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An Investigation Into The Traits Of And Strategies Used By Highly Effective Teachers

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AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE TRAITS OF AND STRATEGIES USED BY HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the traits of and strategies used by highly effective teachers. Two research questions were presented in this study: What are the traits of highly effective teachers? and What strategies are used by highly effective teachers? Elementary school principals in the Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation in Evansville, Indiana, were asked to recommend one to two highly effective teachers. After a thorough review of principal recommendations, participants were considered based upon gender, years of experience, and grade level or subject area taught. Once the participant selection process concluded, dates for six onsite classroom observations and teacher interviews were determined. The classroom observation began at the start of the teacher work day and ended at the time identified by each participant. This study generated a collection of personality traits commonly demonstrated by six highly effective teachers. Additionally, this study simultaneously identified and presented instructional strategies that were commonly used among the participants. Common themes emerged from the data providing insight as to the personality traits of and strategies used by the highly effective teachers. Specifically, 16 traits were presented in this study and grouped into four categories: work ethic, instructional demeanor, disposition, and attitude. Additionally, several instructional strategies were observed during this study; instructional strategies commonly used by the six highly effective teachers were presented in four themes that included preventative maintenance and classroom design, engagement, differentiation, and delivery of instruction. The data gathered from this study will serve many purposes including the hiring of

teachers, a guide for teachers to improve performance, and a guide for school district leaders as they plan professional development opportunities.

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you both with every ounce of my being and it is important that you understand the sky is the limit. You can accomplish anything you can imagine!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Every profession relies on the influence of an effective teacher. Highly effective teachers can have a phenomenal impact upon the achievement of an individual student. According to Stronge (2013), "among the factors within our control as educators, teachers offer the greatest opportunity for improving the quality of life of our students" (p. 17). The most successful teachers have the ability to lead the most challenged learner to success and simultaneously set the stage for learning in future educational settings. Research supports the positive long-term effects a child may experience when matched with an effective teacher, as well as the potential for failure among those students who were assigned to an ineffective teacher (Jordan, Mendro, & Weerasinghe, 1997; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Teacher effectiveness is the most important factor in student growth, stronger than income, class size, race, or family educational background (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Society has created the image, and a very general sense, of what it takes to be a quality teacher. On occasion, teachers are awarded the status of highly effective after demonstrating surface level behaviors. Historical studies that utilized the *black box* approach have been known to consider teachers more for who they were than what they did (Marzano, 2009).

Traditionally, the government has set very low standards for identifying quality teachers. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), revised in 2001, referred to as No Child

Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2002) required schools across America to ensure educators met *highly qualified* status as an effort to improve student achievement. The U.S. Department of Education later reviewed the effectiveness of the highly qualified clause and contended that meeting this requirement was not enough to raise student achievement. The report compiled by the U.S. Department of Education in 2006-2007 revealed that 94% of all public school classes were being taught by highly qualified teachers; however, student achievement gains did not occur (Reed, 2010). Since 2002, state education departments have shifted from identifying effective teachers by their ability to pass the teachers' licensure exams and obtain specific credentials to analyzing student performance on standardized assessments. The NCLB ensured teacher qualifications, but were other elements of what it takes to be an *effective* teacher considered? Simply completing the High, Objective, Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE) may qualify an individual for highly qualified status; however, to be considered highly effective, an individual must accomplish far greater tasks (Teacher Center, 2013).

The future of our country is dependent upon on the emergence of highly effective teachers into classrooms as school corporations experience the rush of retirees. The *baby boomers* who make up the majority of the current teacher force are retiring and the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) predicted that 1.72 million teachers will retire within the next decade (NCTAF, 2009). A reasonable question asked by school districts is, "How do we find and retain the best?" In many situations teachers are hired after participating in a short interview which may not be indicative of potential performance. There are several traits that might predict an individual's ability to serve as an effective teacher; however, there is always a risk factor when selecting candidates based solely upon an interview.

One issue that cannot be neglected is the urgent need to place the most highly effective individuals in every classroom across the United States. Published literature reveals that highly successful individuals often demonstrate specific personal traits. Covey (1989) stated that the separation between those people who are highly effective and those who are not is their ability to have a vision, and then support that vision. Collins (2001) described the traits of many of the top CEOs of the century as modest and humble, willful and fearless. Studying the personal traits of an individual can pose a challenge because they are somewhat difficult to measure. Studying specific inputs teachers bring to the classroom can be simple to measure; however, Goldhaber (2002) reported that only about 3% of the contribution teachers made to student learning were associated with teacher experience, degree attained, and other readily observable characteristics. The remaining 97% of their contribution was associated with qualities or behaviors that could not be isolated and identified (Goldhaber, 2002). Understanding the identifiable traits of and strategies used by highly effective teachers can assist with the teacher interview process and reducing the odds that a teacher who is less effective will be selected.

This study investigated the personality traits demonstrated by highly effective teachers. Studies examining the personality traits possessed by highly effective teachers occurred as early as 1932 when Bell (1932) investigated teacher traits in an effort to influence teacher training programs. Hamacheck (1975) described highly effective teachers:

> They are human in the fullest sense of the word. They have a sense of humor, are fair, empathetic, more democratic than autocratic, and apparently more able to relate easily and naturally to students on either a one to one or group basis. (p. 341)

Lanouette (2012) highlighted 10 traits highly effective teachers possess, which include (a) mobile (b) organized, (c) patient, (d) challenging, (e) adaptive, (f) syntactic, (g) passionate, (h)

interactive, (i) serious, and (j) caring. The personality traits of highly effective teachers may be directly linked to the classroom; however, some of the identified traits can be found among individuals of various professions. Acknowledging the traits possessed by highly effective teachers may ignite a level of awareness among pre- and in-service teachers, providing each an opportunity to enhance or build these desirable traits.

Another aspect of this study was to examine the strategies used by highly effective teachers. Recent mandates on increased student learning could prompt teachers to re-examine the instructional approach they deploy in their classrooms. In combination with the newly adopted Common Core State Standards and high stakes placed upon standardized test results, teachers are left with little room for error. The historical approach to teaching regarded the transmission of information to students by the teacher as best practice. Levine (2010) described the urgency for change in the classroom: "The economic shift has produced and even greater change in schooling. Industrial economies are common processes, and our schools represent the best-known product of the industrial era: the assembly line" (p. 20). There is an urgency to match the needs of society with strategies being implemented in the classroom. Classrooms must equip students with skills that may never have been considered decades ago; if teaching strategies are not modified, student learning may be jeopardized. Highly effective teachers can be the catalyst for learning; however, it is important to understand what it is they do in order to reach success with all students, including the most challenged learner.

A plethora of research and literature focuses on the strategies used by the most effective teachers, including Danielson's (2007) framework for good teaching, which included 22 components of good teaching that fit into four domains: "(a) planning and preparation, (b) the classroom environment, (c) instruction, and (d) professional responsibilities" (para. 1). Lemov

(2010) identified 49 teaching techniques of highly effective teachers; Burgess (2012) and Whitaker (2012) offered recipes for effective teaching.

In a study conducted by Wang, Heartel, and Walberg (1993/94), researchers analyzed a knowledge base comprising 11,000 statistical findings, connecting a variety of variables and student achievement. Twenty-eight categories emerged from this study and were ranked in order from the most to least influential upon student learning. Results from this study revealed that classroom management ranked first as being the most influential variable, followed by metacognitive processes, such as planning and monitoring effectiveness, and cognitive processes, consisting of a level of academic knowledge in subject area taught (Wang et al., 1993/94). Additional studies by Hattie (2003) suggested that teachers' practices inside the classrooms have not only a statistical but also a practical significance on student learning; such practices include providing formative assessments, acceleration, teacher clarity, feedback, and teacher–student relationship. In order to make the hiring of new teachers a successful process, school officials should be aware of the strategies commonly used by highly effective teachers and follow up with candidates who refer to these strategies during interview dialogue. During this time of change, one must examine the elements necessary to create the highly effective teacher, determine what it takes to be an agent of change, and lead every child to his or her highest potential.

Statement of the Problem

The expectations placed upon the classroom teacher have change dramatically since the beginning of the 21st century. In general, students enter school with unique learning needs that must be met in order to learn and progress. What is it that the most successful teacher does to reach all students? If the traits of and strategies used by highly successful teachers can be

identified and replicated, then it would be possible that multiple factors affecting student learning could be impacted by the results of this study. Uncovering the traits of and strategies used by highly effective teachers may assist with the teacher hiring process, planning for professional development, designing teacher evaluation tools, and for individuals who want to improve their teaching practice.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine traits of and strategies used by highly effective teachers. This study provides further guidance on criteria that may be observable in a teacher candidate, may assist district and school leaders in setting expectations for experienced teachers, and in some cases, may improve overall teacher quality. The motivation for this study was to determine what the best teachers do to lead all students to success by considering observed personality traits of each highly effective teacher. It is possible that the participants of this study demonstrated specific personality traits that may be significant components contributing to successful teaching. Furthermore, this study investigated specific instructional strategies that may be used within the classroom of the highly effective teacher. This study took place in the Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation (EVSC) and in the classroom of each participant. An analysis was prepared in order to determine traits of and strategies used by highly effective teachers at the elementary school level; an examination of how and when strategies are implemented was also included in this analysis. Teacher background information such as gender, age, race, years of experience, and grade level or subject area taught was considered when selecting participants for this study.

Significance of the Study

This study investigated the traits of and strategies used by highly effective teachers. Through a combination of classroom observation and interviews, this study could provide an understanding of what makes the highly effective teacher successful. Additional data were obtained and included information pertaining to teacher lesson plans, classroom procedures and expectations, teacher newsletters, daily schedules, communication tools, and curriculum. The results of this study could support the hiring process of teacher candidates and improve the practice of those individuals who are currently teaching.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the traits of highly effective teachers?
2. What strategies are used by highly effective teachers?

Limitations

1. Teachers within the Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation (EVSC) were recommended by their school principals. This study did not take into account the expertise, experience, or leadership ability of the school administrator who recommended teachers for the study. Some teachers may have felt intimidated by the process.
2. A timeline for this study was not specified, which could have impacted the data collected. For example, the interviewed participants could have responded differently to the interview questions if asked at the beginning of the school year compared to the middle of the school year.

3. There was a potential risk that principals may have recommended individuals based on their relationship with the teacher.

Delimitations

1. The teachers who were selected to participate in this study were considered to be highly effective based on principal recommendation.
2. The interviews and observations took place only at the elementary level and may have included general education, related arts, and special education teachers.

Personal Statement

My experiences have provided me with an opportunity to work directly with many highly effective teachers, as a fellow teacher and then as an elementary school principal. During my first three years of teaching, I worked as a third-grade teacher in a large public school, with a team of 12 other experienced teachers. Throughout this teaching experience, I had the opportunity to observe multiple teaching techniques as well as the personality traits that were connected to particular individuals on the grade level team. I relocated to another part of the country where I then began teaching first grade at a small parochial school; I transitioned from a team of 13 to a team of one. During this year of teaching first grade, I gained a perspective of how difficult teaching can be when the opportunity to collaborate is eliminated. I taught first grade for only one year before accepting a position as principal at another small parochial school, located in a different community. As a first-year principal, I sought to ensure quality curriculum and learning for 90 students and supervise seven teachers, who collectively had nearly 150 years of experience. In addition to the academic responsibilities of this position, I was expected to manage a limited budget, supervise a custodial staff of two and a cafeteria staff of two, plus maintain positive and healthy relationships with parents and church members. After three years

in this position, I was motivated to take on a new and challenging role with a larger school corporation. For the past six years, I have worked in diverse elementary school that serves nearly 400 students; 85% of these students receive free or reduced lunch; however, this is not a Title I building.

Many challenges arise when a school's demographic requires high-level needs in multiple areas such as academically, social and emotionally, and financially. The school administrator and leadership team must be creative when providing students with basic needs and solid academic foundation for a transient population. The teachers who currently teach at my school maintain an average of 15 years of experience. Historically there is little turnover, and most teachers have been at our school for multiple years; they are driven by the goal of improving the quality of learning for all children.

For several years now, my responsibilities have included implementing and monitoring the work conducted within professional learning communities, and implementing and facilitating Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) and Response to Intervention (RTI.) Alongside my leadership team, we have worked to develop a school-wide reading block that includes the essential elements of a core literacy program. I have been involved in the Datawise process, curriculum mapping, and school improvement plan. All of these experiences have helped to shape my interpretation of a quality school that offers each student with the best educational experience.

I believe there is more to highly effective teaching than what I have experienced throughout my time as an educator. Conducting this qualitative study allowed me to explore optional ways of effective teaching with the intent of uncovering strategies that have not been highly publicized and to confirm the consistent traits and strategies that have been identified

throughout past studies. I believe the results of this study will help teacher recruiters and administrators accurately identify prospective teacher candidates. Furthermore, teachers and principals already working in the profession can review this study and shift current practice as it works for them. This study also serves as a launch pad for others interested in studying the dynamic teacher and the orchestration that takes place within the classroom each day.

Definitions of Key Terms

Elementary school teacher, for purposes of this study, is one who instructs students between the grade levels of kindergarten through sixth grade.

Highly effective teacher, for the purposes of this study, is one who has been identified by his or her principal as being highly effective.

Traits, for the purposes of this study, are personality dispositions demonstrated by the elementary school teacher.

Strategies, for the purposes of this study, are the actions conducted in the classroom, during the school day, by elementary school teachers.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This review of literature examined related research conducted in multiple areas of study. The first area reviews the definition of the highly effective teacher and research that supports this term. "Educational leaders need to be able to identify the strongest teachers in order to recruit, retain them and assign them to the students who need their expertise the most" (Haycock & Hanushek, 2010, p. 49). It is equally important that an understanding of effective teaching be understood by all school administrators and this understanding be reinforced in teacher education programs.

The second portion of this review of literature examined past studies that explored the personality traits associated with highly effective teachers. In a review of highly effective teachers in Hamilton County, Tennessee, Carter (2003) investigated 100 teachers, including 32 elementary schools, throughout an 18-month period. A community congruence scale and interview was conducted with each teacher, which revealed the importance of showing compassion and caring for students. The teachers reported that in order to be effective one must love working with children, maintain flexibility, and possess excellent management skills and enthusiasm (Carter, 2003). Why is it important to identify personality traits associated with highly effective teachers? Additional studies conducted by Stronge, Ward, Tucker, and Hindman (2008) found there was a difference in the overall personal qualities between effective

and non-effective teachers. Study results revealed that the effective teachers demonstrated more respect and caring for students than did the less-effective teachers, "Effective teachers use care and respect to build relationships with their students that are conducive to academic learning" (Stronge et al., 2008, p. 61). The urgency for increased student performance is at its peak; educators cannot ignore the importance of creating a positive relationship before learning expectations are placed upon students. Do all teachers have the capabilities of developing a positive relationship with students? Do particular personality traits support the connection between student and teacher? This study explored the personality traits of the best teachers and considered the possibility that such traits contribute to increased student performance.

