on interactions with others and the environment. Constructivism goes beyond preexisting beliefs that people are mere recipients of knowledge. Regarding research methodology, researchers operating from a social constructivist paradigm will ask broad, open-ended questions to understand participants' views on the situation or topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a social

constructivist researcher, I view participants as the bearers of rich insight because they construct their reality based on personal experiences and interactions. My research took a collaborative approach in which participants and researchers co-constructed meaning through interviews and focus groups.

In many ways, my religious beliefs have shaped my social constructivist worldview. For example, my biblical worldview has instilled in me the importance of self-reflection. As I try each day to live as God would have me to live, I reflect upon my actions, words, and thoughts so that I continuously grow and improve as a Christian, wife, and person. Lamentations 3:40 reaffirms the need for Godly self-reflection, stating, “Let us take a good look at the way we’re living and reorder our lives under God” (*New International Bible*, 1978/2011). This priority to self-reflect in all aspects of life aligns with the principles of social constructivism. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that social constructivists recognize and reflect upon their personal backgrounds to decide how their experiences and biases might influence research interpretations. Overall, social constructivism is the interpretive framework that resonates most with me and guides my research process.

Philosophical Assumptions

Creswell and Poth (2018) also explained the power of a researcher’s philosophical assumptions. Consisting of personal beliefs and values, the three philosophical assumptions described in the following sections are gained through experiences and often are consistent throughout a researcher’s life. Like the interpretive framework, philosophical assumptions are clearly stated because phenomenological research is delineated and understood through the researcher’s thinking, insight, and reflection (van Manen, 1997/2016).

Ontological Assumption

The first philosophical assumption is called the ontological issue, which refers to the nature of reality. My ontological position as a researcher is that there is only one reality, and that reality can only be seen through God's truth. In John 14:6, the Lord reminds us, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (*New International Bible*, 1978/2011). My belief in God's truth and this one version of reality provides me with direction and purpose for my work in research. Furthermore, this ontological assumption gives me strength, faith, and determination to continue seeking His plan and following His path through obstacles and challenges.

Epistemological Assumption

The second philosophical assumption is called the epistemological issue. Epistemology refers to the subjective nature of qualitative research and knowledge influenced by the human relationship between the researcher and participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My epistemological position as a researcher is that the more engulfed a researcher is in their research, the more influential the results. In other words, when researchers spend adequate time in the field, incorporate their own experiences and perspectives, and get to know their participants, the resulting themes and discussions are authentic, meaningful, and rich. My Christian faith is one factor that has influenced this philosophical assumption, as God asks His followers to do all things with love, care, and thoughtfulness. Colossians 3:23 reads, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord" (*New International Bible*, 1978/2011). Ultimately, my epistemological position aligns with the research design for this study because hermeneutic phenomenology invites researchers to study phenomena they are deeply and personally passionate about (van Manen, 1997/2016).

Axiological Assumption

The third philosophical assumption is called the axiological issue, which refers to the role

of values in research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This assumption requires researchers to acknowledge their values and biases and consider how they might influence their work.

Qualitative researchers believe it is essential to acknowledge values relevant to a study so that readers can consider researcher perspectives when evaluating their work. My axiological position for this study involves acknowledging my positionality concerning the research setting.

Specifically, my participants will be high-school students within the district where I work. It was important that I acknowledged my connection to the participants and discussed the variety of ways that this feature might influence my study. Despite these possible effects, a foundational principle of phenomenological research is that researchers immerse themselves into the research to gain a holistic account of the participants' perspectives (van Manen, 1997/2016). Having a preexisting rapport with participants in a professional setting will help to alleviate the perceived power differential between researcher and participant. Participants will be comfortable and familiar with the setting and the researcher and may speak freely and abundantly about their lived experiences.

Researcher's Role

Similarly, an important consideration in qualitative research is the researcher's role as the human instrument in the study. For example, when conducting research in the same setting where a researcher works, they cannot have a supervisory role over the participants. I am the school counselor at the high school where my study was conducted. As the school counselor, I do not have a supervisory role over the participants. School counselors do not assign grades, evaluate students, or assign discipline. A school counselor's role is to support and advocate for students, so a study in which a counselor asks students to share their lived experiences of good teachers is relevant to their educational role. Furthermore, rapport with students is beneficial in

qualitative research for obtaining rich, honest data from participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Therefore, as students perceive school counselors as supportive, trustworthy resources, they will be more likely to feel comfortable and confident in participating in the study.

Procedures

Detailed descriptions of the procedures of a study enable future replications. The following sections describe the step-by-step procedures of this phenomenological study, including gaining necessary permissions, recruiting participants, collecting various forms of data, analyzing data, synthesizing data, and finally, offering conclusions and implications. Throughout all stages of the study, multiple procedures were implemented to maintain the rigor and reliability of the research. Such methods are also explained in detail.

Permissions

First, I obtained all necessary approvals, including approval from the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A) and the site (see Appendix G). At the site, approval was obtained from the school board, superintendent, and the building principal. An initial study overview was presented to the principal and superintendent before the school board presentation for official approval. Next, participant assent and consent were collected. Because participants were high-school students, their assent and consent from their legal guardians was obtained. An essential step in collecting informed consent is ensuring that participants understand what they are volunteering for (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, I held a recruitment debriefing for all seniors at Lincoln Jr./Sr. High School to describe the study's purpose, duration, and phases (see Appendix B). Participants were informed of their rights if they chose to participate, including confidentiality, the right to withdraw at any time, and the benefits and risks of participation. These details were also present on the informed consent form (see Appendix C). After the

debriefing, students were instructed to take, complete, and return the informed consent form with parental signatures if they chose to participate. I provided a one-week deadline for returning consent forms and sent reminders via email. Finally, after securing participants, data collection began.

Recruitment Plan

The sample pool, or the total number of seniors at Lincoln Jr./Sr. High School from which to solicit a sample was 50 students. The target sample size, or the total number of participants the researcher seeks, was between 10 and 15 students. This type of sample was a criterion sample because participants had to be twelfth-grade students who were eighteen and had been continuously enrolled in public school for their four years of high school (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This criterion ensured that participants experienced the phenomenon of good teachers for similar amounts of time and had therefore experienced various teaching styles and personalities. After the debriefing session in which seniors were invited to participate, I instructed anyone interested in participating to return a signed informed consent form. Because 12 students returned forms, a number within the target sample size, no further action was required. I proceeded with those participants.

Data Collection Plan

Van Manen (2017) claimed that the purpose of phenomenological research is to collect human science data that provides meaningful insights. If data does not provide meaningful insights, van Manen argued that the study was worthless. Therefore, selecting relevant, rigorous data collection strategies is a crucial step in the research process. Qualitative researchers experience the freedom and challenge of choosing from various data collection options, narrowed down by which sources will provide the most meaningful insight into participants'

lived experiences of the phenomenon. Three data sources were utilized for this research study that explored high-school students' perceptions of qualities that make good teachers. Data collection occurred through individual interviews, focus groups, and a questionnaire. Collecting these three data sources yielded rich, detailed information about students' lived experiences of good teachers.

Individual Interviews Data Collection Approach

The first data collection approach was individual interviews, the most common data collection method in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Atkinson (2017) defined qualitative research interviews as one-on-one conversations between the interviewer and interviewee in which knowledge is collaboratively constructed. In other words, during individual interviews, a researcher asks questions that allow participants to share their perspectives and lived experiences of the phenomenon being studied. Ismail et al. (2018) provided one example of how individual interviews helped researchers gain meaningful insight into lived experiences of phenomena. These researchers utilized individual interviews to understand the experiences of Syrian healthcare providers displaced and currently residing in Lebanon. Their qualitative interview guide exemplified many essential features of individual interviews, including establishing rapport through an introduction, beginning interviews with broad questions, utilizing open-ended questions, and inviting participants to add additional thoughts at the end of the interview (Ismail et al., 2018). This research study also used an interview guide or protocol, providing consistency between interviews (see Appendix D).

Individual interviews were appropriate for my study exploring high-school students' perceptions of qualities that make good teachers because one-on-one conversations allowed participants to share their unique lived experiences. Conducting individual interviews shows that

researchers view participants as vessels of meaningful insights that are valuable in addressing research goals (Atkinson, 2017). Van Manen (1997/2016) specified that hermeneutic interviews yield experiential narratives that lead to deeper understandings of phenomena. Because this research study aims to explore student perceptions specifically, individual interviews were crucial to unlocking that information. Furthermore, individual interviews occurred before focus groups so that students were not tempted to answer questions differently in front of peers.

Logistically, individual interviews took place at Lincoln Jr./Sr. High School. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that interviewing within participants' natural settings is beneficial in qualitative research. Participants participated in one 30-45-minute individual interview during their school day. All interviews took place within a two-week timeframe to maintain the validity and reliability of the results. The collected individual interview data helped answer the central research question and sub-questions. In the following section, interview questions are provided, along with which research question the item addresses.

Individual Interview Questions

1. Tell me about what your high school years (9th-12th grade) have looked like. Rapport
2. Summarize your overall feelings towards school. Rapport, CRQ
3. We all experience teachers that, after we have had them, we say to ourselves, "They were a good teacher!" Think about a teacher who comes to mind when you hear "Good teacher." Tell me about them. CRQ
4. What does it feel like when you are in the classroom of a good teacher? SQ1, SQ3, SQ4
5. What do good teachers do that make you feel that way? SQ1, SQ3, SQ4
6. What does it look like when you are in the classroom of a good teacher? SQ2, SQ5
7. What do good teachers do that makes the classroom look that way? SQ2, SQ5

8. What do students (like yourself) do when you are in the classroom of a good teacher?

SQ2, SQ3, SQ5

9. What do good teachers do that cause those behaviors/actions? SQ2, SQ3, SQ5

10. We have been talking about what it means, in general, to experience a good teacher.

Now, let us get more specific. Name the top three to five qualities that make a good teacher. Take your time! CRQ

11. Explain how (each given quality) distinguishes a teacher as good. CRQ

12. During this interview, you described in detail what a good teacher means to you. What else would you like to add that is essential to your definition of a good teacher? CRQ

The first and second interview questions allowed interviewees to introduce themselves and warm up to the interviewer. Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasized the importance of beginning a qualitative interview this way so that participants become more comfortable sharing their perceptions and experiences. When asked about what their high school years have looked like, participants may discuss having moved between different high schools and having played sports or other extra-curricular activities. Regardless of what they shared, students had this opportunity to feel heard and seen by the researcher.