The third area of this literature review investigated the practice of the most successful teacher. In order to closely examine the strategies used by highly effective teachers, a thorough review of past studies and published literature was conducted. The section presented five strategies often associated with highly effective teaching. What are the features in a teacher's daily plan that ignites learning and allows every child in the classroom to be successful? A study conducted by Sanders and Rivers (1996) proved that children who had the most effective teachers three years in a row posted academic achievement gains that were 54% higher than the gains of children who had the least effective teachers three years in a row (as cited in Breaux & Wong, 2003). This section reviewed research that supports the unique practice of the highly effective teacher. Categories to be explored during this section include building relationships, student engagement, differentiated instruction, collaboration, and classroom management. It is important for school administrators to understand the dynamics of a highly effective teacher; equally important is the ability to disregard criteria that does not ensure a candidate's ability to be effective. "A better understanding of what constitutes teacher effectiveness has significant

implications for decision making regarding the preparation, recruitment, compensation, in-service professional development, and evaluation of teachers" (Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011, p. 339).

What is Highly Effective Teaching?

The RISE model, currently implemented in the state of Indiana, considers a teacher to be highly effective when the following has been attained:

> A highly effective teacher consistently exceeds expectations both in terms of student achievement as well as professional contribution to the school or corporation. This is a teacher who has demonstrated excellence, as determined by a trained evaluator, in the domains of Planning, Instruction, and Leadership and whose students, in aggregate, have exceeded expectations for academic growth. (Indiana Department of Education, 2011, p. 8)

In 2001, George W. Bush presented the nation with NCLB (2002) and with this act brought about much change in the world of education. For this reason, it is important to consider research that investigates the highly effective teacher. A portion of this review of literature will clarify the differences and similarities between an effective teacher and a highly-qualified teacher. An investigation of a teacher inquiry group conducted by Nieto (2003) defined highly qualified as noted in the NCLB as "one who has full state certification, or a passing score on a state exam" (p. 387). According to the Department of Education, highly qualified teachers are "those with superior verbal ability and content-matter knowledge who have the ability to use instructional strategies that draw on scientifically-based research, and who are adept and so-called best practices" (Nieto, 2003, p. 387).

Darling-Hammond and Youngs (2002) reported conflicting findings between what it means to be highly qualified versus a highly effective teacher. The authors discussed the Secretary's Annual Report on Teacher Quality of July 2002, citing that "the secretary argues for the dismantling of teacher education systems and redefinition of teacher qualifications to include little preparation for teaching" (Darling-Hammond, & Youngs, 2002, p. 13). Darling-Hammond and Youngs reported the government's frank verbiage, describing the current educational system as *broken* and imposing *burdensome requirements* for education coursework that make up the "bulk of current teacher certification regimes" (p. 1). According to Darling-Hammond and Youngs, being highly qualified means that a teacher will demonstrate high skill in the area of verbal ability and content knowledge, essential but minimal criteria for a highly effective teacher. Furthermore student teaching and field study experiences carry less influence when meeting the criteria for highly qualified status. Darling-Hammond and Youngs reported that "although there is research that finds relationships between student achievement and some measures of verbal ability and content knowledge, there is no evidence that these areas of knowledge are more consequential to student achievement than knowledge of teaching" (p. 18).

Haycock (1998) reported a summary of studies that pointed to the most significant factor in student achievement, the teacher. According to Haycock, specific components set the stage for teacher effectiveness and include strong verbal and math skills and deep content knowledge. Like other researchers, Haycock emphasized the urgency of placing the most talented educators in the schools with the most challenging students and suggested that if the most highly effective teachers are placed in the most troubled and failing schools, a huge decrease in the achievement gap would occur. In another report, Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin (as cited in Wong, 2004) emphasized the importance of the effective teacher:

> The magnitude of the teacher effect is striking. Based on research in Texas, the importance of having an effective teacher instead of an average teacher for four or five years in a row could essentially close the gap in math performance between students from low-income and high-income households. (Wong, 2004, p. 41)

An essay published by University of Memphis professors Thompson, Greer, and Greer (2004) served to improve instructional practice after collecting the opinions of several students of which they had taught. The authors presented the question, "What is it about your favorite teacher that made them teachers from whom you were able to learn?" (Thompson et al., 2004, p. 2). The authors concluded that the responses to this question were not surprising, were supported by recent research in the area of highly effective teaching, and were identified by those characteristics that define a highly qualified teacher. Based on results obtained from this study, Thompson et al. (2004) presented 12 characteristics that were frequently reported by their students in regards to the qualities of a good teacher and included the following: displaying fairness, having a positive outlook, being prepared, using a personal touch, possessing a sense of humor, possessing creativity, admitting mistakes, being forgiving, respecting students, maintaining high expectations, showing compassion, and developing a sense of belonging for students. Among these traits, the authors reported that students repeatedly referred to those teachers who were caring and showed that they cared for the student both academically and personally. Another trait that surfaced on multiple occasions throughout this study was the act of holding high expectations for the students. Those teachers who held to high expectations seemed to have a positive impact and lasting impression on the interviewed students.

Thompson et al. (2004) reviewed research from multiple sources including a study conducted by Rice, which reported five broad categories that represent a highly effective teacher.

According to Rice, teacher attributes that appear to contribute to teacher quality are (a) experience, (b) preparation programs and degrees, (c) type of certification, (d) coursework taken in preparation for the profession, and (e) teachers' own test scores (as cited in Thompson et al., 2004). It is interesting that the five categories presented by Rice included preparation programs and achievement level attained by the teacher; none of the data presented by Rice referred to virtuous characteristics such as caring.

In addition to the findings mentioned above, the study conducted by the team at the University of Memphis described research collected from Berry (2003) that suggested that instructional knowledge and preparation are two qualities teachers must have in order to provide quality instruction. Highly qualified teachers must also know "how to organize and teach their lessons in ways that assure diverse students can learn those subjects. Highly qualified teachers don't just teach well-designed, standards-based lessons; they know how and why their students learn" (Thompson et al., 2004, p. 2).

The terms highly qualified and highly effective are often used interchangeably throughout research. When specifically discussing governmental influence and how a good teacher is defined, highly qualified appears to be the term of choice but may encompass less than the term highly effective. The term highly effective seems to be more frequently used by educational theorists and those working in the teaching field. Being highly qualified helps an individual obtain a teaching job; however, being highly effective may secure a teaching position.

Traits of Highly Effective Teachers

When measuring the effectiveness of a teacher, many factors such as student performance on standardized tests, teacher observations, and teacher qualifications are frequently considered. Teacher evaluation tools often measure the visible actions demonstrated by a teacher, such as

delivery of instruction, level of student engagement, content knowledge and planning, or preparation. In another regard, measuring the characteristics or personality traits of a teacher can be somewhat subjective. As many school districts across the country are experiencing the pressure to increase student performance, it may be worthwhile to investigate the personality traits of teachers. "The positive and negative behaviors exhibited by teachers determine to a great extent their effectiveness in the classroom and, ultimately, the impact they have on student achievement" (Stronge, 2007, p. 115).

A recent study investigated the perspective of the school principal on the qualities of highly effective teachers (Dixon, 2012). A survey was distributed to principals in an urban school district serving 17,000 students, and included 25 elementary schools. The results of this study generated recurring themes from the principals' perspectives and were collapsed into five major descriptors. Highly effective teachers were said to be empathetic, life-long learners, knowledgeable of the content they teach, effective in building relationships, and demonstrated a passion for teaching (Dixon, 2012). The survey responses in this study were few in number; however, they painted a vivid picture of the distinctive qualities identified as strong indicators of highly effective teachers. If the traits of highly effective teachers are identified, then it may be possible that those responsible for the hiring of teachers may be able to seek particular personality traits during the interview process, which can ultimately support the decision to hire.

Stronge (2007) identified multiple traits of highly effective teachers. Among the first trait to be identified is the act of caring. According to Stronge, "caring is defined as an act of bringing out the best in students through affirmation and encouragement" (p. 23), and includes "listening, understanding, and knowing students" (p. 24). Stronge's text considers multiple studies that were performed in order to isolate the traits of highly effective teacher. Aspects

considered in Stronge's text signify that highly effective teachers establish a rapport and credibility with students by emphasizing modeling and practicing fairness and respect. "Respect and equity are identified as the prerequisites of effective teaching in the eyes of students" (Stronge, 2007, p. 25).

In a study conducted by Howard (2008), the perspectives of 10 effective elementary school teachers were investigated. The focus of this study was to determine the perceptions the teachers held in regards to the impact multiple dimensions had upon student success in the elementary classroom. The teachers were considered to be effective based upon successful test scores from students of diverse populations. Multiple dimensions mentioned in this study included professional qualities, efficiency, compassion, passion, and context. Results of this study revealed that the teacher participants believed effective teachers should be able to integrate all five dimensions of teaching into classroom practice. All teachers unanimously agreed that having compassion was the most influential factor on student success. According to Howard, compassion included caring, trust, and respect. The teacher participants in this study agreed that trust and respect are the basis for a relationship-centered framework that motivates students to learn. Subsequent data utilized cross-case analysis to identify predominant themes and overlapping topics. By using this measure, Howard revealed that all 10 teacher participants attributed student success to their ability to effectively manage their classrooms, and that "having students help establish the desired classroom behaviors aided them in assuming responsibility for their actions" (p. 85). In addition, the participants reported to have "successfully managed their classroom by modeling desired behaviors and consistently offering rewards and consequences that had an extrinsic and intrinsic influence on student behavior (Howard, 2008, p. 85). Additional results from Howard's study reported that the teachers perceived having enthusiasm,

an understanding of developmental theories, and experience with instructional skills also contributed to student success. The teachers reported school culture to be impactful upon student success but the least important. Howard (2008) reported that "collaboration may be the single most important factor keeping teachers in the classroom" (p. 79); the teachers in this study reported their personal and professional benefits gained through collaboration.

A study conducted by Murphy, Delli, & Edwards (2004) investigated perspectives of effective teaching based upon responses from 60 second graders, 61 pre-service teachers, and 22 in-service teachers. To measure beliefs about effective teaching, the researchers utilized Tuckman's (1995) feedback form and asked each participant to draw a picture of *good teaching.* Results from this study indicated that the pre-service and in-service teachers' illustrations depicted good teaching from a bird's-eye perspective (possibly indicating that teachers have a global perspective of the classroom), small-group learning with student-centered instruction, and happy students. The pre-service teachers often depicted the teacher who is moving around the classroom and the students and in-service teachers unexpectedly drew classrooms that were teacher-directed or teacher-centered. In order to triangulate data gathered from this study, the participants were given the opportunity to respond to open-ended questions regarding their illustration. When the participants were asked to describe what the teacher in the picture was doing, responses from all three groups were found to be similar; participants described the "good teacher as taking part in active teaching of content, specifically facilitating, guiding, challenging, thinking, and trying to communicate with the students" (Murphy et al., 2004, p. 84). A similar question was asked of the participants in regards to the illustrated student activity; across the groups, it was reported that "students were engaged in the active learning of literacy" (Murphy et al., 2004, p. 85).

Through the exploration of the descriptive data gathered from this study, five characteristics reported by all three groups to be important for effective teaching included being caring, patient, not boring, polite, and organized. There were inconsistencies between beliefs of the three participant groups; however, the second graders and pre-service teachers similarly ranked four of the five characteristics of effective teaching; likewise, the pre-service and in-service teachers similarly ranked four of the five characteristics. Less important characteristics to the groups included being soft spoken, ordinary, and strict. All three participant groups ranked caring as the most important characteristic of effective teaching.

Many sources of research emphasize the traits highly effective teachers demonstrate; however, evidence on how highly effective teachers feel personally and strategies used for self-preservation should also be considered. Turnbull (2013) considered nine habits of highly effective teachers, stating that "one must identify themselves, understanding that our beliefs and values are evident in everything we say and do" (p. 8). According to Turnbull (2013),

> highly effective teachers believe that education has a high moral and social purpose, as well as training for employment, intelligence can be nurtured through learning, everyone is a unique being, if a child does not learn, the teacher has yet to find the key to enable them to learn, and one of the greatest things a teacher can do for a child is encourage good self-esteem. (p. 9)

Turnbull identified effective teachers as having the ability to deal with stress, manage time well, deal with challenges in an assertive manner, understand how to build and manage relationships, listen attentively, and communicate clearly. It is likely that a teacher who takes care of himself or herself personally may shed a more positive light in the classroom, thus demonstrating a variety of personality traits conducive for success in the classroom.

Contrary to what research says about the current best practices in the classroom, Poplin et al. (2011) conducted a study which revealed a teaching approach similar to instruction that may have been observed during the 1980s and was proven to be successful in neighborhoods surrounding Los Angeles. This study included 31 highly effective teachers; 11 participants represented the elementary school level. In the year these teachers were observed, 51% of their students moved up a level on the California Standards Test, 34% maintained their level, and 15% dropped a level (Poplin et al., 2011). The teachers in this study demonstrated characteristics such as strictness, a profound respect for their students, encouragement, optimism, and overall no nonsense, make-it-happen personalities. Teacher participants in this study were responsible, hard-working, emotionally stable, organized, and disciplined. The researchers also reported that teacher participants were energetic, fit, trim, and appeared to be in good health.

Poplin et al. (2011) highlighted the philosophy of the teacher, suggesting that participants believed that every student has more potential than they use, they have not been pushed, and they are responsible for turning the situation around. These teachers do more than hold each student accountable; they also believe that as the teacher, they possess the ability and confidence to lead students to success. Poplin et al.'s account of the traits demonstrated by highly effective teachers and the strategies observed by the 31 teacher participants suggested a different set of strategies to reach student achievement—strategies that are not necessarily thought of as best practice in present day classrooms.

The strategies used by the participants in Poplin et al.'s (2011) study mimicked those that were possibly used decades ago. Teachers were strict, and few constructivist projects took place among students; researchers noted that observed projects often caused irrelevant socializing (Poplin et al., 2011). Teachers were intentional in regard to teaching the standards and state

curriculum; the Open Court curriculum was reported to be used in some classrooms, and the researchers compared teaching strategies to those adapted from Madeline Hunter's sequences: anticipatory set, input, modeling, checking for understanding, guided practice, monitoring, closure, independent practice, and review (Poplin et al., 2011). Although some of the strategies reported from this study seemed to be somewhat outdated, this study proved to link student achievement with best practice of the past. Teachers of this study were also reported to deliver instruction with intensity and smooth transitions. Other findings from this study reported the teachers' frequent movement around the classroom and also noted the teachers' use of monitoring in order to obtain feedback on their instruction. The teachers in this study were explicit with instructions and modeled patience. Researchers in the Poplin et al. study consistently found the teacher participants to have delivered content with energetic presentations that encouraged high-level discussion followed by independent practice.

Strategies Executed by Highly Effective Teachers

Many studies have been dedicated to the investigation of strategies implemented in the classrooms of the best teachers. Some of the strategies used by the most effective teachers are unique, others have been branded; however, many strategies are organic and simple and, when applied correctly, set the stage for success. Five categories of effective teaching strategies are frequently mentioned throughout decades of research and in published literature. These categories often include building relationships, engaging the learner, differentiation, collaborating, and managing the classroom. The five categories presented in this review of literature may help one to understand what it is that highly effective teachers actually *do* in the classroom. Each category may include multiple strategies that, when implemented in a timely manner and for the appropriate reason, can guarantee the success of the most unique learner.

Building Relationships

The best teachers understand that in order for students to succeed academically, one must understand the student. Building a positive relationship with each child can be thought of as making deposits into a checking account. Throughout the year withdrawals between the student and teacher are bound to occur; however, if the appropriate deposits have been made by the teacher, learning and success can continue. Ladson-Billings's (2009) research featured six highly effective teachers. The teachers were different in race, ethnicity, and age; however, the teachers shared two remarkable commonalities. Building relationships with the students was a priority for these teachers; however, extending those relationships into the community ensured student success in the classroom. These teachers experienced success and believed that in order for students to be successful, educators must make an investment within the child, one that goes beyond the school day. Ladson-Billings described these six educators in her book as common figures within the community they taught, attendees of community churches, shoppers at local grocery stores, and family acquaintances. These teachers understood that they must reach out to their students beyond the school day. Bridging the classroom to the community is an effective strategy many successful teachers implement. The teachers that attend after-school events that are important to students seem to connect with the children and develop a mutual respect. Ladson-Billings referenced the mutual respect established between teacher and student but did not discount the high expectations held by each teacher included in her study. According to the work of Ladson-Billings, the students reported to know that their teachers cared about them and had faith in their success. Ladson-Billings focused much of her research upon the success and failure of African American students. When considering the diverse learner, Ladson-Billings (2009) suggested that "those teachers who practice culturally relevant methods not only see

themselves as professionals, but also strongly identify with teaching" (p. 82). By supporting the academic community, teachers encourage a sense of belonging, something young people often crave.

When classroom teachers get to know their students and build a positive rapport, students begin to feel comfortable in the learning environment and eager to go to school each day; it has been reported that respectful relationships are more critical and influential than formal roles and structures (Bowman, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994). According to Peart and Campbell (1999), academic success of at-risk students is enhanced if a personal connection that communicates respect and caring exists between the teacher and the student. Although relationship building can secure the social and emotional connection a child feels towards his or her school, it can also drive decisions about instruction and learning goals for that particular student.

> For teachers to be effective they must get to know each child well. This is obtained through a variety of methods which consist of observation, clinical interview, and examination of the child's work, individual child assessments, and talking with families. Effective teachers will make plans and adjustments to promote each child's individual development and learning. (Tomlinson, 2010, p. 6)

Student Engagement

The effective classroom teacher understands how to engage each student. Marzano, Pickering, and Heflebower (2011) featured several strategies for high engagement. The work from this text implied that the teacher who engages all students successfully leads all students to achievement. As statted by Marzano et al. (2011), "student engagement has long been recognized as the core of effective schooling" (p. 3). Marzano et al. (2011) defined engagement as having positive responses to the following questions: "Is this important?" and "Can I do this?"

(p. 19). On a daily basis, teachers should consider specific engagement strategies to use, prior to every unit of instruction, and have them organized into three categories: "daily strategies, opportunistic strategies, and extended strategies" (Marzano et al., 2011, p. 147). Within each of these three categories, additional strategies can be found and implemented at various rates of frequency. Marzano et al. suggested that an effective teacher will utilize the following strategies on a daily basis: "effective pacing, demonstrating intensity and enthusiasm, building positive teacher-student and peer relationships, and using effective verbal feedback" (p. 148). Opportunistic strategies may be exercised less frequently and naturally fit into upcoming lessons; opportunistic strategies should not be used on daily basis and may consist of the following: "incorporating physical movement, using humor, initiating friendly controversy, presenting unusual information, questioning to increase response rates, connecting to students' ambitions, and teaching self-efficacy" (Marzano et al., 2011, p. 150). Finally, Marzano et al. described extended strategies or opportunities to engage students in activities beyond the classroom. "Teachers who completely engage the learner should utilize all categories of engagement strategies including the extended strategies where students may engage in a school wide projects" (Marzano et al., 2011, p. 154).

Reardon and Derner (2004) described their recipe for success with all levels of learners. The authors described the development of *e-moments* or engaging moments, which last for five to 10 minutes per day. E-moments were created based upon the multiple intelligences, modality, and levels of thinking. "Is it possible that what we experience while learning in formal settings is so unlike our learning in real life that we fail to become engaged" (Reardon & Derner, 2004, p. 9)? The authors defined great teaching when they stated, "One paramount characteristic of great teaching is the facilitation of activities during which learning happens. Great teaching is a series

of purposeful acts, professional judgments, and designed decisions based on experience and theory about how learning happens best" (Reardon & Dearner, 2004, p. 10). In their book, Reardon and Derner reviewed research conducted by Caine and Caine, Jensen, Wolfe, Gardner, Hunter, and Grinder before developing their recipe for brain food. Thirty e-moments with crafty titles such as *Little Professor, Mother Goose, Jeopardy, Hole-in-One,* and *Descartes* targeted several verbal-linguistic, intrapersonal, naturalistic, and visual-spatial skills. "*E-moments* are particularly powerful because they challenge learners to locate patterns. This causes their brains to fit the new information you are presenting into previously activated neural networks" (Reardon & Derner, 2004, p. 11).

Engagement can be more than activities that are teacher or student lead. Often, engagement occurs when students are forced to question their belief system, normal ways of doing things, or perceptions. Finkel challenged the traditional approach to student success. Finkel suggested that one must divert from the traditional approach to teaching to a more student-centered focus. Finkel suggested diverting one's thinking from the stereotypical "good teacher, one who talks, tells, explains, lectures, instructs, and professes" (p. 1) to the thinking that "education should a long-lasting learning that forever alters our grasp of the world, deepening it, widening it, generalizing it, sharpening it" (p. 4). Students of the 21st century must be competitive with their peers across the world. "In the emerging workplace, most students, not just an elite few, must be able find, synthesize, and evaluate information from a wide variety of subjects and sources" (Berry, 2011, p. 3). Educators agree that in order to prepare students for the job market, they must be able to do more than calculate and memorize; teachers must be able to do more than transmit objectives. "Educators must prepare themselves to meet every learner in an expanding educational 'free market' leveraging their teaching skills and knowledge as wise

caring guides who help students through a potentially bewildering world of technology-driven learning opportunities" (Berry, 2011, p. 4).

It is important to consider the strategies that provide students with opportunities to engage and a deeper understanding of the information to be obtained. Finkel (2000) challenged educators to create a learning environment that is inquiry-centered by providing students with the opportunity to investigate and question subject matter. When implementing inquiry-centered learning, teachers link interest to need: "An inquiry centered course focuses not on traditional subject matter but on a problem or question" (Finkel, 2000, p. 54). Finkel explained that the frustration or "disequilibrium" (p. 53) from the disruption of an ongoing interaction with one's world is what truly motivates student learning. Finkel was not alone with his research and theory of engagement, which implies that students must be constantly challenged with their way of thinking. Breaux and Whitaker (2006) explained that the most effective teachers plan for questioning so students are constantly answering and thinking, analyzing, deducing, and comparing. Teachers must remember to acknowledge that student engagement is not always about the child, teachers must also be engaged in the learning. Burgess (2012) suggested that teachers know what they want to teach and determine goals they would like to achieve, before planning a lesson. Burgess encouraged teachers to "create a system to capture ideas, and then use these creative ideas in order develop creative lessons, so interesting you could sell tickets for admittance" (p. 59). Furthermore, Burgess (2012) suggested that in order to engage students all the time, "teachers should commit to being 'on' every period, every day"; furthermore, "teachers should not let what they cannot control affect their effort and enthusiasm" (p. 68).

Differentiating Instruction

The best teachers are likely to differentiate learning for all students. According to Wormeli (2006), differentiation is "a collection of best practices strategically employed to maximize students' learning at every turn, including giving them the tools to handle anything that is undifferentiated" (p. 3). Decades of research proves that "the effective teacher truly believes all students can learn" (Stronge, 2007, p. 29); furthermore, "these teachers believe they must know their students, their subject, and themselves, while continuing to account for the fact that all students learn differently" (Stronge, 2007, p. 29). The literature mentioned in this section of the literature review, as well as published studies, suggested that highly effective teachers understand how to design instruction and simultaneously consider the needs of each individual student. Gentry and Mann (2008) explained that differentiation can maximize student growth by responding to student learning profiles and interests. The authors of the text explained that teachers who differentiate "recognize student commonalities and differences and create tasks that vary by difficulty and match students' achievement levels" (Gentry & Mann, 2008, p. 56). Furthermore, the authors referred to differentiated instruction as a teaching strategy used by educators, one that easily allows teachers to embed challenge, choice, and meaningfulness into lessons while increasing appeal and self-efficacy, factors that increase motivation and form the basis for many curricular and instructional differentiation efforts (Gentry & Gable, 2001; Gentry & Owen, 2004). This text provides readers with a menu of strategies that may increase engagement and student differentiation. The strategies are not a one-size-fits-all list of things teachers must do but a collection of effective practices borrowed from great teachers around the country. The menu includes strategies that "encourage creativity, autonomy, buy-in, interest, quality, strengths, and develop the talent of the student" (Gentry & Mann, 2008, p. 114).

Tomlinson (2010) described strategies for effective teaching and the basis for Tomlinson's work centers on the notion that when differentiation occurs, student learning will result. Tomlinson stated, "The classroom can't work for anybody until it works for everybody" (p. xvii). Discussed in the early portion of the book is the personal transformation of teaching Tomlinson experienced and how she came to understand the power a classroom teacher has when student differences are used as the driving force in classroom orchestration. "Differentiation is classroom practice with a balanced emphasis on students and course content" (Tomlinson, 2010, p. 14).

> Each year in the classroom, each class and each student were catalyst for my continuing growth in understanding and practice. Still later, I came to understand the interdependence of learning environment, curriculum, assessment, and instruction. I understood more clearly the ways in which the classroom leadership and management were part of one system and how they could enable me to use all of the classroom elements to reach each of my students. (Tomlinson, 2010, p. xviii)

Tomlinson (2010) described the vitality of the teacher, explaining that like no other individual in the school, the teacher is by far the most important and will have the greatest impact on the learner. Understanding student differences is a key to highly effective teaching; Tomlinson suggested that a highly-effective teacher differentiates instruction and a teacher who differentiates instruction considers four curriculum-related elements: content, process, product, and affect. These curriculum-related elements are based upon three categories of student need and variance: "readiness, interest, and learning profile" (Tomlinson, 2010, p. 15). The effective teacher who differentiates creates a flexible classroom that provides students an opportunity to work in small groups with classmates and individually with the teacher. This individual provides

students differing amounts of time to complete specific tasks and the utilization of various materials in order to learn well (Tomlinson, 2010). The effective teacher truly believes all students can learn, "these teachers believe they must know their students, their subject, and themselves, while continuing to account for the fact that all students learn differently" (Stronge, 2007, p. 29).

Collaboration

The best teachers are learners themselves and understand that in order to grow they must be reflective. When teachers collaborate, expertise can be shared and more students can be impacted simultaneously. "Cultivating and capturing teacher expertise is one of the most grossly underused assets in education" (Schmoker, 2001, p. 1). When teachers come together to analyze and review, data-driven decisions about instruction can be legitimately made, guaranteed to meet the needs of the students. "A rapidly growing number of schools have made a momentous discovery. When teachers regularly and collaboratively review assessment data for the purpose of improving practices to reach measurable achievement goals, something magical happens" (Schmoker, 2001, p. 1).

In a presentation that focused on teacher induction programs, Breaux and Wong (2003) described multiple ways to support the new teacher. Among the strategies mentioned was teacher collaboration. One factor that determines overall school success, beyond the success of one classroom, is the art of collaboration. Breaux and Wong described the basic needs that must be met in order to support the new teacher and described ways in which districts can reach success and retain the best teachers.

> Teachers remain with a district when they feel supported by administrators, have strong bonds of connection to colleagues, and are collectively committed to pursuing a common

> vision for student learning in a performance-oriented culture as they build capacity and community. (Breaux & Wong, 2003, p. 14)

Professional learning communities (PLC) is a concept that takes a collaborative approach and professional development beyond the acquisition of new knowledge; this type of collaboration requires teachers to rethink their own practice, construct new classroom roles and expectations about student outcomes, and teach in ways they have never taught before (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Through PLC work, teachers are involved in a dual application of teaching and learning; although this concept has been adopted from the business sector, highly effective teachers make this sort of collaboration a priority. Whitaker (2012) noted that the best teachers are reflective and take responsibility for their teaching. This type of reflection goes hand in hand with the team planning process by taking responsibility for what does not work and by changing the behavior of the teacher until something that does work is discovered. "The era of isolated teaching is over. Good teaching thrives when teachers and school leaders work together in strong professional learning communities" (Breaux & Wong, 2003, p. 14). Other individuals dedicated to the investigation of highly effective teachers also view collaboration as a reoccurring strategy but also something that seems to naturally occur among such talented individuals. According to Turnbull (2013),

> Highly effective teachers are visionaries. They see the potential of their students have the energy and enthusiasm to propel their students forward to achieve. Highly effective teachers realize they cannot work in isolation. They are able to engage constructively with parents, colleagues, and other professionals to achieve their broad educational purpose. (p. 206)

Teacher collaboration has been recognized as a strong contributor to the success of individual schools and corporations. Schmoker (2001) described several schools that have found success by investing in teacher collaboration. The schools highlighted in Schmoker's work do not necessarily capture highly successful teachers on an individual basis but provide a perspective as to how more teachers can be highly effective when implementing collaborative efforts. Cuyamaca Elementary School was one of many to be highlighted in Schmoker's text, as well as their students' increased scores on the Stanford 9 assessment. According to one teacher, after working with Schmoker, grade-level teams began to meet monthly and used the 30-minute meeting agenda as suggested. At these sessions, teachers brainstormed for ideas to improve reading and writing for their grade level. The teachers would then choose their top three or four strategies to implement. After experiencing efficient and effective collaboration, this school experienced growth in Grades 3 through 5 on the writing portion of the Stanford 9 assessment, and in reading and language arts, in Grades 2 through 4. Schmoker identified collaboration as "a successful strategy when it is frequent, focused, and data-driven teamwork" (p. 8). When considering the demands upon the individual teacher, it might be realistic to believe that when regular collaboration occurs, highly effective teachers are met with success in the classroom.

At Crest Elementary School, another school mentioned by Schmoker (2001), teachers began collaboratively reviewing the results from the Stanford 9 assessment and identifying gaps in achievement from the students that they had instructed the previous year. The second-grade teachers also considered first grade end-of-the-year achievement results in order to set goals for the upcoming school year. The teams involved in this study met frequently to discuss the curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessments that could be used to measure student progress. The teachers involved this study reported that time was often a challenge for

meaningful planning; however, collaboration and ongoing dialogue proved to be a powerful tool. The teachers also reported collaboration as an opportunity to learn from each other in order to move towards academic success.