The third interview question narrowed the focus of the interview to the good teacher phenomenon. Thus, the central research question began to be addressed. By asking students to talk about good teachers in a general sense, students were invited to begin the reflective process necessary for phenomenological insight. Recalling good teachers from the past helped participants recall examples, anecdotes, and insight into what made those teachers good.

Participants who were less detailed in the description were encouraged to share more by the

researcher utilizing silence, nonverbal cues such as nods, paraphrasing, and short encouragers like, “Tell me more about that!” or “Can you give me an example?”

After describing good teachers broadly, the fourth through the ninth interview questions invited participants to think more deeply and specifically about their lived experiences of the phenomenon. Van Manen (1997/2016) was clear that phenomenological descriptions are most concerned with the seemingly trivial details of everyday life. Highlighting such detail shines light on universality, makes the unconscious conscious, and grasps a sense of what it means to be human. Responses to these six questions informed the five sub-questions that align with the five elements of well-being. For example, when students shared what having a good teacher feels like, responses informed how positive emotion, relationships, and meaning are fulfilled. When students shared what having a good teacher looks like, responses informed how engagement and accomplishment are inspired in classrooms. Overall, these six questions asked students to reflect on what it feels and looks like to be with a good teacher and how students act in such an environment. These aspects of good teachers will comprehensively describe participants’ lived experiences.

The individual interview questions followed a pattern of broad to specific. Therefore, the tenth interview question asked for the most specific description of lived experience as it asked students to choose between three and five qualities that describe their meaning of a good teacher. Because this question comes toward the end of the interview, it acted as an opportunity for participants to summarize all of the experiences they reflected on with a more concrete answer of what the good teacher phenomenon means. The eleventh interview question ended the interview as it began: with the central research question. The purpose of this study was to explore high-

school students' perceptions of the qualities that make a good teacher, and this final question addressed the purpose directly.

Last, participants were invited to reflect on all they had shared about their lived experiences with good teachers and add any other details they felt were essential. Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasized the importance of offering this opportunity at the end of qualitative interviews because humans, as reflective creatures, often think of more to share after initial descriptions. Before the interview ended, I thanked the participant with most sincerity for their time and thoughtfulness, informed the participant of the date for the upcoming focus group, and answered any questions the participant had about the research process.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

After individual interviews, I created manual transcriptions from the audio recordings. Novice researchers are encouraged to transcribe manually to fully immerse themselves in the interview data and avoid the risks of transcription software (Creswell & Poth, 2018). When interviews were transcribed, I engaged in structural coding, the first layer of coding. Saldaña (2013) defined structural coding as assigning content-based labels to segments of raw data related to the research questions. Structural coding helps conceptualize the meaning within participants' descriptions of their lived experiences of the phenomenon. Van Manen (2017) explained that the purpose of phenomenological data analysis is to make the experiences of a phenomenon knowable and understandable. The second layer of coding was pattern coding, which included categorizing the structural codes. Saldaña (2013) explained that pattern coding links seemingly unrelated codes, highlighting patterns, categories, and meaning from the data. These patterns began to create an understanding of the phenomenological experience.

Finally, after manual transcription, structural coding, and pattern coding, I analyzed the surfacing patterns for essential themes. Themes are overarching categories of commonality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For example, patterns such as “funny,” “caring,” and “positive” might be categorized into a theme called “personality traits.” An initially large number of codes were narrowed into five to seven themes that conceptualized the participants’ lived experiences of the phenomenon. Van Manen (1997/2016) added that themes are essential when they cannot be separated from the phenomenon without removing a piece of its universal meaning. The themes established from individual interviews are tentative because they may change when integrating data from focus groups and participant questionnaires. Van Manen (2017) emphasized that phenomenological research does not abide by rigid, structured data analysis procedures. Instead, phenomenologists listen, reflect, and allow the data to speak for itself through the art of writing. Overall, an analysis of the individual interviews provided a textural description of the phenomenon, describing what the participants, individually and then collectively, experience with the phenomenon of good teachers.

Focus Groups Data Collection Approach

The second data collection approach was focus groups. For this study, focus groups occurred after individual interviews because focus groups allow researchers to follow up on themes, patterns, or constructs that surface during the individual interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, the focus group design and questions were altered after analyzing the individual interview data. Using focus groups in qualitative research is well-founded (Perez, 2019). Like interviews, focus groups are another prevalent data collection approach in qualitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Atkinson (2017) defined focus groups as conversations between a researcher and multiple participants at once, in which the collective realities of all participants

are explored. Van Manen (2017/2016) emphasized that participants should actively help construct meaning in hermeneutic research. Focus groups allow participants and interviewees to collaborate and co-construct their phenomenological descriptions. Focus groups were an appropriate data collection approach for my study exploring students' perceptions of good teachers because the phenomenon of good teachers is socially constructed. Conversations within a focus group highlighted similarities and differences among students' perceptions of which qualities make good teachers while highlighting areas of universality in their lived experiences.

Logistically, conducting focus groups to help create triangulation was more time-efficient than conducting follow-up interviews with each participant. All participants participated in one of two focus group interviews. The two focus groups took place during the school day in a private location to ensure the data were collected within a natural and safe setting. The focus groups occurred after individual interview data were analyzed. Like the individual interviews, the focus groups were recorded to be replayed during transcription and analysis, and a protocol was utilized (see Appendix E). Data collected from focus groups helped answer the central research question that aims to create a broad understanding of the meaning of good teachers from students' perspectives. After hearing about each participant's lived experiences with good teachers, the focus group allowed a collaborative opportunity for participants to create and refine a universal student-perceived definition of a good teacher.

Focus Group Questions

1. Teacher Quality Group Analysis - All teacher qualities you listed during individual interviews are on index cards in your envelope. As a team, condense all of your qualities into one universal list. Consider the following questions: Can similar qualities be

combined into a thematical category? Are there outlier qualities that are not universal for all? The final list should be the qualities necessary for a good high-school teacher. CRQ

2. PERMA Model Group Analysis - After learning about the five elements of the PERMA model, place each teacher quality from your team's universal list under the PERMA element(s) that quality fulfills. For example, using the quality "understanding," consider the following questions: Why is having an understanding teacher so impactful and positive for us? Does it add to our feeling of Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, or Accomplishment? If the quality fulfills more than one PERMA element, place it under all applicable categories. SQ1, SQ2, SQ3, SQ4, SQ5
3. Agree/Disagree Game – Listen to each statement. Then, walk to the Agree or Disagree side of the room to show your stance. Then, participants will be asked why they agree or disagree. CRQ
 - a. Practices typically employed in elementary school should continue into high school.
 - b. Good teachers avoid traditional school methods.
 - c. High-school students are motivated by grades.
 - d. Good teachers are a happy medium between lenient and strict.
 - e. Teenagers behave better for teachers they view as "good."
 - f. Teenagers learn more easily when they have a relationship with their teacher.
 - g. If my teacher is on their computer at their desk during class, it is difficult for me to care about what we are doing.
 - h. It helps me learn when I have a clearly organized teacher.

4. After all of the discussion and reflection, let us each offer our final response to the original research question: What do you feel are the essential qualities of a good teacher?

CRQ

As an educator, I understand best educational practices and ways that children learn and work best. This is why my focus group protocol was designed as a series of engaging activities rather than a mere list of questions. Chunked segments of collaborative, hands-on tasks are more developmentally appropriate for sustaining adolescents' attention and focus than an hour of straightforward questioning and discussion. This unique focus group protocol exemplifies a student-driven mindset, allowing students to take the front seat in analyzing their own data, guiding the direction of the conversation, and communicating in an open, creative, and cooperative approach.

Like the individual interview questions, the focus group interview questions began and ended with addressing the central research question, attempting to find words that describe the essence of good teachers. The first activity reminded students of their individual interview answers and focused their minds on constructing a shared understanding of the phenomenon. After much discussion and analysis, the final question invited participants to make the unconscious conscious and the implicit explicit, the challenging goal of phenomenological research (van Manen, 1997/2016). The explicitness of this final question also invited participants to co-construct the phenomenological meaning instead of relying solely on the researcher's interpretation of their experiences.

The second and third focus group questions offered engaging activities that aligned directly with the five elements of well-being, the pillars of the theory of positive psychology that guides and frames this study. Van Manen (1997/2016) emphasized that phenomenological research is a

science of examples, so the focus group questions welcomed specific examples to guide students' responses. Drawing out examples from participants is an appropriate use of focus groups because sharing personal narratives is a typical and insightful topic in human conversation, especially among students (Tomsic & Zbaracki, 2022). Therefore, these four focus group interview questions and activities added alignment to the theoretical framework and rich anecdotal data.

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

Focus group data were analyzed similarly to individual interview data. As such, focus group audio recordings were manually transcribed. I began analysis with structural coding, assigning conceptual labels to each sentence of raw data, followed by pattern coding or identifying patterns based on the initial codes (Saldaña, 2013). Then, codes were categorized into overarching themes. Because focus group data was collected after individual interview data, another step of focus group data analysis was called constant comparison. In constant comparison, the coded focus group data were continuously compared to and integrated with the codes, patterns, and themes from individual interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a result, I identified commonalities, differences, and relationships in the data (Saldaña, 2013). Themes were solidified, altered, or added. Analysis of each data collection method resulted in a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of the phenomenon.

Questionnaire Data Collection Approach

The third data collection approach utilized in this study was implementing a student questionnaire (see Appendix F). Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that questionnaires are insightful qualitative data collection tools when they are open-response. In other words, questionnaires are open-response when students create unique, original answers rather than

choosing from pre-determined responses, such as Likert-scales and multiple-choice questions. One reason a questionnaire was appropriate for this study is that it offered an opportunity to collect specific, clear, and concise student perception data on the qualities that make good teachers. For example, participants provided lengthy narratives and elaborations in interview situations; however, after participating in such in-depth reflection, questionnaires allowed students to summarize and state their answers to the research question clearly. Questionnaire data reinforced the universality of themes that surfaced throughout individual and focus group interviews. For this reason, this data collection approach occurred last in this research process.