In Farr's (2010) research, collaboration was identified as a strategy teachers used to ensure that their efforts were sustainable over time. According to Farr, highly effective teachers found that drawing energy and support from collaboration with colleagues, helped to manage and limit exhaustion. Farr stated that when in the company of fellow teachers, crucial, yet often tedious tasks such as grading and planning, could become enjoyable and even energizing. Farr described collaborative work as an important source of support, "offering refreshingly different perspective, advice rooted in experience, and some insight into students you might be struggling with" (p. 239). Furthermore, Farr explained that collaborative strategies were not limited among teachers but should also occur between teacher, student, and guardians. According to Farr, the reasons for collaborating are obvious:

> We gain knowledge and skills from veteran teachers around us about our subject matter, teaching method, and working within the system of our school, district, and community. Establishing relationships with our colleagues and administrators helps us to gain access to resources and gives us allies when we must navigate obstacles in our own work. (p. 233)

Collaboration is not limited to the work done among teachers. Highly effective teachers also collaborate with students, parents, and stakeholders. Farr (2010) extended the strategy of collaboration beyond the work done with colleagues. Farr suggested that teachers must understand their own strengths and weaknesses in order to collaborative effectively with students, families, and colleagues who might differ in race, socioeconomic status, or background.

Why do highly effective teachers find value in collaboration? A study conducted in the Pacific northwestern portion of the United States featured two high performing elementary schools where teachers engaged in professional learning communities (Rose, 2008). The purpose of the study was to identify a potential link between teacher perceptions of participation in a collaborative model (PLC) and student achievement. Based upon the way in which teams rated their value and skill level of collaboration, they were categorized into one of two groups; strong or moderate collaborators. Results of the study inferred that students whose teachers were categorized as strong collaborators demonstrated a high rate of academic growth according to the Rasch UnIT, "a scale designed to simplify the interpretation of test scores RIT score points" (Rose, 2008, p. 78). The author of this study emphasized the importance of including all six key components of collaboration, "If even one component of the Professional Learning Community is ignored or absent, optimum learning and growth will be stifled" (Rose, 2008, p. 178). The six components of collaboration included clear goals, attention to results, time and structures, deprivatization, and reflective dialogue. Teachers of this study reported that the time and structure of the model of collaboration allowed them to address issues and problems that they might otherwise not have done. An important component of the collaboration model was identified by participants as the willingness of each work together. After working collaboratively, teachers identified student achievement to be the primary focus and motivation to engage in the collaborative process.

Three trends the participants of the collaborative model identified as being change agents in student achievement were change in instruction, alignment of instruction, and differentiated instruction (Rose, 2008). The participants of this study reported collaboration as being influential; teachers felt an increased confidence in their own instructional skills and refined their

focus of instruction and the learning of their students (Rose, 2008). Overall, the teachers of this study identified that through the collaboration model, they were able to increase expertise which focused upon student instruction.

Classroom Management

Tomlinson (2010) discussed various elements of differentiation that are often utilized by an effective teacher. One element of effective classroom instruction included designing the learning environment that considers every child. Teachers who effectively implement a differentiated classroom lead students to form a positive sense of community; this can be acquired as the teacher models respect, students begin to mimic this behavior, seeing the value in their peers (Tomlinson, 2010). Lemov (2010) described seven techniques that can be used to create a positive classroom environment that supports effective teaching. Lemov (2010) explained that "strong management is not only a positive part of an effective classroom culture, but a necessary part" (p. 147). Lemov spoke of five critical elements: "discipline, management, control, influence, and engagement, all of which must work in combination" (Lemov, 2010, p. 147). Research on classroom management has suggested that teachers who approach classroom management as a process of establishing and maintaining effective learning environments tend to be more successful than teachers who place more emphasis on their roles as disciplinarians (Murphy et al., 2004).

Effective teachers are aware of the importance of creating a physical learning environment that provides a structure and predictability that allows the students to feel secure. In order to maximize learning, Tomlinson (2010) suggested using tables instead of desks but also to include four to eight desks available in one area of the room so that independent work can be completed if necessary. Students should have plenty of room at their assigned seat in order to

respect their personal space. Classroom tables should be arranged in a fashion that allows the teacher to easily walk among the students, and the teacher's desk should be at an out-of-the-way place: "In an effectively differentiated classroom a teacher's desk will be used very little" (Breaux & Whitaker, 2006, p. 93). Lemov (2010) explained that the physical environment "should support the specific lesson goals for the day rather than using the best approach to support the most lesson on average or, worse, to support ideological beliefs about what classrooms *should* look like" (p. 67).

Being an effective classroom manager involves more than setting up the physical environment. Highly effective teachers manage their classrooms by keeping close track of time in order to preserve student engagement. Breaux and Whitaker (2006) described seven secrets of the most effective teachers, including time management as an integral piece of a successful classroom. Breaux and Whitaker suggested planning in segments of five minutes: "When teachers plan this way, several things happen. It ensures that the lesson will continue to move and that the activities will be varied" (p. 17). Time management is just one of the seven secrets of the most highly effective teacher and directly supports classroom management. Breaux and other educational specialists suggest that the best teachers overplan for their students and are flexible with the plans they create. According to Breaux and Whitaker, "when one activity is successfully completed, it is time to take the new skill to the next level" (p. 25). Breaux and Whitaker explained that teachers often drift, getting caught up in teaching to a theme, forgetting about the objective. "The most effective teachers all have something in common. They understand the difference between objectives and activities, and they plan their lessons based on one or two objectives" (Breaux & Whitaker, 2006, p. 23). In the effective teachers' classrooms, activities are centered on the objectives; therefore, if an effective teacher runs out of time, the

objective was likely to be covered using one of the many activities. Effective classroom managers are able to orchestrate smooth transitions and strike a balance between variety and a challenge (Patrick, Turner, Meyer, & Midgley, 2003).

Beyond the planning and the implementation, effective teachers clarify expectations for their students; the key is to set expectations and then establish relationships so the students want to meet them (Whitaker, 2012). According to Breaux and Whitaker (2006), the best teachers actually tell the students what they will be able to do at the end of the lesson. The best teachers understand that they must set high expectations for students but also understand that they are the variable when students succeed or fail. The best teachers set high expectations for themselves, "Many teachers of all skill levels have high expectations for students. The variable-and what really matters, is what teachers expect from themselves" (Whitaker, 2012, p. 41). In Lemov's (2010) research, the first five techniques focus on setting high expectations. Naturally, teachers want to see students reach success; in some cases, it is easier to assist students as they find a solution instead of encouraging independent discovery. Some teachers also give students a false sense of success, allowing effort to appear as achievement. Lemov mentioned that great teachers "praise their students for effort but are clear to not confuse effort with mastery" (p. 37).

An important strategy used by the best teachers, when creating a positive learning environment, is to ensure all students understand the procedures and policies in the classroom. Breaux and Whitaker (2006) suggested that the best teachers do not teach all classroom procedures at one time, rather, the most important procedures are taught on the first day of school. The beginning of the school year can be a crucial time for teachers to introduce expectations and procedures that students are expected to demonstrate throughout the school year. A study conducted by Bohn, Roehrig, and Pressley (2004) examined six elementary school

teachers in an effort to prove the need for organizational activities early in the school year. In this study, two teachers who spent more time establishing routines and procedures in the first two days of school were compared to four others. The study results revealed that mid-observational outcomes for the two teachers produced greater student achievement in reading, writing, and student engagement.

A final component, but one of the most important components the best teachers use to manage their classroom, is positive praise. In the classrooms of the best teachers, students are constantly praised for appropriate actions. According to Whitaker (2012), some of the most ineffective teachers also constantly praise their students: "What matters most is not that they do it but how appropriately and effectively they do it" (p. 21). The best teachers know when to praise their students and understand this act to be a very powerful tool. "The best teachers use praise on the following terms, they are: specific, unconditional, credible, consistent, enthusiastic, stand alone, and suitable" (Breaux & Whitaker, 2006, p. 141). When a teacher praises a student and follows these guidelines, the praise is never associated with any negative comments and "must be suitable to the particular student's personal situation" (Breaux & Whitaker, 2006, p. 142). Effective teachers appropriately praise their students but also strive to remain happy themselves. A teacher makes each child feel as if he or she is his or her favorite; at the same time, each child believes that the only thing that really matters is what is happening inside his or her classroom.

Summary

The research presented in this section of the review of literature consistently supports the idea that in order for teachers to be effective they must be caring and compassionate. When identifying elements that make a teacher effective, a simpler task might be identifying the

observable actions carried out in a classroom by the effective teacher in order to reach desirable outcomes. The more difficult task might be ascertaining the abstract qualities, those elements that cannot necessarily be seen during observation but are critical for effective teaching. According to the research presented in this section, teachers believe that there are particular characteristics, such as being caring, compassionate, respectful, and trustworthy, that must be exerted in order to build relationships, engage, differentiate, manage, or collaborate.

The review of related literature and research considered the traits of and strategies used by effective teachers. The first area considered research-based findings regarding the term highly-effective and the definition of what it means to be highly effective. This section mentioned changes that have occurred in education because of NCLB legislation.

The second area of this review of literature considered studies and literature pertaining to traits commonly associated with effective teaching. The personality of an effective teacher can be dynamic. Many unique traits can emerge; however, they are consistent throughout research. Many studies have suggested that highly effective teachers model a caring personality, and students who have been involved in various studies also identify being cared about as a reason for their success. Studies featured in this literature review described highly effective teachers as having a sense of humor, being respectful, and having a no-nonsense personality.

The final area in this review of literature presented highly effective teaching strategies: building relationships, student engagement, differentiated instruction, collaboration, and classroom management. The categories presented were determined after a thorough analysis of published literature and past studies that aimed to uncover the best practices of the highly effective teachers. Each category presented described strategies the best teachers might implement at the appropriate time in order to lead all student learners to success.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the traits of and strategies used by highly effective teachers. An extensive review of literature was conducted regarding the personality traits of and strategies associated with individuals who were identified as being highly effective. The strategies executed by the participants, and observed during the investigation, were collected throughout the course of this study, and if possible matched with observable personality traits.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the traits of highly effective teachers?
2. What strategies are used by highly effective teachers?

Research Design

As stated by Creswell (2009), "phenomenological research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants" (p. 13). This study afforded the opportunity to visit the environment of the participant for one full day of teaching. The benefit of observing participants in their natural surroundings allowed for each individual to remain in an environment that was as comfortable as possible during participation in a study. The goal of this study was to capture the

elements of effective teaching that emerged during any given school day. A qualitative researcher understands that past experiences shape the perspective one has upon particular situations and future experiences. "Qualitative research is a form of interpretive inquiry in which researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear, and understand" (Creswell, 2009, p. 176). Considering that these past experiences will impact interpretation, it is important to note that once an interpretation was narrated, "the readers make an interpretation as well as the participants, offering yet another interpretation of the study" (Creswell, 2009, p. 176).

Methodology

The nature of a qualitative study is to capture a realistic image of the behavior executed by participants in their natural environment. "The only genuine way of knowing is to become a part of the subjects' world, thereby better understanding the meanings they attach to the events" (Gorman & Clayton, 2005). This study began in the classroom environment, a place where the participant could be himself or herself, allowing for natural behaviors to occur in a realistic timeline or schedule. A priority of this study was to observe the strategies, protocols, and personality traits the participants executed; a determination of existing commonalities between participants was also determined.

During this study, observations were coupled with an exchange of dialogue between the teacher and researcher, providing the opportunity to step into the world of the participant. In qualitative studies, "the researcher actually enters the context or situation, collecting data and—an important point, this—enhancing these raw data collected first-hand through the insights gained from actually being on site" (Gorman & Clayton, 2005, p. 4). This study collected firsthand data on successful teaching. As stated by Powell and Silipigni-Connaway (2004), "qualitative methods are appropriate when the phenomena under study are complex, are social in

nature, and do not lend themselves to quantification" (p. 59). In qualitative studies, the researcher submerges into the complex environment of the teacher's classroom and shares in learning the students might experience.

Procedures

The design of this study involved the following procedures:

1. An explanation of the study was delivered at an elementary principals' meeting.
    - The explanation given to fellow principals included the purpose of the study, criteria for selecting participants, and procedures that were followed during the study, including a one-day site visit to each participant's classroom.
    - During this meeting each principal was informed of the minimal risk that was involved in this study and that the potential risk was no greater than recognizing a teacher for his or her successful work on any other occasion.
    - Security measures taken during this study were explained at this meeting, including the confidentiality of principal recommendations.
    - A description of the study was given to EVSC administrators; a copy of this description can be found in Appendix A.
2. Each principal was given a link to the Qualtrics web survey, where they could easily recommend one to two highly effective teachers for the study.
3. A follow up email was delivered three days after the principal meeting, reminding principals that their input was needed in order for the study to take place.
4. A follow up phone call was made to principals one day after the email, in the event principals had not accessed the Qualtrics link.

5. Once principal recommendations were collected, prospective participants were reviewed.
6. As an effort to obtain a diverse sample, this study included male and female participants, with varying years of experience, and teachers from multiple subject areas and/or grade levels.
    - Two lists were generated from the pool of recommendations.
    - Twenty-five teachers were recommended for this study; six were selected to participate based upon the criteria mentioned above.
        - One participant of the original list did not respond to the request to participate, and another declined to participate due to other commitments.
        - Two additional participants from the second list were selected to participate in the study based upon the criteria mentioned above.
7. Each participant was contacted by email; the email contained the link to a Qualtrics survey that allowed the participant an opportunity to agree to participate, request additional information about the study, or decline participation (Appendix B).
8. In the event recommended participants did not respond to the original email, each was contacted by phone.
9. Each potential participant had an opportunity to meet with me prior to the study in order to receive a description project, the approval letter from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and my contact information should they later decide to withdraw from the study.
    - At this meeting participants were asked to sign the informed consent document before officially agreeing to participate in the study.

10. After participants had been determined, building principals were contacted by phone in order to discuss possible dates that would be best for the one-day observation. Next, the teacher–participant was contacted by phone in order to coordinate the classroom visit with the teacher; dates approved by the principal were considered.

Data Sources

This study explored the traits of and strategies used by effective teachers from the EVSC. The EVSC is located in the southwestern corner of Indiana bordering Illinois and Kentucky and is the third largest school corporation in the state. The EVSC serves more than 20,000 students from prekindergarten through Grade 12 and throughout various urban, suburban, and rural locations. The corporation consists of 21 elementary schools, seven middle schools, five high schools, and the Southern Indiana Career and Technical Center.

The focus of this study took place at the elementary school level and included participants who taught in 20 of the 21 schools throughout the district—excluding the school led by me. Preliminary efforts were made to recruit one to two teachers from the 20 elementary schools; however, through narrowing the intended sample, the number of participating schools was much smaller. Differences in student demographics throughout the 20 elementary schools are reported in Tables 1, 2, and 3. Schools are identified in tables mentioned; however, participants and their assigned schools were not revealed in the results of this study. The principal recommendation process featured in this study poses a delimitation; principals recommended participants based on their perspectives of a highly effective teacher. Jacobs and Lefgren (2006) conducted an investigation that explored the elementary school principal's ability to identify effective teachers. The authors presented the notion that subjective performance assessments are already used to evaluate untenured teachers; furthermore, these types of

evaluations play a large role in promotion and compensation in other professions (Jacobs & Lefgren, 2006). This study encompassed 13 elementary school principals who were asked to rate the teachers in their schools on a variety of performance dimensions; the study consisted of the evaluations of 202 teachers, representing Grades 2 through 6. The study revealed that "principals are quite good at identifying those teachers who produce the largest and smallest standardized achievement gains in their schools (the top and bottom 10-20 percent)" (Jacobs & Lefgren, 2006, p. 60). The findings of Jacob sand Lefgren's study suggested that ratings by principals, both overall ratings and ratings of a teacher's ability to improve student achievement, effectively predict future achievement gains. In conclusion, the researchers described the benefit of allowing principals to evaluate teachers, suggesting an increase student performance when principals assess a teacher's ability to instruct, instead of a system where compensation is solely based on education and experience. Furthermore, principals would be able to identify and reward the very best teachers and, at the same time, identify the least competent teachers for remediation or dismissal.

Participants who were selected for this study were teachers of kindergarten through Grade 6, special education, or of the related arts department. "In purposeful sampling, members of the sample are deliberately chosen based on criteria that have relevance to the research question rather than criteria based of randomness of selection" (Powell & Silipigni-Connaway, 2004, p. 190). In order to ensure an unbiased perception of effective teaching, this study attempted to include both male and female teachers with varying years of experience, race affiliation, and teachers from multiple subject areas and/or grade levels. Tables 1, 2, and 3 represent specific demographics of the EVSC.

Table 1

Student Demographics by School

School Name	2011-12 % for Free and Reduced Lunch
Caze Elementary School	89.0%
Cedar Hall School	96.0%
Cynthia Heights Elementary School	>40.0%
Daniel Wertz Elementary School	69.0%
Delaware Elementary School	94.5%
Dexter Elementary School	80.0%
Evans School	94.0%
Fairlawn Elementary School	80.0%
Glenwood Leadership Academy	95.0%
Harper Elementary School	71.0%
Hebron Elementary School	49.0%
Highland Elementary School	40.0%
Lincoln School	93.0%
Lodge School	87.0%
Oak Hill Elementary	<40.0%
Scott Elementary School	<40.0%
Stockwell Elementary School	71.0%
Stringtown Elementary School	63.0%
Tekoppel Elementary School	76.0%
Vogel Elementary School	59.0%
West Terrace Elementary School	<40.0%

Table 2

School Demographics

School Name	Student Enrollment 2012-2013	Title I Funded 2012-2013 Y/N
Caze Elementary School	508	Y
Cedar Hall School	617	Y
Cynthia Heights Elementary School	526	N
Daniel Wertz Elementary School	320	N
Delaware Elementary School	459	Y
Dexter Elementary School	408	N
Evans School	514	Y
Fairlawn Elementary School	442	Y
Glenwood Leadership Academy	471	Y
Harper Elementary School	469	N
Hebron Elementary School	879	N
Highland Elementary School	949	N
Lincoln School	367	Y
Lodge School	494	Y
Oak Hill Elementary School	774	N
Scott Elementary School	769	N
Stockwell Elementary School	587	N
Stringtown Elementary School	523	N
Tekoppel Elementary School	516	N
Vogel Elementary School	651	N
West Terrace Elementary School	650	N

Table 3

Teaching Years of Experience by School 2010-11

School Name	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	20+
Caze	56%	9%	6%	3%	25%
Dexter	20%	16%	6%	10%	46%
Lincoln	13%	26%	19%	12%	29%
Harper	27%	11%	11%	15%	35%
Stockwell	31%	7%	4%	17%	41%
Lodge	29%	23%	20%	0%	29%
Daniel Wertz	26%	9%	4%	0%	61%
Vogel	8%	13%	15%	5%	59%
Stringtown	8%	11%	19%	6%	56%
Delaware	14%	11%	22%	13%	41%
Cedar Hall	23%	30%	18%	5%	25%
Tekoppel	11%	7%	11%	7%	64%
Highland	13%	13%	17%	13%	43%
Evans	17%	30%	17%	0%	37%
Hebron	7%	7%	11%	11%	64%
Fairlawn	32%	26%	16%	10%	16%
Glenwood	30%	23%	18%	13%	15%
Scott	17%	7%	15%	11%	50%
Cynthia Heights	11%	7%	14%	14%	54%
West Terrace	18%	3%	18%	6%	55%

Data Collection Process

Data were initially gathered from recommendations made by elementary principals using the Qualtrics web survey system; recommendations were kept confidential. Each

recommendation was reviewed, and participants were selected based upon criteria that included gender, experience, race affiliation, and subject areas and/or grade level taught.

All subjects involved in the study agreed upon a one-day visit. Each observation occurred when students were present, or during teaching time, and was digitally recorded. Field notes were taken in order to capture elements of the environment such as the physical design, climate, and organization of the classroom. Field notes also included the description of various artifacts collected during visits, such as lesson plans, data binders, and visual resources. Dialogue that occurred between the participant and other individuals was scripted during the visit and later during the review of the digital footage.

The observation began at a time designated by the teacher. It was imperative that the video camera record only the teacher and avoided capturing the identity of any student in the classroom; the video camera was moved as needed in order to protect the identity of each student.

Additional data were collected upon each visit and during the teacher interview; interviews took place before class time, during teacher plan periods (if applicable), during lunch, after school, and any other time designated by the teacher. The discussion that occurred between the teachers and I was guided by questions that had been prepared prior to the classroom visit (Appendix D). The questions were designed to prompt natural discussion and were open-ended; this was be an opportunity for the teacher to elaborate on the strategies deployed during the school day and other focal points which might impact his or her instruction. Dialogue that occurred between the teacher and I was scripted and then compared to digitally recorded footage in order to ensure accuracy.

The script from each observation and interview was translated into a narrative form; pseudonyms were used for each teacher and school name in order to ensure confidentiality. Field notes collected during site visits were matched with each teacher, along with recorded observation footage, and documents pertaining to curriculum, procedure, policy, and communication. All video documentation, field notes, and artifacts were kept in a locked portable storage box throughout the visit. In the event the teacher left campus for any reason, a hand-held recorder was used to capture discussion that might impact study results.

At the end of the investigation all data were stored in a locked cabinet at my personal residence. After three years the data collected will be professionally destroyed in order to protect the personal identity of each individual involved in the study.

Data Analysis

"Qualitative inquiry places the researcher into the 'lifespace' of a group or organization, using a variety of data collection techniques to gain a full and realistic overview of events and patterns" (Gorman & Clayton, 2005, p. 205). This study began with the collection of principal recommendations, which were gathered using the Qualtrics web survey system. This study did not require the collection a specific number of participants from particular groups; however, to ensure reliability and validity, it was ideal to include both male and female participants with varying years of experience, race affiliation, and subject areas and/or grade level taught. As stated in Gorman and Clayton (2005), the researcher must "move in between the role of the scientist and the artist, condensing volumes of data into quantifiable analytical units; data are manipulated and reconfigured in an attempt to discover patterns and connections not previously apparent" (p. 205).

Keeping in mind that individuals often demonstrate conventional and unconventional thinking applications when teaching, it was a goal of this study to uncover the secret ingredients the exceptional teachers follow in their classroom each day. It was important to maintain an open perspective to unexpected responses that the participants might divulge as a part of their daily practices. Data collected that highlighted the personality traits demonstrated by each teacher participant were matched with the on-site observation and interview footage, as well as supportive documents that were collected the day of the visit. Supportive documents included quarterly lesson plans, data binders that were used by participants to differentiate instruction, and small or individual group plans. Data collected during the site visit established the opportunity to explain the traits of and strategies used by highly effective teachers; I was open to the idea that unexpected artifacts, which supported the success of each participant, might be uncovered during the study. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), "the first task in the processing of qualitative data is to get the information into a format suitable for classifying and ordering" (p. 211). In order to preserve data, observational and interview footage, and field notes, were reviewed immediately following the visit in order to avoid unnecessary confusion that could transpire after multiple visits took place. At the conclusion of the on-site visits, scripted interview and field notes were reviewed, followed by the coding process. Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Gorman & Clayton, 2005) referred to this process as *unitizing*, or disaggregating data into the smallest pieces of information that might stand alone as independent thoughts in the absences of additional information other than a broad understanding of the context. As mentioned, various literature pieces pertaining to qualitative research, implementing a simple coding scheme might prevent a management nightmare, Bogdan and Taylor (as cited in Gorman

& Clayton, 2005) advised that there was no "one-coding-formula-fits-all coding scheme" (p. 212).

Establishing Validity and Reliability

In a qualitative study, the researcher will fill the role as the measuring device. Kirk and Miller (1986) defined reliability as the extent to which a procedure yields the same answer time and time again. Reliability is also described as follows:

> Reliability pertains to the degree to which observations are reported as consistent with some phenomenon during the lifespan of inquiry. Unlike quantitative measurement, which often applies an instrument (e.g., a thermometer) or a mathematical formula, in ethnographic research, it is the researcher who judges the findings reliable or not. (Chatman, 1992, p. 8)

Validity builds upon reliability and reliability can be thought of as repeatability; validity can be thought of as uncovering the truth. Study findings can be reliable yet not valid, both reliable and valid, but cannot be valid without reliability. Gorman and Clayton (2005) explained that "validity builds upon the foundation of reliability" (p. 58). In order to ensure the reliability and validity of this study, the observational and interview data, along with personal data, were collected and triangulated among each participant. Strategies such as consistent note-taking, immersion into the environment of the participant, and the reflection on past studies on teacher effectiveness were implemented throughout this study. Participants were given the opportunity to review field notes that had been translated into narrative form so that all events, observations, and statements (or dialogue) were accurately represented throughout the fieldnotes.

Summary

This chapter presented and described specific design components: the research questions, research design, methodology, procedures, data sources, data collection process, data analysis, validation, and trustworthiness and generalizability. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the traits of and strategies used by highly effective teachers. The study also considered additional factors that may be common among the participants and possibly support their ability to be highly effective.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the traits of and strategies used by highly effective teachers. Through a qualitative study, the personality traits displayed by a group of effective teachers were examined; the second aspect of this study considered strategies that were executed by this same group of teachers. This study included six elementary school teachers throughout the EVSC who were identified as being highly effective based upon survey results completed by school level administrators.

Research Questions

1. What are the traits of highly effective teachers?
2. What strategies are used by highly effective teachers?

Presentation of Study Sample

In order to collect a sample of participants that accurately portrayed the traits of and strategies used by highly effective teachers, a survey was delivered to 20 elementary school administrators in the EVSC. The school administrators had the opportunity to recommend one to two individuals for the study. Based upon factors such as gender, age, race, years of experience, and grade level or subject area taught, six individuals were selected to participate in the study. The participants for this study included three female teachers and three male teachers. Each teacher represented a different grade level; one participant represented the related arts subject

area. The grade levels represented for this study included kindergarten, second, third, fourth, and fifth grades. Three of the teachers in this study represented schools where less than 40% of the students receive free or reduced lunch, two other participants represented schools where the free and reduced lunch rate fell between 63% and 71%, and the last teacher participant represented a school with a free and reduced lunch rate of 93% or more. The free and reduced lunch rate for each school was not a factor when selecting participants; however, this could be an indicator of the dynamics present at each school. Teaching experience was also not a factor when selecting participants for this study; however, the participants represented a wide range of years in the field. Additionally, race affiliation was not a factor during the participant selection process.

Once the selection process was finished, each prospective participant was delivered a letter via email inviting him or her to learn more about the study. The letter included detailed information about the study such as the purpose, selection process, methodology, and timeline. All six of the invited participants responded via email and agreed to be part of the study. An informed consent document was sent to each participant prior to the beginning of the study. Each school administrator was informed that his or her teacher had been selected for the study and verified approval for the observation to be conducted. After obtaining administrator approval, a date was selected for the one-time observation to be conducted. Some of the participants asked for clarification of specific protocols for the one-day observation; they were given requested information before signing the informed consent.

Observations

Each participant established a date to visit his or her classroom. The observation began at the start of the teacher's day and concluded at the end of the school day. On two occasions the opportunity for discussion took place after the school day. A video camera was set up in a non-

distracting location of the classroom; field notes were taken throughout the duration of the visit and discussion between the participant and other individuals was scripted. On one occasion the opportunity to observe a professional learning community in action occurred. On two different visits there was an opportunity to eat lunch with the participant and his or her colleagues.

During each of the onsite observations all six teachers appeared to be very relaxed despite the fact that their instruction was being recorded. Student identities were not captured during the observation footage and each teacher prevented the possibility that the camera distracted learning. The camera was turned off each time the students exited the classroom. Recording each observation afforded the opportunity to review observation footage when field notes were vague or did not thoroughly capture a specific detail. After each visit a chart was created that highlighted the most obvious traits demonstrated and strategies used by the teacher participant. In order to provide a distinct image of each participant, the chart was reviewed in accordance with the field notes and documented footage; this information was then translated into narrative form.

The first observation took place in a kindergarten classroom that included one teacher, a teacher assistant, and 29 students. Participant 1 was referred to as Molly in order to protect her identity. I arrived in Molly's classroom at 7:00 a.m., and students began to trickle in around 7:45. The first students who entered the classroom did not seem to belong in Molly's class, however, seemed to be there to tidy up the room. Molly asked the students about their mothers; one boy arrived early and immediately sat on the teacher's lap. One student commented, "I am so ready for Valentine's Day, so ready." Another student arrived and told the teacher, "Mommy came to grandparents' house!" Molly held the boy for several minutes and it appeared to comfort him before the start of the school day. The teacher in this classroom greeted each

student as he or she arrived and seemed genuinely happy to see each child. As the students arrived they immediately begin to put down chairs and retrieve book tubs. The teacher told the students that they could go ahead and begin "shopping" for books because tomorrow (Valentine's Day) would be a very busy day. The teacher wasted no time beginning instruction, which punctually started at 7:55. Molly wore an apron, which held tickets that she would eventually give out to students throughout the day. One student told the teacher that he had his medicine twice today. The teacher modeled a genuine concern for this student and ensured that his guardian was contacted before the student was allowed to proceed with his school day. This kindergarten classroom was extremely large; however, Molly had students spread throughout every inch of the room. Some students sat at long tables and others sat at round tables. The teacher had a dining room table in the "library," a place where the majority of the books were located. Students were instructed to take care of several items of business, including using the restroom, prior to 7:55 a.m. The teacher complimented the students as they settled into their seats, "You look so cute today! Your hair bow is cute; your bracelet is cute too." Molly had an assistant teacher; however, this individual remained unseen and unheard for the majority of the day.

The teacher met with four reading groups during the reading block, and the teacher's assistant met with four different groups; eight groups were seen during this period. As the teacher met with two or three students at one time, she first modeled the skill she wanted them to do. Next, the teacher completed the task with the students and then observed as the students completed the task independently. During the small group interaction, and when the entire class was gathered, the teacher utilized a quick teaching pace, minimizing off-task behavior.

Transition time between small and large group activities was minimal and the teacher appeared to know exactly what the students were doing during each minute of the day.