Logistically, I delivered the student questionnaire to participants using a Google Form because students in this school district were familiar with Google applications. The Google Form collected student e-mail addresses, limited students to one response, and closed at a pre-determined date. Bledsoe et al. (2020) offered one example of how questionnaires yield insightful data that help qualitative researchers construct answers to research questions. These researchers used questionnaires to ask students to nominate teachers for The Great Teaching Award. The responses were qualitative because students had the open-ended opportunity to explain why their nominee deserved the award. Bledsoe et al. (2020) analyzed the questionnaire data and discovered patterns and themes across student responses. One main advantage of questionnaires as a supplement to interview data is that questionnaires allow participants to think and reflect before answering complex questions. Furthermore, Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasized the importance of participants having an opportunity to correct or clarify the researchers' interpretations of their interview data; therefore, the data collection sequence of individual interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires provided a comprehensive and appropriate data collection plan.

Questionnaire Question

1. After all of the discussion/reflection, what do you feel are the essential qualities that make a teacher a “good teacher?” CRQ

This single question asked students to answer the central research question directly, making the questionnaire a valid instrument. After reflecting on their lived experiences with good teachers in the individual and focus group interview, students’ answers were refined. At this point in the research process, I analyzed individual and focus group interview data before examining questionnaire data. Therefore, I had already created a list of the essential themes that best described high-school students’ lived experiences of the good teacher phenomenon for comparison. Open-ended responses from this questionnaire clarified, modified, corrected, and added to the essential themes and the description of the phenomenon.

Questionnaire Data Analysis Plan

Questionnaire data were analyzed with pattern coding and constant comparison (Saldaña, 2013). In other words, student responses were examined and coded for similarities, differences, and relationships while simultaneously compared to the themes from individual and focus group interviews. In addition, researcher memoing was utilized while analyzing the questionnaire data. Creswell and Poth (2018) described researcher memoing as detailed notetaking of emerging ideas and researcher decisions throughout data analysis. Therefore, when analyzing student questionnaires, I used memos to note thoughts, ideas, and decisions that I made during this final stage of data analysis. Documentation of these internal processes is valuable when time passes, and I must remember the rationale behind my analysis decisions. During the questionnaire analysis of such focused data, I kept in mind the ultimate goal of phenomenological research: to create an overall description of the phenomenon's essence (Moustakas, 1994).

Data Synthesis

Overall, my data analysis and synthesis processes followed the Saldaña method for qualitative research. Saldaña (2013) prioritized a hermeneutic approach to qualitative data analysis, in which researchers become fully engulfed in data. The Saldaña approach emphasizes coding, an interpretive act that symbolically summarizes data to depict meaning. The data analysis steps above align with the Saldaña model, including structural coding, pattern coding, constant comparison, researcher memoing, and thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2013). After all three forms of data were collected, the result was a large number of emerging themes. The final step in data synthesis was to differentiate between incidental and essential themes (van Manen, 1997/2016). Van Manen (1997/2016) explained that the essential themes that create the ultimate phenomenological description are the themes that cannot be separated from the phenomenon without removing a crucial aspect. This differentiation produced a more concise list of the phenomenon's essential themes.

In addition, I utilized a data analysis spreadsheet to ensure the synthesis of the three data collection methods. The spreadsheet was organized by research question and data collection method, as shown in Table 1. Emerging ideas, themes, and descriptions throughout data analysis were stored in this spreadsheet. Such alignment of the data analyses highlighted overall theme development and helped maintain focus on the research questions. As analysis developed, the spreadsheet adapted accordingly, adding columns and a color-coding strategy to differentiate between textural and structural descriptions. This data synthesis spreadsheet ensured that data collected through the three methods were not analyzed in isolation. Instead, the data from each method were compared, contrasted, and analyzed concurrently to help comprehensively answer the research questions and define the phenomenon from the participants' perspective.

Table 1*Data Synthesis Spreadsheet*

	Central Research Question	Sub-Question 1	Sub-Question 2	Sub-Question 3	Sub-Question 4	Sub-Question 5
Individual Interviews						
Focus Group						
Questionnaire						

Trustworthiness

Providing evidence for the trustworthiness of a study is different in quantitative and qualitative research. In qualitative research, specific strategies are employed to ensure rigor throughout the research process, from participant recruitment and data collection to data analysis and reporting findings. The following sections discuss the specific strategies utilized in this research study to increase its trustworthiness to readers. Shenton (2004) explained the trustworthiness framework used in this research study to ensure rigor. The framework includes four criteria for trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In the following sections, each criterion is defined, and the steps to satisfy those criteria are clearly explained. Finally, ethical considerations essential to this qualitative research study are discussed.

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) related credibility to internal validity, a measure of the extent to which results denote truths for the reality of the studied population rather than errors in the research. Shenton (2004) added that credibility includes whether the study measures what it

intended to measure. Three trustworthiness strategies used in my research study increase its credibility.

Triangulation

First, the data in this study were triangulated, as discussed in the data collection and analysis sections. Triangulation of data, synthesizing data from individual interviews, focus groups, and document analyses, adds credibility because using different methods helps create a more comprehensive and accurate depiction of the phenomenon than one method alone.

Triangulation of data from three collection methods allowed participants to describe their lived experiences more deeply and allowed researchers and participants to refine the nature of their lived experiences collaboratively.

Peer Debriefing

Furthermore, research studies are increasingly credible when people other than the researcher check the researcher's work. When becoming engrossed in the data as a qualitative researcher, researchers must seek opportunities for consultation and collaboration to identify potential issues or obscurities. Therefore, I participated in frequent debriefing sessions with my committee chair and member. Shenton (2004) defined debriefing sessions as discussions in which others bring their own experiences and perspectives to offer a researcher.

Member Checking

Finally, I incorporated two levels of member checks or opportunities for participants to approve the accuracy of my analyses (Shenton, 2004). Participants were invited to review, edit, and approve the interview transcript during the first member check. During the second member check, participants were invited to review, edit, and approve my conclusions, findings, and results. Member checks increase the credibility of a study because qualitative research aims to

report on participants' lived experiences. Therefore, for a study to be credible, participants must agree that their experiences with the phenomenon have been accurately represented.

Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) related transferability to external validity; however, in qualitative research, rather than generalizing findings, transferability refers to giving enough detail so readers can judge which settings and circumstances are appropriate for transferring research findings. Two specific strategies were used in this study to increase its transferability. First, I provided thick, descriptive details throughout each phase of the research process. For example, an exhaustive list of demographical information on the site and sample was provided so that readers can decide to which other situations the findings can be applied. Other sections of the research study, such as the procedures, data collection approaches, and data analysis methods, were described at length so that readers can understand each aspect of this study.

Second, maximum variation existed within the sample population to increase transferability in this study. Maximum variation exists when a sample population is representative of the target population being studied. In this particular research study, the population studied is twelfth-grade students at Lincoln Jr./Sr. High School. Therefore, the gender make-up of the sample (58% male, 42% female) was similar to the gender make-up of the senior class (54% male, 46% female). Maximum variation increases the reliability of research findings because the sample is made more similar to the population it represents (Shenton, 2004).

Dependability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) related dependability to reliability, meaning consistency. Shenton (2004) added that a dependable study could be replicated many times and yield similar results. Two strategies for trustworthiness used in this study increased its dependability. First, I

maintained an audit trail from the beginning to the end of the research process (Appendix H). An audit trail is a log of everything a researcher does, along with reflective notes of the researcher's thoughts, feelings, ideas, and decisions. Second, I underwent an external audit, in which an expert evaluated my researcher audit trail. The Liberty University dissertation committee conducted the external audit in this case. An audit trail increases the dependability of a study because it provides readers with evidence of a research-based, thoughtful, ethical, and aligned research process that could be evaluated or replicated by others. An external audit adds dependability because it provides evidence that experienced researchers in the field support the research study as dependable and trustworthy.

Confirmability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described confirmability as a study's objectivity and neutrality. Confirmability is critical because if rigorous strategies are not used, researcher bias can impair qualitative research. The ultimate goal of qualitative research is to report participants' lived experiences with a phenomenon. Four of the beforementioned trustworthiness strategies, triangulation, member checks, audit trails, and external audits, increased this study's confirmability. Triangulation increases confirmability because participants' lived experiences are refined and enhanced with each additional data collection method (Shenton, 2004). Audit trails and external audits increase confirmability because they require that researchers be reflective and thoughtful in each research step. Finally, member checks increase confirmability because this strategy allows participants to confirm the researcher's understanding of their lived experiences with the phenomenon being studied. Overall, qualitative research inevitably contain researcher bias; however, these four strategies helped increase my study's confirmability and overall trustworthiness.

Ethical Considerations

Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasized that qualitative researchers must anticipate ethical issues for their study and plan how they will be addressed. Ultimately, ethical considerations protect the human subjects at the heart of qualitative research. The following considerations and actions were taken to ensure the ethical treatment of the participants in my study.

As described in the permissions section, I obtained all necessary approvals, including approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the site. At the site, approval was obtained from the school board, superintendent, and the building principal. Next, participant assent and consent were collected. An essential step in collecting informed consent was ensuring that participants understand what they are volunteering for. Therefore, I held a debriefing for all seniors at Lincoln Jr./Sr. High School to describe the study's purpose, duration, and phases. Participants were informed of their rights if they chose to participate, including confidentiality, the right to withdraw at any time, and the benefits and risks of participation. These details were also present on the informed consent form. After the debriefing, students were instructed to take, complete, and return the informed consent form with parental signatures if they chose to participate.

Ethical research clearly states the benefits and risks of participation so that students can consider them when deciding whether or not to participate (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The benefits of participating in this study that explores high school students' perceptions of qualities that make good teachers include taking an active role and using their voices to describe and improve their educational experiences. By expressing their perspectives of good teachers, students help inform educators of the positive qualities that students are looking for. Another benefit of

participation is contributing to educational research overall. By participating, students can advocate for their generation and school experiences in this unique time.