Molly reviewed academic and behavioral expectations several times throughout the day and awarded table points as students followed very simple commands. In one instance the teacher explained to the students that she was going to count down from 10, the students should put their book away, and have their heads down. After she finished counting she told the students, "You are impressive!" and then directed a student from each table to the front board as they added a tally mark by their table names. It was evident that Molly had made an investment into the relationships she had with the students in her room. Frequently throughout the day, she discussed family members, some whom were former students, with the students. Molly praised the students for their efforts in nearly every other sentence spoken. If a student seemed to become distracted, she would speak to the individual student in a very quiet and private manner. It was difficult to follow what specific words the teacher used during redirection, but 100% of the time the student was able to restart and return to his or her assigned activity. The teacher made physical contact with the students throughout the day; for example, she would put her hand on their shoulders when speaking.

The teacher was engaged in every aspect of the instruction; there was not one occasion when the teacher appeared to be distracted by an email, managerial task, colleague, or other behavior that was not totally focusing on the instruction of the student. Molly displayed a very matter-of-fact relationship with each child and he or she appeared to have known one another for several years. The teacher's demeanor was steady throughout the day, never becoming frustrated, and remained non-reactive. On one occasion the teacher blew a whistle as the noise level rose; the students instantly became quiet and returned to task.

It was evident that the learning activities in this kindergarten classroom were developed prior to the on-site visit. For each instructional activity, Molly had a sentence strip, book, worksheet, journal, or other item needed to complete the task, ready for students to use. Molly mentioned during her interview that much of her planning took place during the summer. This teacher used data to plan and design instructional activities for each reading and math group. Molly displayed a sense of confidence throughout the day; she was consistent with her expectations and maintained a steady flow of instruction.

The second observation took place in a fourth grade classroom; I have referred to the teacher as Ryan, in order to protect his identity. Ryan was extremely comfortable in his environment. He stood at the classroom door, greeting each as they arrived, not preoccupied with gathering materials for instructions. Ryan's strategy for student success was to utilize the multi-player classroom where students could earn experience points. This teacher's priority was to instill intrinsic motivation and competition among peers. The students in this class have a daily achievement goal to earn five compliments in one day. Ryan began his instructional day at 8:03 a.m. and utilized the Flocabulary website on the classroom interactive board. The students were given typed lyrics that they recited as the music played; Flocabulary is an educational website that provides vocabulary enrichment in a meaningful and interesting fashion. The teacher participant sang along with his students and demonstrated enthusiasm as the music played. Immediately following the Flocabulary lesson Ryan was ready, as were the students, to move on to the next activity. The teacher took just a few minutes to take care of managerial items such as attendance and lunch count. The teacher demonstrated a sincere concern toward the well-being of the students; he asked a couple of students, who seemed unmotivated, if they felt okay; this occurred two to three times throughout the day. Ryan interacted with the students

in a very matter-of-fact fashion; it was as if he had known the students longer than six months. The teacher demonstrated confidence and appeared to know exactly what needed to be accomplished before the end of the day.

Ryan mentioned that it was a priority to "reinforce pride and being good people, at all times," and he referred to this philosophy multiple times when speaking to the students. Throughout the day this teacher modeled how to respond to particular life situations. For example, when students where obviously irritated with one another and bickering began to take place, Ryan asked both students to speak with him. During this situation the teacher quietly asked each child to take a minute to describe his or her perspective on their problem. After each student had a chance to voice his or her opinion, the teacher gave an example as to how they could resolve the problem. On another occasion the teacher asked a student to read an essay she had written. The teacher modeled how to be a respectful listener and at the end encouraged the students to clap once she finished. Ryan modeled appropriate behavior multiple times throughout the observation; he demonstrated the appropriate way the students could ask peers for help. The teacher repeated the directions for a task at least four times and also explicitly explained his expectations for student behavior. Students who could accomplish basic tasks in a specified amount of time earned five bonus points (towards a badge.) Ryan utilized a rubric during the writing portion of the day; he clearly wanted the students to understand what was expected on the writing piece. The teacher used catchphrases to redirect students; for example, Ryan would say, "Eyes on who," and the students would respond in unison, "You." The teacher also challenged the students when he said, "Who's going to get beat by Mr. B," which seemed to motivate the students to participate in the activity.

During this observation Ryan maximized every minute he spent with his students. The students were engaged in some sort of instructional activity throughout the day, which included independent reading time with the teacher, partner work, and large group activities; most of the instructional activities afforded students the opportunity to utilize multiple senses (touching, hearing, seeing, and smelling). Ryan set aside the time to review the results of the recent Acuity testing results. The teacher met individually with students to explain their progress. Ryan awarded points to students (a different amount based on their growth), and told the students how proud he was of them. For those students who did not pass, Ryan explained that he knew they could do better and stated, "This test tells me what I need to do better as a teacher." Ryan moved frequently around the classroom as he presented new material to the students. When meeting with a different student, the teacher stated, "All because of your work ethic and how you worked it," she was able to surpass the predicted pass score.

The teacher moved the students frequently; the students stood when playing a "Ninja Turtle" game, they sat on the floor when Ryan presented a lesson that required the students to feel and hold certain objects, and they relocated to various places during the Daily 5 reading block. Ryan explained that he had spent some time at the Dollar Store and purchased several new items that could be used for "Word Work," a Daily 5 Station. Ryan spent a significant amount of time reading to his students. The teacher explained that he thought students of all ages needed to be read to; he mentioned that this was something he brought along with him after teaching first grade. The teacher utilized the Promethean board throughout the day; when jumpstarting the math period the teacher incorporated a math multiplication game. Ryan passed out a sheet of paper that the students would later use during math journaling. The teacher modeled how to subtract when using multiple digit numbers and explicitly explained the

regrouping process. Formative assessment data indicated that the students needed additional practice on symmetry, so the teacher provided the class with an opportunity to practice drawing lines of symmetry on various shape cutouts. During the geometry activity, the teacher moved around to student tables checking for understanding, encouraging students to ask a partner when confused, and ensuring each student was on task.

Ryan's demeanor remained consistent throughout the day; he was friendly with the students but maintained a no-nonsense attitude. It was obvious that he was serious about accomplishing the goals that were set and valued the investment he had made when planning for the day. Ryan's planning included preparing instructional activities that targeted each learner; the teacher delivered multiple activities that allowed for different types of learners to grasp a skill.

The third observation took place in a related arts classroom; music was the focus of instruction. The teacher in this classroom will be referred to as Bob in order to protect his identity. Bob arrived before his first class began in order to lead the school choir. The choir was composed of several students and began at 7:00 a.m.; there were a few open seats in the music room during choir practice. Bob's first class arrived promptly at 7:55 and he greeted each student with a smile. The students seemed to understand the morning routine and it was later determined that was maintained throughout the day. This teacher began the instructional day with intermediate students and incorporated friendly competition into his instruction; the students counted beats within a measure with the intent of doing a better job than the class before them. Bob smiled throughout each class period. He used humor (always directed at himself), when redirecting and emphasizing behavioral expectations. At one point, during the second grade class, Bob said, "Even if you get excited don't sing goofy. Don't scream and yell, because

you know what happens?" The students responded in unison, "Your hair falls out!" Bob replied, "And I can't afford to lose anymore!" Throughout the day Bob redirected student behavior with a very positive approach. During the fourth grade class the teacher asked the students, "Does anyone want to change the line up where they're standing?" One student moved across the room (it appeared the new location would ensure his success). The teacher was engaged in the learning activities that took place; he moved around the student circle and listened to students as they sang. During the observation it was apparent that Bob was passionate about the content he was teaching. He appeared to be dedicated to his mission of teaching and confident with his presentation.

Bob moved frequently throughout the students, but he also moved the students from their desks to the floor space at the front of the classroom. He explicitly explained the goals that he had set for each class; Bob's planning process was completed on a quarterly basis. The planning for each class included multiple activities that focused on one to two skills. It appeared as if Bob had a clear vision of the skillset he needed the students to develop by the time they were in sixth grade. It was clear that Bob differentiated his expectations for each group based upon the developmental level of the students, scaffolding the learning between grade levels. For the younger students, Bob would demonstrate a skill and provide opportunities for the students to practice the skills with him before requiring them to perform independently. With the older students, Bob modeled the skill but required them to perform independently with less coaching. The gradual release model was implemented throughout the day; however, the time of release was dependent upon the grade level of the student. The instructional activities appeared to be "hip," and during one class the teacher played the song "I'm a Believer," originally performed by The Monkees (in the 1960s); however, most of the students seemed to be familiar with the song

(which was also featured in a rather new film, *Shrek*). In addition, Bob incorporated "The Cup Song," which also seemed to be familiar to the students and appeared to increase engagement.

Bob was friendly with his students; however, it was obvious that the students understood his energy would not be spent on unwanted behavior. The teacher maintained a tight schedule, eliminating any time that might allow for off-task behavior. The teacher seemed to regard his students in a way that might lead one to believe he had known them for several years; he was honest and direct but sensitive to individual student needs. Bob demonstrated the ability to understand his students and their needs. Nearly every instructional activity that occurred during the day involved some sort of hands on application. Some students used tennis balls to maintain rhythm, others used large tubes, and younger students experimented with rhythm sticks.

The fourth observation took place in a second grade classroom; the teacher in this room is referred to as Karen in order to protect her identity. It was nearly impossible to capture the multifaceted instructional planning in Karen's classroom. Like other participants in this study, learning punctually began in this classroom at 7:55 a.m. The teacher did not complete managerial tasks, nor did she prepare for instruction as the students trickled in the classroom; rather, she was prepared to interact and give each child her undivided attention. The students immediately began practicing math fluency facts as they became settled into the classroom. The teacher administered a fluency math quiz after the students had the opportunity to practice facts; each student was given a different quiz dependent upon his or her developmental level. By 8:30 Karen had conducted a fluency quiz and completed a phonics activity with the entire group. Next, she transitioned into the reading block by inviting the students to relocate from their pods (four desks arranged together) to the carpet, where she reviewed learning expectations.

The Common Core State Standards require second-grade students to demonstrate the ability to research a given topic and this teacher provided her students with multiple opportunities to develop the ability to research (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014). The teacher incorporated iPods, iPads, and laptops into the Daily 5 rotations, allowing for multiple opportunities to engage in research when working independently and collaboratively. The teacher met with pairs of students for nearly 30 minutes throughout the reading block but stopped the students between groups in order to reflect and conduct a large group mini-lesson. When the students worked with the teacher, the remainder of the class was self-governed; at times it was difficult to capture discussion due to very low tone used by all individuals in the classroom.

The teacher intentionally assigned students to reading stations based on their ability; this process was duplicated during math instruction. The teacher prepared a clipboard for each student, that included independent work and was targeted to meet the individual student's performance level. The teacher incorporated an Iditarod theme into the learning tasks, which seemed to catch the attention of all students in the classroom. The students were given the opportunity to create QR codes during station time and appeared to enjoy creating questions for their peers. The students seemed proud when they were able to stump classmates as the answers were revealed after scanning with an iPod or other technical device. The teacher monitored learning stations; however, very little redirection was necessary during this on-site visit. Karen was engaged with her students 100% of the school day. At times, this engagement occurred during small group instruction; at other times, she was modeling a math or science skill; at one point she sat on the floor in the classroom as the students predicted how far windup toys would travel on the carpet.

Karen provided her students an opportunity to develop skills through multiple modes. During the science period the teacher utilized a website which allowed the students to conduct a virtual science experiment. Student volunteers were given the opportunity to manipulate objects on the Promethean Board during the experiment; however, all students were engaged. If they were not at the board, they were recording results on a form provided by the teacher. After the online experiment, students were given the opportunity to engage in a different science activity which incorporated the five senses and gummy bears! The students were thrilled to be able to observe a gummy bear that had been immersed in water overnight. Students recorded experiment results in their science journal. On the day of this particular observation the school day had been extended by one hour because of missed instructional time due to weather. The teacher occupied this additional time with math stations; time for math had been cut short earlier in the day due to a school program. The teacher maximized instructional time, leaving no minute unoccupied and concluded instruction and learning time at 3:05 p.m. in order to prepare for dismissal.

Karen maintained a very serious disposition throughout the day. She had very specific goals in mind, which needed to be accomplished, and it seemed to be common knowledge that the class had reached success with these goals. The students appeared to understand that the teacher was in charge; however, they did not seem intimidated. The students participated in discussion and appeared eager to ask for clarification when they did not understand. Karen spoke in a very soft voice and seemed to attract the students' attention; they replicated her actions. The teacher appeared to be a true leader of learning and the students appeared to follow in this lead. The confidence demonstrated by this teacher seemed to be contagious and each student seemed to copy this confidence when completing a task. There was never a time when a

student seemed to become frustrated or demonstrated an "I can't" attitude. The teacher's leadership ability was not only present in her classroom but also among colleagues. Other second grade teachers reported to Karen's classroom as a professional learning community. Karen presented student data, initiated conversation about curriculum maps, and ensured that the team stayed on topic throughout the 40-minute timeframe.

The fifth observation took place in a third grade classroom; the teacher in this room is referred to as Erin. This teacher had perfected the ability to engage students in a workshop model while simultaneously providing targeted instruction to small groups of students. Erin teaches math, science, and writing to third-grade students on a block schedule. The first group of students to enter Erin's classroom performed above grade level in reading and were grouped according to their reading level (it was assumed they performed above level at math; however, Erin differentiated instruction throughout the day). Erin was seated at her desk when I arrived but quickly hopped up and began to explain her day. She was not occupied with managerial tasks nor did she gather materials for her lesson. Several students came into the classroom and worked on laptops; she mentioned that some of the students were her helpers. As the students entered the classroom and become settled the teacher said, "Hocus pocus"; the students replied, "Everybody focus." The students were instructed to practice their math facts with their "math mate"; after just a few minutes a math fluency quiz was placed on each child's desk. The teacher explained that the students had 3 ½ minutes to complete the quiz. Once the quiz was finished the teacher (always regarding the students as "friends") asked the students to retrieve a pen in order to check their quizzes. Immediately following the grading of the quiz, the teacher reviewed the math stations and student assignments. Supplies for particular stations were laid out, students

reported to their assigned stations, and six students relocated to a back table where the teacher began small group instruction.

During the math workshop, the students working in stations were attentive to task and low level discussion took place; however, students who were not in the small, teacher-led group appeared engaged. At the teacher table, students were given step-by-step instructions to solve math problems. The teacher modeled each step of the problem and the students followed her lead. She later explained that she does not give the students a copy of math word problems during small group instruction because it can be overwhelming. Instead, the teacher read a word problem to the students in the small group and then dissected the problem until each student could solve with mastery. At one point during the small group instruction, the teacher told the students, "We're not at 12s yet, my friends," but because the students requested to be challenged with multiplication facts including the number 12, the teacher afforded them the opportunity.

Erin met with two math groups during a 60-minute period. The students who were not included in the small group were fully engaged in the various math stations set up around the classroom and did not interrupt the teacher. The teacher regarded all students in a warm and friendly manner; it appeared as if the teacher and students were old friends. Erin was a master at giving the students the benefit of the doubt and redirecting positive behavior. At one point during the observation a glue bottle went sailing through the air. Erin identified the student responsible and simply said, "It's okay, not a big deal," and continued on with the instruction. The students were seated in pods in Erin's classroom and her teaching allowed for students to engage in discussion with one another throughout the day. When teaching a lesson on vibration, Erin connected learning to student interest and also hooked the students by presenting challenges. At one point the teacher said, "What my challenge is going to be, my friends, is to

make a high and a low sound with the depressor." The teacher modeled what she would have the students do with the tongue depressor. Again, the teacher stated to the students, "Your challenge is to discover ways to make high pitches and low pitches." After the students had the opportunity to experiment with the tongue depressors the teacher asked them to "turn and talk" with their neighbors in order to share their results. The teacher used a tone generator to demonstrate the difference between pitch when the plate vibrated very fast and then slow. The teacher moved the students six times during science period; this was in addition to the times the students moved during the math block. Before transitioning into lunch, the teacher asked the students to prepare their science journals for an experiment that would be conducted on the following school day.

Erin began the afternoon writing activity by reminding students that they previously learned about the mystery object in her gift bag. The students then used their senses and discovered that there were Pop Rocks inside the bag. The teacher reviewed rules and expectations for the writing assignment and then rotated around the room observing student progress. Erin remained upbeat and positive during this period; the teacher's tone and persona remained friendly, focused, and confident throughout the observation.

The final observation took place in a fifth grade classroom; the teacher in this room is referred to as Derek. It should be noted that the student dynamics observed in Derek's room varied greatly from the dynamics in other classrooms of this study. The teacher stated, and it was obvious, that the basic needs of many of the children in this class were not regularly met away from school. This information was provided in order for the reader to understand priorities Derek must consider when planning for instruction each day. The students began to trickle into the classroom around 7:40 a.m. and took their seats at various size tables; some students found

their seats in study corrals. The teacher shut the door at 7:50 a.m. and began to settle the students in a very matter-of-fact manner. It was apparent that the teacher understood the students needed some time to calm down before transitioning into the first instructional block. During this homeroom period, Derek remained calm, speaking in a very informal manner, and was non-reactive to some of the behavior issues that followed the students to school on this particular day. Derek explained prior to the observation that it would take some time to calm particular students, and as predicted, the students had calmed before leaving to go to related arts.

At 9:35 the students arrived back at Derek's room, and he was informed that four students had been placed in an alternative classroom (in-school suspension.) This teacher perfected the ability to spin the most negative behavior into a harmless accident. Derek began his instruction by speaking in a very stern voice. He did not yell at his students, but the level of his tone captured their attention. This teacher picked his battles and ignored behavior such as slouching, playing with objects, and unengaged students. The teacher knew his students and exactly what it would take to get each involved in the instruction. The teacher used humor to first attract the attention of some students. At one point a child fiddled with her purse; the teacher simply stated, "If your purse attacks you, you'll have to put it up!" On another occasion two girls conversed during instruction and Derek redirected by stating, "You two are off in La La Land, like unicorns, sunshine, and puppies." The teacher challenged one of these two girls and asked, "Did I put my money on the wrong horse?" The two girls laughed at these comments but gave the teacher their attention. Other students also instantly directed their attention to the teacher, and Derek now had more students listening and ready to hear what he say next.

The teacher posted "I Do, We Do, You Try, You Do" on the board and followed through with this during all instructional activities. Some students asked the teacher if they could

complete a task independently; he replied by stating that eventually they would do the task on their own. The teacher used catchphrases throughout the day; when modeling division the teacher reminded the students to "drop it like it's hot." The teacher took advantage of opportunities to teach his students life skills; an example of this was when a student put money in his mouth. The teacher told a humorous story about how dirty money can be and by the end of the story had the attention of 100% of his class. The teacher's instruction was simple and to the point, not giving the students more than they could handle. Derek incorporated video clips from YouTube that seemed to be entertaining to the students but also aligned with the content that was being delivered. When describing median, mode, and range, the teacher told a story about when he was little. The students laughed at his story and seemed to have forgotten about the challenge of the task. Throughout the day, Derek delivered his instruction with a stern but humorous approach; the students had very few opportunities to veer off task or engage in inappropriate behavior.

During the teacher interview Derek explained that his students' grades were based on Acuity quizzes. At this site, visit the teacher gave his students multiple opportunities to pass specific quizzes. The students seemed to take great pride in their accomplishment; they appeared to be willing to take on new challenges once they realized they could be successful. The teacher used data from Acuity to reteach and provide remediation. After completing the "I Can" tasks that were written on a piece of chart paper, Derek handed out laptops to students to engage in educational activities. Next, the teacher met with individuals or a pair and provided direct instruction that was targeted at performance ability. The remainder of the students, not working with the teacher, played educational games on the laptops. Derek mentioned that his students worked best when they were in a large group, so he did not attempt stations as he worked in

small groups. Derek knew exactly what he needed to accomplish with his students on this day and was punctual, focused, and allowed no time for distraction.

Interviews

Each participant engaged in a short interview that lasted less than 30 minutes. Each teacher was asked several questions; all questions were presented to each participant. The first question that was asked of the each participant was "What is something pre-service teachers or individuals contemplating going into the teaching field should know about teaching?" Two of the six participants explained that people must know teaching is very hard. Another responded that you must love your students, build relationships with the students, and "never let them see you sweat." Karen mentioned that you must be flexible in order to be a teacher and accept change. Erin stated that a teacher must understand that students learn in many ways. Derek stated that in order to teach you must understand students of poverty and those from the most affluent families because there are skills you learn from both sides that can be beneficial. Ryan explained that

> it's not as easy as those good teachers make it look. Those really good teachers make it look really simple, but multiple hours go into one day, sometimes one lesson. It is worth that time, there is a lot that goes into it but it is totally worth it when things click for students.

Next, the participants were asked if they are impacted by negativity. All six of the participants reported that negativity does not impact their teaching. Two of the teachers commented that negativity can be frustrating at times; however, teaching today is all they know. They understand it to be difficult, and it has been like this since they started teaching. Ryan stated, "Negativity can be exhausting during faculty meetings; however, I am going to do

whatever I want and what is best for my kids." Derek shared that negativity is often presented in a way that is not always tactful; however, if you listen to naysayers you can often see another side of an issue. Karen stated, "Negativity from parents makes you reflect upon what you're doing. From colleagues, it doesn't stop me, but I'm a pleaser and an overachiever." Molly also mentioned that negativity can be frustrating but once she sees what her kids can do, negativity is forgotten.

When the participants were asked about specific strategies they used to increase student learning, three of the six teachers stated that keeping their students' attention and engaging the students are very important. Derek mentioned that implementing structure and routine gives students a better way to thrive. Ryan stated that his strategy to increase student learning is to instill intrinsic motivation through competition and cooperation, challenge, curiosity, control, and recognition. Bob described his strategy for increased student learning, stating that

> boys have to move. The more engaged and physical they can be, the more they will learn. First you get their attention, and then you get their concentration. Change your strategies, keep changing things, they get on to one thing and then it stops working.

Finally, Erin stated that strategies such as differentiation and implementation during the math workshop model maximized student learning. Additionally, Erin stated that creating a learning environment where students understand that it is okay to fail is another strategy that increases student learning.

When the participants were asked to identify the traits that described them personally or professionally, being passionate, organized, energetic, compassionate, and hardworking were mentioned by at least two teachers. Being dependable, competitive, responsible, fun, patient, happy, friendly, caring, and positive were mentioned by at least one participant. One participant

said that building relationships, looking at the students, and building a connection helps them to understand he cares. Another teacher said that being a role model for the students and teaching them how to be good people was also very important. Each participant in the study demonstrated the traits they would want to see in their students.

Throughout the observations very little time was spent managing discipline issues. When the participants were asked how they handled discipline, two mentioned that they had an economy system in their classrooms where students could earn money for doing jobs, to pay rent for their desks and pay fines for a variety of "natural" occurrences. This participant described the establishment of the economy system, explaining that the expectations are presented to the students at the beginning of the year, and the children are aware of the ways in which they can earn an income and reasons that might cause them to pay or lose money. Ryan implemented a gaming system in his fourth grade classroom where the students could earn "XP" points for achieving various goals; the students have an achievement goal each day that includes receiving compliments from others in the building. Ryan stated that it is important for him to build intrinsic motivation involving competition, cooperation, challenge, curiosity, control, and recognition. One participant did not mention a behavior system during the interview, nor was any sort of student management system observed during the onsite observation. Molly mentioned that she reviews expectations and appropriate behavior every morning while the students are seated at the carpet. She also explained that due to snow days she had to pass out recognition tickets more frequently. Karen also mentioned that she heavily rewards students with tickets when she is teaching beginning of the year procedures; students can use tickets to earn rewards but she does not tell them how many tickets they will need until it is time for the reward. One participant mentioned that it is sometimes necessary to write the student names on

the board as a warning and then a check if a behavior continues; this participant did not use this strategy during the observation. Both Erin and Molly afforded students the opportunity to move clothespins (labeled with the student name) up a ladder where each rung displayed an appropriate behavior.

Participants were asked if there was a regular routine that was followed at a particular time of the year. All six participants said that they spent several days at the beginning of the year teaching procedures. Classroom procedures such as morning work, sitting, standing, and working in learning stations were mentioned as being taught at the beginning of the school year. Participants mentioned that they spent anywhere from three days to two weeks at the beginning of the school year teaching procedures, and at least three participants reviewed classroom procedures on a daily basis. Derek used the beginning of the year to conduct placement assessments so that he could identify student developmental levels. All participants emphasized the importance of building classroom routines and procedures and maintaining consistency during implementation.

When participants were asked about their relationships with parents and guardians, five of six participants said that they communicate with parents frequently. Molly mentioned that several of the 29 students in her class had been placed in her class based upon parent request. This teacher mentioned that she becomes involved with families beyond the school day by attending extracurricular activities. Molly also mentioned that she sends a daily update to parents via email and that parents appreciate the recap of the daily learning activities. Molly also mentioned that her principal ensured that teachers had an opportunity to meet with parents during parent–teacher conferences, which enhanced the relationship. Karen and Erin both commented that parents hold them accountable; Karen explained that parents have molded her into the

teacher she is today. Erin stated that she communicates with parents daily and spends 20-30 minutes per night answering parent emails. Ryan stated that he needed to do a better job in this area; however, he mentioned that he speaks with parents daily as they pick up their children. Ryan maintains a webpage that his parents can access for class information. Bob described how important parents are and how students would not succeed without their support. As a music teacher, Bob explained that students' families assist in musical productions and help with costumes and sets. Derek explained that parent participation in his classroom was very low and he does not receive much support.

The six participants were also asked if there were barriers that challenged their success as teachers. Two of the six participants identified time as a barrier to success. One teacher mentioned that the lack of technology and resources can act as barriers. Different participants mentioned that not having parent–teacher conferences was a barrier. Erin mentioned that parents can be a help and a barrier. According to Erin, "they (parents) do keep you accountable but they also can make you feel inferior and inadequate, not intentionally, but I feel like they can question teachers." Ryan mentioned that the pressure of assessments, and the implementation of assessments, can interfere with building relationships with the students, thus causing a barrier.

The last question asked during the teacher interviews considered the teacher training program. Specifically, the participants were asked if they felt their success could be attributed to their teacher training programs. Five of the six teachers said that the program they attended did not necessarily prepare them to be highly effective; however, Karen mentioned that there is definitely a discrepancy but not a given when considering the teacher training program. Molly felt as if her experience in her teacher training program was very influential on her success and she still keeps in touch with her professors. Ryan stated that he was able to get out in the field

early during his teacher training program, which could have contributed to his success. Karen stated that she did not obtain skills in her college education that would have taught her to build relationships. She also stated that she believes you have it or you do not; it does not matter where you go. Derek stated that "college is theory" and you have to be lucky to be placed in classrooms. He also mentioned that you must be surrounded by good teachers during your first year of teaching because you will need support.

Analysis of Traits

During this study the participants displayed several traits while interacting with students and colleagues. Specific traits also emerged during participant interviews. Throughout the course of each observation, particular actions carried out by participants were recorded and then associated with a trait. For example, Molly rocked a student prior to the beginning of the school day; this action was labeled as "consoling." During the interviews, teachers alluded to the traits that best described them on a personal and professional level. Table 4 displays traits that were demonstrated by the participants as well as traits the teachers used to describe themselves personally and professionally.

Table 4

Traits Demonstrated by Participants

Trait	# of Participants
Attentive	6
Calm	5
Caring	6
Comfortable	6
Committed	6
Compassionate	4
Concerned	4
Confident	6
Connected to culture	5
Consistent	6
Dedicated	6
Encouraging	6
Engaged	6
Focused	6
Friendly	5
Intentional	6
“No-nonsense” attitude	6
Non-reactive	4
Nurturing	4
Passionate	6
Patient	6
Positive	6
Realistic w/students	6
Sincere	6
Treated students like old friends	5
Understanding	4

Some of the traits listed in the chart above can be paired and are synonymous. For example, a teacher who is committed is also dedicated; however, during teacher interviews, participants used the words interchangeably. All of the six participants were focused, intentional, and consistent; all of these terms can be used interchangeably. Each participant was engaged with the learning that was taking place but also attentive to the needs students demonstrated during the learning. Each teacher was sincere, and it was obvious that each truly cared about the performance of the individual student. The teachers were concerned with the students who appeared to be ill or unmotivated; however, this student behavior infrequently occurred, but the teacher seemed in tune with the potential for distraction. Students who seemed tired, sad, or irritated were quickly comforted, and no student was charged with intentionally defying the teacher. Student mistakes and off-task behavior was minimized and quickly redirected. All participants were positive and encouraging; they were their students' cheerleaders, regardless of situations that may have occurred throughout the day. During teacher interviews, participants mentioned that it was important to be passionate, and as teachers engaged in the instructional activities, it was obvious that they were passionate about the content and instruction being delivered.

The teachers in this study were frank with their students. They did not sugar coat verbal directives nor speak harshly. They were simply honest, straight to the point, and transparent with the instructional expectations and goals. The teachers spoke in a matter-of-fact manner; each seemed confident to challenge students and break through barriers that might make the students feel uncomfortable. Each participant laid the emotional ground work early on in the school year; students did not refrain from challenge or avoid difficult tasks. It appeared that the students trusted their teachers; students seemed to understand the teachers would not expect anything

from them that they could not handle.

Presentation of Traits

Twenty-six traits emerged from six on-site observations and six participant interviews. Of these 26 traits, different teacher actions prompted the documentation of a specific trait. Through the review process, traits that were not demonstrated or identified by all six participants were removed and a new list containing 16 traits was generated. The remaining 16 traits naturally fit into one of four categories: work ethic, instructional demeanor, disposition, and attitude.

Work Ethic

The traits in Category 1 provide a snapshot of the work ethic demonstrated by all of the participants such as being committed, dedicated, passionate, and sincere. Each of the participants referred to the time they invested planning simple instructional lessons. Two of the participants mentioned that teaching in 2014 is hard work, but because they are somewhat new to the field, it is how they understood teaching would be. Four of the six participants expressed the hard work that comes with being an effective teacher and discussed how change is necessary. When speaking with each of the participants, it was evident that each was passionate about teaching. They identified the difficulty in teaching but emphasized their commitment.