Finally, participants were compensated with a luncheon after the completion of data collection. The risks of participation in this study were minimal. There were no risks of pain or injury. Furthermore, because the study focused on the positive traits of teachers, there were no perceived risks of teachers finding out students reported something negative about them. One potential risk was that students sacrificed a small amount of instructional time to participate in interviews during the school day. To ensure the confidentiality of the research site and participants, pseudonyms were used. Physical data was secured in a locked cabinet, and electronic data files were password protected.

Summary

The overall purpose of this chapter is to provide comprehensive details of the methods used so that other researchers feel confident trusting and replicating my study. The chapter began with a definition of phenomenology, as my study explores lived experience through student perceptions of the good teacher phenomenon. This chapter also incorporated discussions of researcher positionality, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations, all critical components of maintaining rigor in qualitative, phenomenological research. Other sections in chapter three, including research questions, setting and participants, data collection, data analysis, and data synthesis, demonstrate alignment throughout the research process. Ultimately, this study aimed to allow students' voices to be heard through structural coding, pattern coding, and thematic analysis of data from individual interviews, a focus group interview, and student questionnaires. The phenomenon of a good teacher is discussed often, but what is it like for students to have a good teacher? What qualities do good teachers have that make them impactful and memorable

for teenagers? The answers to these questions indicated what school should be like in order for students to feel, do, and be their best.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

Data from individual interviews, focus group interviews, and student questionnaires were analyzed and synthesized to explore high-school students' positive lived experiences with school and their perceptions of the qualities that make good teachers. This phenomenological study highlighted student voice regarding what is positive and impactful for teenagers. Such findings, detailed throughout this fourth chapter, can be utilized to inform proactive educational practices and policies. Chapter Four begins with participant descriptions, followed by a presentation of data in the form of themes, subthemes, and outlier themes. Finally, data is shared by answering the study's central research question and the five sub-questions. Interpretation and discussion of results are reserved for Chapter Five.

Participants

As described in Chapter Three, participants were recruited via an in-person presentation. All eligible students, seniors eighteen years and older, were invited to hear about and participate in the study. Details about the study were shared, including the purpose, the data collection processes, the informed consent document, and the next steps should they be interested in participating. By the deadline, twelve eligible students signed and returned informed consent forms, fulfilling the recommended sample size for a phenomenological study. Furthermore, all twelve student volunteers participated in one individual and one focus group interview and submitted a questionnaire. Participant information is detailed in tabular form below.

Table 2*Student Participants*

Student Participant	Grade Level	Age	Methods of Participation
Amanda	12	18	Individual/Focus Group/Questionnaire
Anthony	12	18	Individual/Focus Group/Questionnaire
Ariel	12	18	Individual/Focus Group/Questionnaire
Benjamin	12	18	Individual/Focus Group/Questionnaire
Carly	12	18	Individual/Focus Group/Questionnaire
David	12	18	Individual/Focus Group/Questionnaire
Donald	12	18	Individual/Focus Group/Questionnaire
Ethan	12	18	Individual/Focus Group/Questionnaire
Gabriel	12	18	Individual/Focus Group/Questionnaire
Kassidy	12	18	Individual/Focus Group/Questionnaire
Logan	12	18	Individual/Focus Group/Questionnaire
Michelle	12	18	Individual/Focus Group/Questionnaire

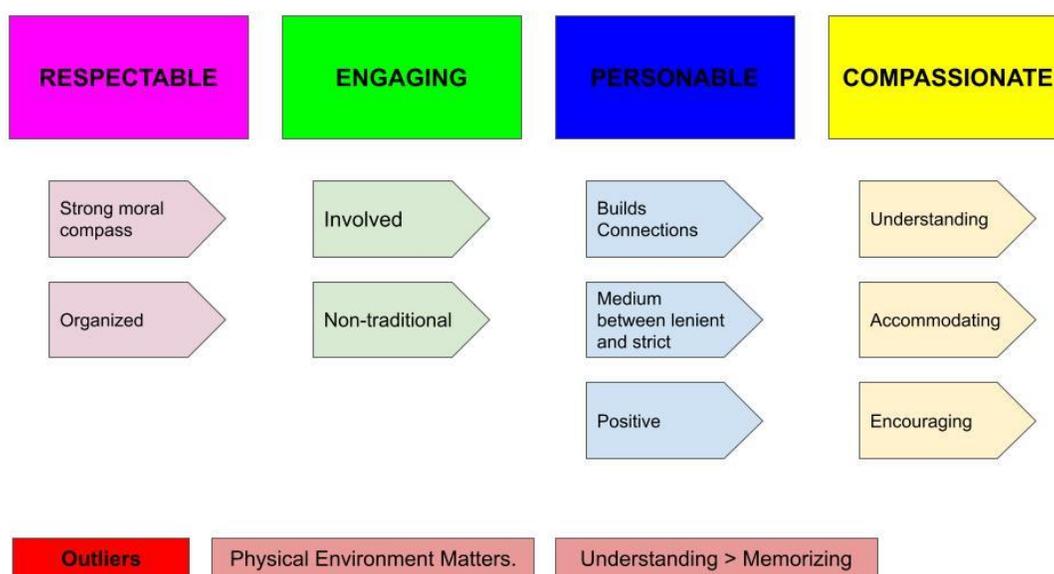
Results

From the rich data collected from the twelve research participants, analysis and synthesis procedures yielded four overarching themes regarding the qualities that high-school students believe make good teachers: Respectable, Engaging, Personable, and Compassionate. As shown in Figure 1, each theme is branched into two or three sub-themes that further describe the quality from the student perspective. Also displayed near the bottom of Figure 1 are two outlier themes that surfaced from the coded data but did not fit seamlessly into a thematic category. The

following sections provide explanations and narrative examples for each theme, sub-theme, and outlier theme essential to high-school students' phenomenological descriptions of a good teacher.

Figure 1

Themes, Sub-themes, and Outlier Themes



Respectable

All student participants agreed that good high-school teachers must be respectable. Benjamin stated, “Good teachers are more respectable and mature than us. They don’t engage in power struggles or publicly embarrass or humiliate students, and teenagers need that so we can look up to them and see how we can handle things better.” Often, teenagers are aware of their struggles and flaws at this difficult age and, thus, their need for adult role models they respect and admire. Amanda added, “Having good teachers makes us think twice before we make bad decisions. Because they’re such big role models in our lives, we think about what they’ll say when they find out about this because we respect them so much that we don’t want to disappoint them.” Students compared themselves to silly putty because of how much they change, grow,

and shape during their teenage years as they explore and figure out who they are. This malleable life stage makes the impact of strong, respectable adult role models all the more powerful. Upon further exploration of what it means for a teacher to be respectable, two sub-themes emerged.

Strong Moral Compass

Participants coined the term “strong moral compass” to describe the respectable nature and character of good teachers. Having a strong moral compass involves teachers being unbiased. Logan stated, “In high school, there are so many cliques and popularity groups, and oftentimes, the students who aren’t popular don’t get to interact with teachers as much. I think the good teachers are those who interact with everyone and who see and treat all of their students equally.” Participants explained that high-school students notice, appreciate, and respect when teachers treat all students equally. Carly added, “A good teacher treats all of their students with the same love and respect.” Likewise, participants agreed that high-school students also notice when teachers favor certain students over others, and they believe the impact of favoritism is detrimental to the level of respect teenagers have for that teacher. Finally, having a strong moral compass involves teachers being confident and consistent, two qualities that help students feel safe and comfortable in their learning spaces.

Organized

A second sub-theme of what makes teachers respectable through the eyes of high-school students is teachers’ organization. Every participant agreed that good teachers are organized. Amanda explained, “We can certainly tell when teachers are organized, and organization makes teachers appear more put-together, respectable, and ready.” Students’ specific examples of how a teacher appears organized include clear systems and procedures in the classroom. For example, describing one teacher in particular, Michelle recalled, “He maintained a class calendar so we

always knew what we were doing that day, what was coming up, and it helped us so much.”

Organization is a teacher quality respected by students because it indicates preparedness and trustworthiness, attributes that help students feel at ease emotionally and focused cognitively, allowing them to learn to their maximum ability.

Engaging

In addition to being respectable, all student participants stated that good high-school teachers are engaging. When asked to describe a good teacher’s classroom, Benjamin replied, “A good teacher’s classroom looks like a McDonald’s Playhouse. The kids are exploring and playing pretty independently, but the parents (teachers) are right there with them, watching, guiding, and stepping in whenever needed.” When diving deeper into what students mean when they say a good teacher is engaging, two sub-themes emerged.

Involved

Student participants reported that one aspect of an engaging teacher is the teacher’s level of involvement with students and course content. To further explain what makes an involved teacher, nearly every participant utilized a comparison to an unengaged teacher, one who appears uninvolved during class time. Gabriel explained, “When teachers sit at their desks on their computer while giving us busy work, it tells us they don’t want to be there, so neither do we.” Students described these behaviors as unengaged, compared to an engaged teacher who interacts with students for the duration of a class period. Gabriel continued, “Good teachers are active, smiling, moving around the classroom, helping…” High-school students perceive that teachers’ levels of involvement correlate to how much they care. Ethan summarized, “If the teacher cares, the students will care, and I’ll take that one to my grave.” Michelle offered a possible explanation for why an involved teacher is positive and impactful for teenagers. She stated,

“Having a teacher that’s engaged gives us reassurance and motivation because it shows they care about what we’re learning, too.” Carly reiterated, “When a teacher is excited to teach the material, we’re excited to learn the material.”

Non-traditional

When describing an engaging teacher, most student participants also agreed that this involves teachers breaking away from traditional teaching practices. Participants named the following practices as traditional: hour-long lectures with student notetaking, textbook assignments, raising hands to speak, and desks arranged in aisles. Ethan explained, “Good teachers aren’t afraid to move away from the boring and the traditional because the world is evolving and, for the most part, school isn’t.” Similarly, Carly echoed, “If you’re paying attention to the world at all, you know traditional teaching styles aren’t doing it for us.” A commonly used phrase by student participants was that good teachers do something “fun and different.” For example, Ariel stated, “Good teachers make class more enjoyable, with different activities or brain breaks or projects; anything that gives us a break from taking notes and listening to lectures.” When remembering a specific teacher from his high-school experience, Anthony stated, “He gave us space to talk, discuss, and collaborate in class, and that’s how teenagers think and learn.”

Multiple participants offered possible explanations as to why utilizing non-traditional teaching practices is positive and impactful for teenagers. Most agreed that different learning activities give them a “change in pace” and help them sustain attention. Ariel summarized, “When we sit still for so long, our attention spans literally can’t hang, and then we aren’t learning anything.” Regardless of the type of activities, students noted that good teachers made their classrooms run differently than the norm, which helped them feel excited to go to that class.

Finally, with consideration for the uniqueness of the current generation, Logan added, “Making material fun for teenagers today is crucial because all we want to do is be on our phones. If a class is boring, we physically cannot pay attention.”

Personable

The third essential emerging theme is good high-school teachers are personable. All student participants emphasized that teenagers must feel pleasant about their teachers to learn from them. Amanda explained, “High-school students cannot learn from teachers they don’t like because when there is a bad relationship, teenagers put up a mental wall and don’t allow anything to get in.” The well-known power of the influence of teacher-student relationships supports this theme. Amanda continued, “Teacher-student relationships can be extremely beneficial. Like I know a lot of people don’t have healthy home lives and don’t have role models to look up to, so I think that good, personable teachers are really important because they can become like mother and father figures when students aren’t getting them from home.” Three sub-themes emerged when further exploring what makes a teacher personable. Personable teachers build connections, find a medium between leniency and strictness, and display positivity.

Builds Connections

All participants agreed that what makes a teacher personable is their ability to build connections with students. Cassidy stated, “Good teachers let us get to know them, and then we can see our teacher as an actual person and not just a teacher.” Students explained that when they get to know their teachers more personally, the human connection helps increase the enjoyment and learning in the classroom. Furthermore, participants noted that good teachers intentionally set aside time and engage in activities that support these crucial student-teacher connections. Carly explained, “I think a lot of what makes a good teacher is the emotional connection they

make with students, and good teachers make room each day for that.” Michelle echoed, “Putting your barriers down and actually letting your students get to know you helps teenagers realize you’re not just a teacher. You’re a person with a whole life outside of school, just like we all are.” Specific actions mentioned by participants as influential in building connections include talking to students about more than classwork, listening to students with their full attention, telling stories about life experiences, and sharing pictures of families, pets, etc. Each of these small gestures help teenagers connect with their teachers.

Medium Between Lenient and Strict

Students described a second sub-theme of a personable teacher as a medium between lenient and strict. All participants agreed that either extreme can be harmful to students, so good teachers operate with a healthy balance of both. David explained, “A little bit of toughness will help us strive to be the best people we can be, but at the same time, no student wants to feel afraid of their teacher, and unfortunately, that happens all too often.” When recalling an impactful teacher from her past, Amanda reiterated, “He makes every student feel valued while also holding high expectations, which makes students want to work hard and make him proud.” Research participants repeatedly discussed how a demeanor between lenient and strict is an essential quality of a good teacher because it makes teenagers feel safe. Michelle summarized, “Students have to be in a safe environment before they can even think about learning. In order to learn, we have to first be comfortable where we are.” When recalling what it felt like to be in the classroom of a good teacher, Gabriel added, “It was warm and cozy. I felt comfortable, safe. That’s what I remember.”

Positive

A third sub-theme essential to students' descriptions of a personable teacher is positivity. Positivity in teachers was described as teachers who smile, come across as genuinely happy day-to-day, and seem to love their job. Gabriel recalled, "She always smiled. I can't think of a time she wasn't smiling," and David explained, "A positive teacher is key because a lot of teenagers don't want to go to school, so they really need something positive to look forward to and keep them going." All participants agreed that a personable teacher's positive nature helps encourage and motivate them. Ariel stated, "Good teachers' positivity is seriously contagious, and it makes us feel like we can do this." When recalling what it felt like to be in a classroom of a positive teacher, Logan described, "Being in her classroom felt bright, whereas other classrooms felt apparently more dull. When in that positive learning environment, teenagers work harder because we know our work will be noticed and appreciated." Participants also agreed that the impact of having positive teachers goes deeper than increasing student learning. Carly said, "I really think having such a positive, loving, open teacher can literally save someone's life."

Compassionate

The fourth emerging theme is that high-school students believe compassion is an essential quality of a good teacher. When recalling their most positive lived experiences with school and good teachers, students repeatedly noted the compassion different teachers showed them and how impactful that care was on their development and lives. Michelle explained, "When a teacher has compassion, students feel less alone. We're all teenagers. We're all going through things, big and small, so it's that compassion from teachers that has the power to make high schoolers feel seen." Ariel added, "Good teachers seem to remember how hard it is to be a teenager," and Benjamin echoed, "Good teachers make us feel like we are actually wanted at

school.” Three sub-themes emerged when students further described a compassionate teacher: They are understanding, accommodating, and encouraging.

Understanding

The first sub-theme of a compassionate teacher is understanding, the most commonly used word in individual and focus group interviews. Every research participant listed understanding on their final lists of the qualities that make a good high-school teacher. From students’ perspectives, understanding was described as a mindset where teachers attend to unique student needs, experiences, thoughts, ideas, and feelings. Cassidy explained, “I think one of the most important things that makes a good teacher is that understanding that all students are different.” Another aspect of understanding involves how good teachers are patient and nonjudgmental. Benjamin stated, “Even if we have a really bad day one day, we know that tomorrow he’ll give us a clean slate.” Furthermore, good teachers understand that teenagers have more on their plates than class assignments. Donald said, “Teenagers need teachers who are understanding because we’re balancing so much – sports, clubs, friends, family stuff – that it’s impossible for us to do everything right.” Teenagers crave understanding from adults because they know they will be met with understanding in situations when they need it the most. Anthony provided an example that many high-school students resonated with: “I know if I was ever exhausted, I could put my head down, and if there was ever an emergency, I could text my mom really quick. I could do these things with a good teacher if I ever really needed to because they understand.”

Accommodating

The second sub-theme of a compassionate teacher is accommodating. While students described understanding as a mindset, they described accommodating as the action step after

understanding. In other words, good teachers understand students' differences and uniqueness and therefore accommodate them. Benjamin explained, "Every kid is different. Every kid learns a different way, and good teachers see that and adapt to it." Carly reiterated, "School is very, very difficult for some kids, but a good teacher somehow makes enjoyment and success possible for everybody." All student participants agreed that good teachers are flexible because accommodation requires teachers to sometimes change lessons, plans, and activities based on student interest. For example, a good teacher is willing to change the direction of learning when students show curiosity about an idea or question that differs from the teacher's original plan. Anthony recalled, "I remember one time I had a question, and my teacher also didn't know the answer, but he was willing to spend time during class to explore that question, and we all learned together." Teenagers feel they benefit from having accommodating teachers because it makes their learning feel more enjoyable, authentic, and relevant.

Encouraging

The third sub-theme essential to a compassionate teacher is encouragement. All student participants agreed that most teenagers need encouragement from teachers to succeed. Donald explained, "Teenagers don't always have their own motivation, so good teachers always try to motivate us, even though that can be really hard." Students further explained that encouraging teachers praise and uplift students with words of encouragement. Carly stated, "I love a teacher who hypes you up about your accomplishments. I love making my teachers proud." Other encouraging teacher behaviors included greeting students in the morning, chatting with students in the hallway between classes, and joking with students. Benjamin summarized, "Good teachers make us feel like we are wanted at school."

Another teacher quality students noted as especially encouraging is their teachers' passion. Participants explained that good teachers are passionate about the content and learning activities they deliver. Anthony explained, "I want to be able to tell we're learning about something they absolutely love." Students recalled that the classes they learned the most in throughout high school had teachers who clearly loved the content they taught. Finally, one student provided additional examples of what else teachers do that encourage teenagers. Benjamin said, "It's the small little things they say, the stickers they put on your test, the extra pat on the back that help a kid keep holding on... The little things mean everything."

Outlier Data and Findings

In addition to the four essential themes that emerged from this study, two outlier findings also persisted, warranting readers' attention. Therefore, the following sections provide explanations and narrative examples of two additional themes that did not align with a thematic category. The two outlier findings regarding the qualities that make a good teacher include the importance of a classroom's physical environment and an emphasis on understanding over memorizing.

Physical Environment Matters

When broadly asked to describe the classroom of a good teacher during individual interviews, most participants mentioned the physical environment in their responses. Carly emphasized, "The physical environment of a classroom is so critical. Classrooms need to look less prison-y and more cozy." Kassidy echoed, "Boring-looking classrooms make students more negative and miserable." Although participants recalled different aspects of teachers' classrooms they remember, all students agreed that good teachers portray aspects of themselves in the physical environment of the space. For example, students respond positively when teachers

decorate their desks with pictures of family, souvenirs from places they've traveled, or items they collect. Amanda explained, "When teachers' classrooms are decorated to show who they are and what they like, students automatically feel more curious and connected." Another statement about the physical environment of classrooms that all students agreed on was their dislike for fluorescent lights and blank white walls. Ethan stated, "Schools are traditionally like a blank canvas at first, and it feels like a prison, but good teachers don't leave it that way."

Understanding over Memorizing

The second outlier theme is that good teachers emphasize understanding over memorizing. All research participants agreed that, in their day and age, teenagers find memorization useless due to factors such as constant access to technology. Instead, students reported a desire to understand. One participant used an example from history class to explain the difference between understanding and memorizing. Anthony explained how memorizing dates and names felt useless, whereas understanding why a war occurred taught students significant life lessons. He stated, "When I memorize, I forget it within a week, but with good teachers, I still remember what I learned years later because they helped me understand, and that lasts forever." When describing what made one teacher from her past stick out as a particularly good teacher, Carly recalled, "She's such a good teacher because she understands that memorizing does not equal learning. She wants you to truly understand and apply knowledge and grow as a person, and that is what learning is."

Research Question Responses

The twelve participants provided insight into high-school students' positive experiences with school and their perceptions of the qualities that make good teachers. Data collected through individual interviews, focus group interviews, and questionnaires offered answers to this

study's central research question and each sub-research question. The following sections provide concise explanations and narrative examples relevant to each research question. More in-depth discussions and interpretations are reserved for Chapter Five.

Central Research Question

What are high-school students' lived experiences of good teachers? The findings identified four central themes: Good teachers, meaning the most impactful for high-school students, are respectable, engaging, personable, and compassionate. Sub-themes under each central theme help further define these qualities from the student perspective. These emerging themes suggest that, overall, what high-school students crave is authentic connections with their teachers. Benjamin explained, "It's not even the subject or the activity we're doing; it's her as a person that makes us want to learn and enjoy that moment being in her class." In addition, the findings suggested that positive school experiences for teenagers are aided by the physical environment of classrooms and an emphasis on understanding over memorization. Michelle summarized, "Good teachers develop both the academic aspect and the personal aspect of their students' growth. Neither one can be missing."

Sub-Question One

How do students' perceptions of good teachers inform positive emotion? Student participants identified compassion and understanding as two teacher qualities that lead to positive emotions. When teachers express care, patience, and positivity, their students feel safe, happy, and encouraged. Such positive emotions lead to resiliency in the classroom. Gabriel said, "You know it's a good teacher when you know going to class that it's going to be an okay time. You're not going to get yelled at. You're not going to get in trouble. They're just welcoming, they talk to us, they care about us as people, and that makes us want to be there." Carly added,

“When we know our teachers care about us, we do whatever we can to do well in their class because we just want to make them proud.”

Sub-Question Two

How do students’ perceptions of good teachers inform engagement? Participants identified involvement and organization as two teacher qualities that lead to student engagement. All student participants agreed that when teachers are actively involved in class, their own engagement in the present activity sparks students’ engagement. Michelle explained, “Good teachers are engaged with their class, not sitting at their desk, on their computer, telling us what to do. When the teacher is engaged, students are engaged. Having a teacher that’s engaged gives us reassurance and motivation because it shows they care about what we’re learning, too.”

Organization, another sub-theme that all participants agreed is essential to being a good teacher, also impacts student engagement. When teachers have a clear organization in their classroom, students said they can better focus, learn, and be completely absorbed in the activity. On the other hand, when teachers are unorganized, students say they feel distracted, chaotic, frustrated, and flustered.

Sub-Question Three

How do students’ perceptions of good teachers inform relationships? Student participants agreed that the most influential aspect of high-school students’ positive experiences with school is teacher-student relationships. The central theme, personable, describes the teacher quality students believe impacts relationships the most. When describing good teachers, students repeatedly expressed that good teachers allow students to get to know their real personality. Kassidy explained, “Knowing your teacher as a person leads to positive thoughts and then positive behaviors.” Amanda added, “In the best type of high-school classroom, both teachers

and students can be themselves.” Throughout the interview process, it became clear that relationships and human connections were the most essential themes surrounding high-school students’ positive school experiences.

Sub-Question Four

How do students’ perceptions of good teachers inform meaning? Students described meaning as feeling they have a purposeful existence or a sense of value, worth, and belonging. Participants expressed that teacher qualities such as a strong moral compass and respectability help students feel such a sense of meaning. For example, when teachers serve as respectable role models, they display to students how to treat others equitably, maintain high expectations, have confidence, and build a good life. Landon explained, “Good teachers give us a role model we can look up to in every way. That’s why, when you’re in the classroom of a good teacher, you’ll notice the students are even treating each other better, too” A teacher’s demeanor, the way they carry themselves and treat others, helps students find the meaning, the purpose, and the possibilities for their own lives.

Sub-Question Five

How do students’ perceptions of good teachers inform accomplishment? Student participants agreed that teachers who are accommodating and encouraging help them feel a greater sense of accomplishment. When teachers possess these qualities, they are perceived by teenagers as good teachers because high-school students crave feeling successful, capable, and proud. Benjamin explained, “Good teachers make you really work for it. They make us really use our brains, so when you finally get it, you get that amazing feeling of accomplishment.” When teachers accommodate the uniqueness of students, they make it possible for all students to be successful. When teachers encourage students, they increase the motivation students need to

overcome challenges and eventually find success. When recalling a particularly good teacher from his school experiences, Donald remembered, “Chemistry is a really hard class, but he made it easy for me. He somehow made it easy for everyone to understand.”

Summary

High-school students have a unique and crucial perspective that often is overlooked. This phenomenological study explored students’ positive lived experiences with school. More specifically, participants were tasked with describing the qualities they feel make a good teacher. After individual interviews, focus group interviews, and student questionnaires, themes surrounding these questions surfaced. From high-school students’ perspectives, good teachers are respectable, meaning they are organized and have a strong moral compass. Second, good teachers are engaging, meaning they are involved with class and offer non-traditional activities. Third, good teachers are personable, meaning they build connections with students, offer a medium between lenient and strict, and emit positivity. Fourth, good teachers are compassionate, meaning they are understanding, accommodating, and encouraging. All student participants agreed that teachers who possess these four qualities are good teachers for teenagers. When in the company of such good teachers, students feel equipped with what they need to learn, grow, and contribute to their world.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore high-school students' positive lived experiences with school and their perceptions of the qualities that make good teachers. This chapter begins with interpretations of the findings detailed in chapter four, connecting those findings to empirical and theoretical research. Next, this chapter will provide policy, practice, theoretical, and methodological implications inspired by these findings. Then, limitations and delimitations relevant to this study are discussed. Finally, this chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

Discussion

After identifying a gap in educational literature and a pressing issue surrounding secondary schools, this study explored the question, "What are high-school students' lived experiences of good teachers?" This central research question was rooted in Martin Seligman's (2018) theory of positive psychology. Seligman's PERMA model identified five criteria for happiness: Positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. These five PERMA components provided a lens through which to view high-school students' positive experiences with school and teachers, posing the question: Why was that experience positive for the individual? Why is that teacher quality positively impactful for teenagers?

The site selected for this study was a secondary school in a small, rural school district. The district and school leadership strongly supported this research, and eligible students were eager to participate. Data collected through individual interviews, focus group interviews, and student questionnaires highlighted high-school students' voices. In this section, thematic findings are highlighted and discussed. These themes resulted from a combination of participant data,

empirical and theoretical research, researcher voice, and consideration for the uniqueness of humanity and the subjectivity of lived experience.

Interpretation of Findings

This section begins with a brief summary of the thematic findings discussed in Chapter Four, followed by my interpretations. Each thematic interpretation is defended by empirical or theoretical research and connected to new knowledge or new perspectives on high-school students' positive lived experiences with school and their perceptions of the qualities that make good teachers.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The findings revealed that high-school students are confident in and agree about the qualities that make a good teacher. All student participants could recall and describe positive experiences with school and qualities that made good teachers, even students who felt overwhelmingly negative toward school. Overall, the findings revealed that high-school students are best served by teachers who are respectable, engaging, personable, and compassionate. Respectable teachers are organized and possess a strong moral compass, providing role models for teenagers. Engaging teachers are actively involved with learning and offer non-traditional teaching methods, thus motivating teenagers. Personable teachers prioritize connecting with students, operate at a medium between lenient and strict, and showcase a positive attitude and mindset, allowing students to enjoy their time in the classroom. Compassionate teachers are understanding, accommodating, and encouraging, helping teenagers feel safe and comfortable. These four overarching themes are the qualities that participants pinpointed as necessary for them to learn and grow to their utmost potential in high school.

Relationships are a Prerequisite to Learning. The distilled essence of the findings is that high-school students want and need to feel personally connected to their teachers. While traditional views on education prioritize maximizing learning by increasing instructional time and other academic-focused initiatives, my findings underscored the invaluable influence of prioritizing human relationships. During focus group interviews, all student participants agreed that teenagers learn more in classes when they have a relationship with their teacher. Most participants agreed that teenagers cannot learn from a teacher they do not like, and it is difficult to learn from teachers they feel they do not know. A reoccurring statement from participants was that building a relationship with a teacher helps them see the teacher as a human with a whole life outside of school. Vice versa, when teachers build relationships with each student, getting to know them holistically, teenagers feel special, comfortable, and motivated. Teenagers have the desire to know their teacher and to have their teacher know them, allowing each party to see the humanness of the other. The educational environment created by relationship-building educators provides a powerful foundation of trust, inspiration, and togetherness that allows for learning and growth for all.

One possible explanation for the influence of relationships on learning is John Hattie's research on the factors influencing student achievement. The teacher-student relationship has one of the strongest positive correlations of all the factors that impact students' learning the most (Corwin, 2018). Hattie's work supports the possible universality of my study's finding that good teachers prioritize building relationships with students because such relationships pave the way for learning to occur. Martin Seligman's theory of positive psychology further explains why relationships may be a prerequisite to learning. Seligman's PERMA model indicates that for humans to operate to their maximum potential, they require positive emotions, engagement,

relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman, 2018). The model suggests that students who feel fulfilled in these areas will be in the best possible position to learn. During this study's focus group interview, participants were asked to relate each teacher quality to one component of the PERMA model, answering the question: Why do you think that teacher quality is so impactful for teenagers? Which component of the PERMA model does it fulfill? Participants placed "Builds Relationships" under all five PERMA categories. Students explained that having a close and positive connection with their teacher makes them feel good (Positive Emotions), pay attention in class (Engagement), like their teacher (Relationships), feel purposeful and motivated (Meaning), and want to succeed and make their teacher proud (Achievement). If the student-teacher relationship fulfills all five components of well-being and readies students for learning, these connections must become more of a priority in high schools.

Good Teachers are Established by Who They Are, Not What They Do. A second interpretation of this study's findings relates to the type of teacher qualities high-school students discussed while sharing their lived experiences with good teachers. Of the fourteen qualities of good teachers (this study's themes/subthemes), thirteen were personality traits describing a teacher's way of being. Only one quality related to teaching methodology: their preference for non-traditional methods. This finding is notable because it contradicts common practices. While instructional strategies, teaching techniques, and curricula comprise most teacher-training and professional-development content, narratives from student participants in this study contained little to no mention of these topics. When asked about their positive and impactful memories of school and teachers, students did not discuss specific assignments, basals, strategies, content, or projects. Instead, students recalled the way teachers made them feel and how teachers, by example, showed them what their own lives could be like someday. When students discussed

good teachers, they spoke about individuals who gave them hope. Learning that high-school students are impacted more by who their teachers are than what their teachers do in the classroom questions the current landscape of educational systems in their core priorities and in how they train teachers.

My finding corroborates the infamous work of the father of hermeneutic phenomenology, Max van Manen. Van Manen (1999) highlighted the vitalness of understanding the good teacher phenomenon, calling it the untapped domain holding the secrets to what is missing in educational research and teacher education programs. He stated that a good teacher is comprised of their immeasurable way of being with students, providing a possible explanation for my participants' focus on who teachers were rather than what they did. Although this field of research is challenging because it is abstract, personal, laborious, and often contradicts traditional ways of thinking, this qualitative knowledge could be the key to shaping outstanding educators and transforming secondary schools.

Schools Must Either “Get with the Times” or “Get Left Behind.” A third interpretation of this study's findings is that students want schools and teachers to embrace change. Each generation of students brings new interests, ideas, values, needs, and opportunities. To best prepare them for their world, educational institutions must adjust accordingly. Nevertheless, student participants reported feeling that schools and teachers ignore their generational differences by sticking to outdated, decade-old practices. For example, Michelle explained, “I'm well aware that I like school so much because I'm one of the lucky ones whose brain works the way the public education system wants our brains to work. The school system was historically built for people like me, and it's not made for any other kind of person, and that's not okay. We need serious change.” Even teenagers who thrive in school notice that, for

many people, public education is irrelevant and ineffective. Today's high-school students seek relevancy, innovation, flexibility, discussion, and thinking critically. As the world changes with each generation, public education maintains the status quo. The inability of many public schools to "get with the times" may be one potential factor contributing to the problem this study ultimately set out to address. Perhaps the overwhelmingly negative perceptions that high-school students have toward school are due, in part, to the misalignment between the educational system and the interests and uniqueness of the current generation. The stagnancy of brick-and-mortar education could also factor into the increased enrollment in alternative school settings, including cyber schools, charter schools, and homeschooling. In this way, unchanging public schools risk being "left behind."

Empirical research exploring the outdated nature of educational institutions supports my student participants' assertions. Obiakor (2000) analyzed obsolete perceptions of the quality of schools and teachers that still largely considered test scores and unrealistic expectations of perfectionism. Furthermore, Souto-Manning (2019) discussed how many aspects of school systems still reflect traditional preferences of the dominant culture, ignoring changes in and respect for diversity. "Getting with the times" requires more than a one-time change or upgrade. What teenagers expressed, and what preexisting research supports, is the need for schools and teachers to become ever-changing, embracing the newness that each year and generation brings so that schools become relevant, informed, fluid learning environments that are in touch with the world outside its four walls.

Student Voice = Student Empowerment. One final, mentionable interpretation from the findings of this study is that high-school students become empowered when adults ask and listen to what they have to say. During their individual interviews, each student participant mentioned

in some way their surprise and sincere gratitude to tell their stories and share their thoughts, experiences, and ideas. For instance, when one participant expressed that good teachers listen to students, I replied, “Wow. When I hear you say that, it sounds so simple.” The student, Benjamin, responded, “Yeah, what we want and need really is that simple, but no one ever asks us.” In recent years, student voice has become a hot topic in educational research (Conner, 2022; Mayes et al., 2021). My study supports the value of seeking student voice to empower students because it shows the invaluable and rich insight that results. Instead of educational leaders discussing and deciding what students want and need, the key is to invite students to the table and listen. Then, leaders have accurate data for decision-making, and students become active partners in their education.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study have implications for policy and practice related to high-school students’ positive experiences in high school and the qualities they feel make good teachers. First, this section discusses policy implications, offering specific policies, laws, or regulations relevant to school, district, state, or federal entities. Second, this section discusses implications for practice, specifically practices applicable to this study’s population and site.

Implications for Policy

This study’s findings imply that professional development for educators should be reconsidered and redesigned. Instead of focusing solely on specific teaching techniques or classroom strategies, professional development should address what students say is important. Thus, professional learning topics should include building relationships with students, self-care for educators, getting with the times of the current generation, and strategies for collecting and using student-voice data. Furthermore, this study implies that students should be invited to join

decision-making teams at all levels. High-school students are eager to share their thoughts and ideas and become empowered when given the chance. Teams that discuss state-level initiatives, district-level policies, and building-level decisions must include student participants because their insight is indispensable as the end-users of educational institutions. A decision made or plan created for students without the input of students themselves overlooked the most relevant and useful type of data.

Implications for Practice

The primary implications for practice focus on strategies for continuously improving all high-school students' experiences with school. First, time for teachers and students to build relationships should be intentionally designated. Due to the power of the teacher-student relationship on student outcomes, time spent on building connections is not time wasted or taken away from learning. Conversely, once connections are established, learning will be more present, more impactful, and more memorable for students because relationships are the foundation for learning. A second recommendation for practice is exploring non-traditional teaching methodologies. Although it may be easier for teachers to continue using lesson plans from the last twenty years, high-school students crave newness and relevancy. Strategies such as incorporating technology, gamifying classrooms, designing group projects, or trying something new offer students a much-needed break from the monotony of a day full of lectures. Embedding non-traditional learning opportunities can change high-school students' negative perceptions toward school. Third, this study's data collection methods show how schools can implement systematic student voice procedures. Specifically, high schools can establish senior exit interviews. Like exit interviews for employees leaving a business, senior exit interviews invite students at the end of their high-school journeys to reflect on their experiences. Unique to each

school, this authentic feedback may be the data needed for schools to improve what they do and remember why they do it.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

Martin Seligman's positive psychology theory and PERMA model provided the conceptual framework for this study (Seligman, 2018). This study validated the PERMA model by confirming the existence of the five components of well-being in high-school students' most positive lived experiences. My findings extended the theory by discovering an educational purpose for the PERMA model. Not only can the PERMA model help individuals conceptualize and evaluate what is present and missing in their lives, but the PERMA model can also help members of a school community conceptualize and evaluate what is present and missing in schools. This new use of the PERMA model provides school leaders with a positive, proactive lens to inform school improvement. Such a framework can ultimately lead to a growth mindset and mental model all school community members share.

Max van Manen's research on hermeneutic phenomenology provided the foundation for future research exploring the good teacher phenomenon. In his original research, van Manen (1999) suggested that universally good teachers are fair, patient, committed, approachable, and kind. Such empirical work is supported and reinforced by the findings of my study; however, my study dove deeper into the good teacher phenomenon by asking students to describe their positive experiences and utilizing the PERMA model to understand why those qualities are impactful for high-school-aged students. The similarities between van Manen's findings and mine showcase the universality of the personality traits perceived as good in educators. The differences between van Manen's and my study's findings imply that student populations evolve as the world evolves. There will always be a need for empirical research that explores the good

teacher phenomenon because it may differ by generation, geographic location, etc. Schools that routinely collect and utilize student-driven data will best serve their students.

This study also echoes the value of focus groups for qualitative data collection. This methodological approach yielded rich conversation, debate, and discussion among same-aged peers, allowing them to share insights from their individual interviews while constantly comparing and finetuning their thoughts and ideas in a collaborative environment. My study builds upon the common uses of focus groups by shedding light on newer, more innovative uses. First, my focus groups modeled best teaching practices by providing opportunities for hands-on collaboration and utilizing chunking, or breaking educational time into smaller instruction/activity segments. For example, participants were given index cards for each teacher quality they deemed essential during their individual interviews. Participants were tasked with collaboratively combining their teacher qualities, resulting in one group list of qualities they believe make good teachers.

Second, my focus groups acted as an additional layer of thematic analysis in which student participants analyzed their data utilizing the conceptual framework. During focus groups, I provided participants with a mini-lesson on the PERMA model. Then, I tasked the group with placing each teacher-quality notecard under the PERMA component that the quality reinforces. I added this analytical activity to my focus groups to safeguard against subjectivity, ensuring that my research showcases my participants' voices, not mine. By allowing participants to help analyze and make sense of their qualitative data, researchers further empower the communities whom they wish to serve. This new, collaborative approach to focus groups is coined the ASE (Active, Scholastic, Experiential) Method. ASE Focus Groups utilize best teaching practices to collect truly student-driven data, emphasizing participants' hands-on engagement, embedding an

educational component in which participants learn and use new knowledge to analyze, and prioritizing the interactive process planned and guided by the researcher, but led by the participants themselves.

Limitations and Delimitations

Three key limitations of this study must be highlighted for readers' consideration. First, the demographic makeup of Lincoln Jr/Sr High School is largely homogeneous. At the time of the study, 98% of the student population was White/Caucasian, 60% were economically disadvantaged, and the surrounding communities were vastly rural. The homogeneity of the research site is a limitation of the study because its results cannot be generalized to other schools whose demographic makeup may differ. However, phenomenological research aims not to generalize findings but to understand the lived experiences of a small sample of individuals. The second limitation is that participants were self-selected, meaning that students volunteered to participate. Self-selected participants can be a limitation because the researcher does not control or balance the sample. Nevertheless, all eligible students were invited to participate. The third limitation is the lack of a definitional consensus on the phenomenon of "good teacher." In other words, when students were asked about lived experiences with good teachers, some may have considered admirable and impactful teachers. In contrast, others might have selected teachers who were kind and comforting. Nevertheless, this lack of definitional consensus aided the purpose of this phenomenological study. This study intentionally allowed students' voices to define good teachers and what qualities made them "good."

Selecting a hermeneutic rather than a transcendental phenomenological approach was a delimitation of this study. While researchers bracket themselves out of transcendental studies, I knew that my educational experiences, expertise, and passion were too influential not to be

involved. Hermeneutic phenomenology enabled me to become a human instrument in my research as I co-constructed meaning alongside my student participants. A second delimitation was selecting only students who were eighteen years of age. I made this decision because high-school seniors, at the end of their high-school experience, could be the most reflective of their lived experiences with school and teachers. Another delimitation of this study was my professional relationship with the student participants as their school counselor. I chose to utilize students in my high school as participants because of the qualitative nature of my study. In qualitative studies, establishing rapport with participants is critical so they feel comfortable speaking openly and at length during interviews. Because of my connection with students at Lincoln Jr/Sr High School, many seniors were willing to participate, all participants completed each data collection procedure, and the data collected was abundant and rich.

Recommendations for Future Research

Quantitative studies that further explore the findings of this study are recommended. For instance, a quantitative study can validate the universality of the teacher qualities deemed essential by my study's small participant sample. If large samples of high-school students agree with the teacher qualities, this finding could be generalized to more than Lincoln Jr/Sr High School. Another recommendation for a quantitative study is to validate the relationship between variables such as the teacher-student relationship and students' readiness to learn or the implementation of student feedback procedures and students' feelings of empowerment.

For future qualitative studies, a longitudinal study is recommended. As my study provided a snapshot of the perceptions of my participants during their senior year of high school, a longitudinal study can explore if and how those perceptions change over time. Do individuals feel similarly about what made good teachers one, three, five, or ten years after high school, or

do their perceptions change? Another recommendation for future qualitative research is replicating this study in different environments. For example, researchers can strategically select schools with different student populations and consider how those differences impact student response. What differences exist between rural and urban schools, between low-SES and high-SES populations, or between ninth versus twelfth-grade students? Inspired by the findings of my study, there is no limit to the questions or perspectives yet to be explored.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore high-school students' positive lived experiences with school and their perceptions of the qualities that make good teachers. After conducting a literature review and framing this study with Martin Seligman's theory of positive psychology and his PERMA model, I developed a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. Data were collected and triangulated through individual interviews, focus group interviews, and student questionnaires. The data were analyzed and synthesized into four overarching themes that described high-school students' lived experiences of the qualities that make a good teacher: Respectable, Engaging, Personable, and Compassionate. The most important takeaways from this study are that schools can maximize learning by prioritizing relationships and embracing student voice. Educators, especially educational leaders, are constantly involved in school improvement conversations. My study suggests that to have the most direct and consequential impact on school improvement, students must be at the table.

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Appendix A

IRB Application

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 13, 2023

Carissa Flook
Breck Perry

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1232 Exploring High-School Students' Positive Lived Experiences with School and Their Perceptions of Qualities that Make Good Teachers: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Carissa Flook, Breck Perry,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Recruitment Letter

Dear Seniors of Lincoln Jr/Sr High School,

As a student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in curriculum and instruction. The purpose of this study is to understand and analyze the positive experiences that high-school seniors have had throughout their high-school years, pinpointing what those experiences are like and what qualities students look for in what they consider “good” teachers. I am reaching out to you, the senior class, to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older and have attended public school from ninth through twelfth grade. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in one individual interview, one focus group interview, and answer a one-item questionnaire. It should take approximately one hour for the individual interview, one hour for the focus group, and five minutes for the questionnaire. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

Attached to this recruitment letter is the study’s informed consent form. If you are interested in participating after hearing about this research, please take the informed consent form home and discuss participation with your parents/guardians. To participate, the informed consent form, with your signature and a parent/guardian signature, must be handed to Ms. Flook by Friday, May 5th, 2023, at 3:00 PM. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the study. Contact me at [REDACTED] if you have any additional questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Carissa Flook
PhD Candidate
Liberty University

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Title of Project: Exploring High-School Students' Positive Lived Experiences with School and their Perceptions of Qualities that Make Good Teachers: A Phenomenological Study

Principal Investigator: Carissa Flook, Doctoral candidate at Liberty University, School of Education

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age and have attended a public school for all four years of high school. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about, and why is it being done?

This study explores high-school students' positive experiences and their perceptions of the qualities that make good teachers. This study is being done because students' feelings toward school are overwhelmingly negative, which leads to negative experiences for both students and teachers. The purpose of this study is to understand and analyze the positive experiences that high-school seniors have had throughout their high-school years, pinpointing what those experiences are like and what qualities students look for in what they consider "good" teachers.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in an in-person, audio-recorded, individual interview that will last no more than an hour.
2. Participate in an in-person, audio-recorded focus group that will last no more than an hour.
3. Complete a one-question Google Form questionnaire.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study include:

- Having a voice in school improvement efforts
- Sharing personal experiences and ideas for change
- Feeling empowered and connected
- Practicing interview/communication skills
- Experiencing what it is like to be a part of research

Benefits to society include:

- Improving schools so that all students can feel happier and more positive/successful

- Informing educators about what students actually want and need

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others, I will be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group. Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and any hardcopy records will be shredded. Audio recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

Is the researcher in a position of authority over participants, or does the researcher have a financial conflict of interest?

The researcher serves as a school counselor at Lincoln Jr./Sr. High School. To limit potential or perceived conflicts, students will only become participants voluntarily, as they feel comfortable. The school counselor does not assign grades or discipline in the school setting, and school counselors operate under a strict code of ethics for confidentiality and student-counselor relationships. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on their decision to participate or not participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Lincoln Jr./Sr. High School. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from the focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Carissa Flook. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Breck Perry, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document as the subject, you are agreeing to be in this study. By signing as a guardian, you are agreeing to allow your child to participate in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Printed Guardian Name

Signature & Date

Signature & Date

Appendix D

Individual Interview Protocol

Begin with sincere thanks for their participation. Give important reminders of the purpose of the study, their rights as a participant, and the limits of confidentiality.

1. Tell me about what your high school years (9th-12th grade) have looked like.
2. Summarize your overall feelings towards school.
3. We all experience teachers that, after we have had them, we say to ourselves, “They were a good teacher!” Think about a teacher who comes to mind when you hear “Good teacher.” Tell me about them.
4. What does it feel like when you are in the classroom of a good teacher?
5. What do good teachers do that make you feel that way?
6. What does it look like when you are in the classroom of a good teacher?
7. What do good teachers do that makes the classroom look that way?
8. What do students (like yourself) do when you are in the classroom of a good teacher?
9. What do good teachers do that cause those behaviors/actions?
10. We have been talking about what it means, in general, to experience a good teacher.

Now, let us get more specific. Name the top three to five qualities that make a good teacher. Take your time!

11. Explain how (each given quality) distinguishes a teacher as good.
12. During this interview, you described in detail what a good teacher means to you. What else would you like to add that is essential to your definition of a good teacher?

End with another thank you for their participation. Remind student of the details of the next step in the process: the focus group!

Appendix E

Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group Interview	
1. Quick Overview	- Dissertation Process & Purpose
2. Group Analysis	- Qualities of Good Teachers
3. Quick Overview	- PERMA Model of Positivity
4. Group Analysis	- Categorize Qualities
5. Agree/Disagree Game	- Common Insights
6. Ending Activities	- Flook Sharing Out & Google Form

Quick Overview

Dissertation Process & Purpose

- My Purpose
- Future Opportunities

Group Analysis

Qualities of Good Teachers

- You have the qualities from your list on pieces of paper
- As a TEAM, condense all of your qualities into ONE list
- Decisions
 - Can many similar answers be condensed into one?
 - Are there any qualities that are not universal for all students?
 - Are there qualities that ONE person thought of but you all agree with?
- Ending result should be a universal list for qualities that make a good high-school teachers (colored index cards)

Quick Overview

PERMA Model

5 main factors that contribute to each human's wellbeing (aka- quality life)

Group Analysis

Categorizing Qualities

- Using the list of qualities you just created (index cards), now categorize the qualities by PERMA categories
- Example
 - Quality - Understanding
 - Question - Why is being an understanding teacher so good for us? Does it lead to our desire of Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, or Achievements?
- Discuss and place on associated poster
 - If we can't pick between two, we can make a second index card

Agree/Disagree

To Common Insights from Individual Interviews

- Listen to the statement.
- Walk to the "Agree" or "Disagree" sides of the room based on if the statement describes your experiences or not!

Thank students again for attending and participating in the focus group. Remind students of the details of the final step: the student questionnaire!

Appendix F

Questionnaire

Google Form Directions

After the in-depth discussion and reflection during your individual and focus group interviews, the last task is to directly answer the central research question. Read the question below, type your response in the box provided, and submit the Google Form by Friday, June 2nd, 2023, at 3:00 PM.

Google Form Question

From your lived experiences, what do you feel are the essential qualities of “good teachers?” List the qualities.

Appendix G

Site Approval



June 7, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

At the April 11, 2023, Board Meeting, the Southern Tioga School Board approved Carissa Flook to do her dissertation research at North Penn Liberty High School.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Thompson, PCSBA
Business Manager/Board Secretary

Learner Driven Endless Possibilities Empowered Engaged Innovative Connected Learner Driven Endless Possibilities Empowered Engaged Innovative Connected Learner Driven Endless Possibilities

Southern Tioga School District Administration Office
310 Morris Street, Blossburg PA 16912
(570) 638-2183 (570) 638-2184 FAX (570) 638-3512

Appendix H

Audit Trail

Raw Data	Individual and focus group interviews were audio-recorded using two electronic devices. Audio files were uploaded to and stored via the researcher's Otter account. The Otter account and the researcher's electronic devices were always password-protected. The researcher's physical notebook with notes and research-related documents were stored in a locked filing cabinet.
Data Analysis	Interview audio files were transcribed using Otter.ai on a password-protected computer. Interview transcriptions were then printed and stored in the researcher's physical notebook, stored in a locked filing cabinet. Level 1 Structural Coding occurred by hand on transcripts. Level 2 Pattern Coding occurred using a Google Sheet.
Data Synthesis	Data synthesis produced thematic codes from the pattern codes. The Data Synthesis Google Sheet was protected on the researcher's password-protected Google Folder on her password-protected computer.
Process Notes	Physical process notes were maintained in the researcher's physical notebook, stored in a locked cabinet. Digital process notes were maintained using Google Sheets, stored in a password-protected Google Folder.
Materials Relating to Intentions and Dispositions	Signed consent forms for each participant were collected, consolidated, and kept in the researcher's physical notebook. The notebook is secured in a locked cabinet at all times.
Other	Documents such as IRB approval, site approvals, interview protocols, and student questionnaire responses were uploaded and stored digitally on the researcher's password-protected Google Folder on her password-protected computer. All digital and physical documents will be destroyed after three years.