Instructional Demeanor

The second category, instructional demeanor, described traits that were observed during teaching instruction. The traits include being engaged, focused, intentional, attentive, and consistent. Each participant was engaged with the activity and did not seem too bothered or troubled by the fact that they had to focus their attention on the task at hand. The teachers were intentional with their instruction and refrained from tasks that took their attention away from

their students. The teachers were consistent with their planning process and instructional delivery; during interviews teachers described the organizational process they followed to plan, as well as instructional delivery.

Disposition

Category 3 captures the disposition of each participant. Throughout the observations the participants consistently demonstrated behaviors that suggest highly effective teachers model the act of caring through different modes. Traits in this category include being caring, patient, encouraging, and positive. By examining the planning process used by all participants, it was evident that the teachers cared about students and their success. The teachers also asked students about their personal lives and their well-being. Teachers made certain their students were comfortable in the class. The teachers were patient, never hurrying a student; the time was for the students, and the teachers allowed them to progress at the developmentally appropriate pace. The participants were positive when teaching and also demonstrated this patience during the study interview. Each participant had the ability to change a negative situation into a positive experience. When the teachers were asked directly about negativity and how it affected them, all responded that it did not impede their instruction. The teachers were overly positive with their students and minimized negative situations; students were praised for their efforts and mastery when applicable.

Attitude

The fourth category, attitude, is possibly the most intriguing category to report and includes the traits of being realistic, frank, confident, and comfortable. The teachers in this study were frank and performed with a no-nonsense attitude. The teachers were realistic with students and maintained this attitude throughout the school day. Teachers demonstrated confidence when

delivering instruction and interacting with students; they displayed these traits when participating in the interview. The matter-of-fact nature demonstrated by each participant seemed to send a message of leadership to the students. The students appeared to understand who was in charge of the classroom did not seem intimidated to participate in the classroom activities or interact with the teacher.

Analysis of Strategies

Several strategies emerged through on-site observations and participant interviews. Field notes were taken during each observation, and comments made by the participants were scripted. Data were compared and reviewed, and common actions carried out by participants were noted. After reviewing scripted field notes, a chart was generated that included the most common strategies used by the participants. In some cases just one or two strategies were implemented by a participant; these strategies were eliminated from the chart. A thorough review of the remaining strategies was conducted; additional strategies were eliminated, and only the strategies used by five or six of the participants remained on the list. The final process began to unfold as the strategies naturally began to represent specific themes. For example, strategies such as student seating arrangements, simplicity of the classroom, and the review of daily behavioral expectations shaped the first theme, preventative maintenance and classroom design. In addition to preventative maintenance and classroom design, three other themes emerged after the coding process concluded.

Presentation of Strategies

Preventative Maintenance and Classroom Design

The first theme that emerged was preventative maintenance and classroom design. The highly effective teachers in this study initiated efforts to ensure that their classrooms ran in an

orderly manner. Efforts initiated included providing explicit instructions about behavior expectations, describing classroom procedures, and praising students when they successfully accomplished these expectations. The teachers frequently reviewed the expectations and afforded the students plenty of opportunity for practice. The teachers' classrooms were simple, were organized, and provided students the opportunity to work collaboratively. The layout of the classrooms also appeared to allow for easy transition and movement, which frequently occurred. It is possible that highly effective teachers who demonstrate specific traits also implement particular strategies included in Theme 1.

Each teacher demonstrated and stated that the groundwork for successful behavior management takes place at the beginning of the school year. In every classroom, except the related arts class, desks were grouped so collaborative interaction could take place. In two classrooms, the teachers used tables and each table accommodated a different amount of students. The teachers moved among the desks or tables as students worked or as instruction was being delivered. Four of the six classrooms had few visual resources or items hanging around the room; only items specific to current learning or behavioral goals were posted. Nearly all of the classrooms were clean and well maintained. Student learning materials were stored away, and it appeared as if resources students needed were easily accessible.

The students understood how to move throughout the rooms; it was obvious they had been taught how to report to learning stations, turn items in to the teacher, line up to leave the room, and transition quickly. Five of the six participants moved the students frequently, sometimes five to six times in one hour; the participants also moved frequently. The teachers' desks were out of the way of learning, and in most classrooms a small table was the place where the teacher interacted with small groups of students. All participants maximized instructional

time, and it was evident each had invested in the planning and preparation of the day's activities. There was not a situation where the students had to wait for the teacher to transition; instead, the teacher lead the transition and had materials and resources ready for the next activity.

All six of the participants eliminated the possibility for the students to act out, become off task, or cause a distraction to learning. In the situation where an unwanted behavior began to brew, each teacher punctually, but privately, addressed the situation. Only positive interaction took place between teacher and students in four of the six classrooms. Ryan seemed to spend more time investigating student behaviors and emotions; it was as if he understood preventative maintenance must take place or larger problems might develop. In Molly's kindergarten classroom there were 29 students; therefore, much redirection occurred. However, this redirection was always followed by praise. In Derek's classroom it was evident that the students needed his attention and affirmation, and he constantly redirected all negative behaviors with a positive spin. Every teacher in this study gave the student the benefit of the doubt after a questionable situation occurred. For example, Erin minimized the incident when the glue bottle went flying through the air; the teacher seemed to sincerely believe this was accidental. Ryan talked his students through challenging situations, giving reasons as to why they might be feeling or behaving in certain ways. Ryan's reasons never included intentional defiance but had more to do with the decision-making process. All six participants modeled the expected behavior; this strategy seemed to be contagious and the students mimicked the teacher behavior. Every classroom had some sort of a behavior system; however, it was referred to on an infrequent basis unless students were earning points or tickets. All six of the participants praised their students as a group and individually; all six teachers did more than praise, they built the students up by challenging them and explaining that they were performing beyond their age. In every

classroom the students were self-governed; when they did not have the teacher's undivided attention, they were able to work independently.

Engagement

The second theme that emerged was engagement. This theme is very important because it represents not only student engagement but also teacher engagement. Student engagement is a strategy often suggested for positive learning outcomes. During this study the level of teacher engagement was observed just as frequently as the level of student engagement. Participants consistently sat on the floor with the students, fostered conversation with the students, frequently checked for understanding, and ensured students were working at the appropriate pace. When the students were given the opportunity to sing, the teachers also sang; when the opportunity to dance occurred, the teachers also danced; and when a science lesson was taking place, the teacher participants engaged in the process alongside the students. The strategy to engage on the behalf of the adults seemed to motivate student engagement.

Throughout all six observations, the teachers were engaged and involved in the learning, and there were very few, possibly one or two, situations where the teacher was not directly interacting with a student during the six-hour day. It was obvious that the teachers understood how to captivate the learner and invested in this strategy. Five of the six participants used music throughout the day. In Bob's room, music was the focus, so he selected songs and activities that were relevant to the students; he maintained 100% student engagement throughout the six-hour observation. Derek, Ryan, and Erin utilized the Promethean Board in order to play YouTube clips and, in Ryan's case, Flocabulary. Molly also used the Promethean Board during math, which featured a Heidi song and seemed to be very exciting for the students.

Each of the participants engaged the students through physical movement. The teacher

gave the students multiple opportunities to move; no child sat for longer than 25 minutes during any of the observations, and when stationery for those 25 minutes, the students were engaged in learning stations. Bob used rhythm sticks, tubes, and tennis balls during his music instruction, and Molly used a variety of objects, giving the students ample opportunity for the students to feel these objects. In addition to the movement Ryan afforded the students during Flocabulary, they also played a Ninja Turtle game where they tossed an object around the room while answering questions; the teacher also incorporated artifacts such as a microscope, for students to explore. Karen and Erin both utilized candy (Pop Rocks and Gummy Bears) into instructional activities which instantly engaged all students. All six participants designed learning activities that were relative to the learner at the particular grade level or subject area, and all activities were targeted to one or two learning skills of the day.

All six of the participants put themselves in close proximity to the learners. Karen sat with students at a kidney-shaped table for the majority of the day, providing individualized learning. When students were not at Karen's table, they were seated on the carpet at her feet, usually manipulating an object on the Promethean Board. Molly sat on the carpet with her students to deliver math instruction. There was a rocking chair on the carpet the teacher could have used; instead, she sat with the children. Bob and Ryan also sat on the floor while delivering instruction; Ryan sat knee-to-knee and elbow-to-elbow modeling the "read with a partner" strategy.

Differentiation

The third theme to emerge from this study was differentiation. Each participant utilized many strategies that allowed for the differentiation of learning. The participants were data driven, planning each classroom activity based upon the data they collected through multiple

forms of assessments. Very little whole group instruction occurred, and when it did occur, it was equally balanced with individualized or small group instruction. Most of the participants referred to notebooks, binders, or sheets of paper that contained individual student information or goals. Consistently, the highly effective teachers' instructional activities aligned with the students' needs. Student learning stations were also designed to meet individual goals. In addition to small or individual learning groups and student learning goals, the teacher participants engaged students in multiple activities that might reinforce one or two skills.

The teachers provided multiple opportunities to learn in order to reach the most diverse learners. In Karen's room, students were given a clipboard that held learning activities targeting the needs of the individual student; station activities were also designed to challenge students according to their developmental levels. Karen met with two students for a period of 25 to 30 minutes during the reading block; the instruction that was delivered during small group was based upon individual student data and had been collected from a variety of assessment measures. Both Derek and Ryan used data gathered from Acuity assessments to develop learning plans that were carried out through whole group instruction. The teachers were intentional and planned their activities according to the deficits indicated on student test results. At one point Ryan told the students that the data helped him to know how to be a better teacher, and during his observation, he taught symmetry because scores indicated weak student performance. Molly, the kindergarten teacher, met with four reading groups, and her assistant teacher also met with four different groups. Combined, there was an opportunity for eight small groups to meet that targeted individual learning skills. Bob did not engage in small group instruction but appeared to scaffold the learning according to student developmental level. His expectations for skill demonstration differed according to the age group he was teaching. Erin

met with numerous small groups during her observation, each targeted to the learning levels of the students. Five of the six participants mentioned that they designed their instruction based on assessment data; students were given tasks based upon their performance on various assessments. Derek allowed his students to take tests up to three times before taking an official grade. He mentioned that it was very important that the students be successful on assessments and emphasized to the students that his goal was to see what they can do instead of what they were unable to do.

Delivery of Instruction

The success of the participants in this study could largely be associated with the fourth theme, instructional delivery. Multiple traits presented earlier in this chapter associate with the strategies that fall into Theme 4. The participants were patient with the students when delivering instruction. It seemed as if they understood how each child learned and did not rush, yet challenged students as needed. The participants used a consistent flow when delivering instruction; it seemed as if the students understood that information would be presented and the teacher would model how to carry out the task. The participants and students would complete a task together, and then the students would complete the task individually. Each participant, including the music teacher, consistently used a gradual release model when delivering instruction. The highly effective teachers in this study delivered instruction at a quick pace and maintained one step ahead of the students throughout the observation period. The teachers were calm and in nearly all cases delivered instruction with a positive, but matter-of-fact tone. The students understood they would have to achieve identified tasks and there was never resistance. The students accepted the challenge of the task and seemed confident the teacher would coach them to success.

Instruction in each classroom began as soon as the majority of the students were at their assigned seats. Derek, who met with his homeroom class first, did not jump into instruction, and it appeared to be necessary to give the students time needed to settle before transitioning into the related arts. Ryan began instruction well before the morning announcements and Karen, Erin, Bob, and Molly also began instruction very close to 7:55 a.m. Managerial tasks, such as lunch count, attendance, etc., were not noted during any of the observations; Ryan completed this task after already engaging the class. The teachers in this study always explained the next task before the students were directed to transition. The teachers were leaders and coaches, and the students were members of their teams. Although unscripted, one might think that the teachers had typed out each move they made throughout the day. Student learning goals were identified and intentional; however, each participant took advantage of the impromptu learning opportunities that surfaced during the day. The teachers used catchphrases and jingles when they wanted students to remember specific material; the teachers frequently checked for understanding, ensuring the students had processed the delivered content. Erin frequently asked her students to turn and share with a partner. All six participants frequently asked questions and pressed the students until they replied with the best answer. The students did not seem intimidated when asked a question, and most seemed to understand that they could ask their classmates to help them explain. Typically, the teachers did not give the students the answer; however, students were guided through the process until they could articulate the correct response. The students were challenged to answer every question asked and seemed to understand strategies they could use in order to provide an appropriate answer.

It appeared as if all six teachers identified one to two skills from each subject area that they expected the students to master. During each period the participants provided multiple

opportunities for the students to practice targeted skills; instructional activities presented content from different angles. During Derek's observation, he focused upon mean, median, mode, and range. The teacher broke down each term and presented each separately throughout the week. On the day of his observation, the teacher reviewed a chart that displayed the learning objectives, reminding the students that they were familiar with some of the terms, but on this particular day would learn about mode and range. The teacher used the Promethean Board to model how the students could find the mode and the range; the teacher completed an activity sheet with the students. Next, Derek played a YouTube clip that featured an entertaining rap that was familiar to the students and also emphasized the mathematical vocabulary. After the YouTube clip, Derek asked the students to independently complete an activity sheet that reviewed the terms for a third time. Ryan identified the importance of delivering content in a way that allows students to utilize their five senses. He gave the students four to five opportunities to exercise a skill through the manipulation of different senses. Bob moved the students from their seats to the floor, engaging the students in two to three different activities that exercised one to two skills.

The teachers in this study shared student data with the students, and the students seemed to understand why they were engaging in specific learning activities. Instructional goals were posted in three of the six classrooms; in two of the classrooms the teachers referred to the "I Can" statements throughout the day. In addition to posting learning objectives, all six teachers used very explicit instructions when delivering content information. Each participant, including those that instructed older students, only required students to follow one direction at a time. Ryan repeated his instructions at least three times and Molly asked her kindergarten students to complete one task at a time. During the observation when kindergarten students appeared to become fidgety, the teacher restated behavioral expectations but never stated more than one to

two expectations at a time. During Bob's observation, he specifically asked the students to sing carefully and clearly; he also modeled the expectations he had for his students. All six participants used the gradual release model throughout the instructional day. Each teacher spent an enormous amount of time modeling a desired task. The teachers began with a demonstration, then performed the task with the students, followed by asking the students to practice the task independently. Erin presented math word problems to students in her small group using this process: the teacher read the word problem, broke the problem down into steps, performed each step of the problem with the student, and then afforded the students the opportunity to complete the task independently. Erin coached the students as they completed the problem but held the expectation that they would do this independently.

All of the teachers in this study planned for instruction well before the day of delivery. Molly stated that she met with other kindergarten teachers during the summer in order to make plans for the year. Karen planned instructional activities that provided the students with multiple opportunities to enhance specific skills through a variety of operations: iPods, iPads, and laptops, as well as traditional resources such as hardback dictionaries. Molly kept a notebook that included planning notes she made throughout the school day and would use the notes when planning for future learning. Resources for instructional activities were readily available; not one participant spent time preparing or gathering items when students were present.

Summary

This chapter presented the traits of and strategies used by highly effective teachers. After first reviewing scripted field notes from teacher observations and interviews, common traits began to emerge. Traits that were demonstrated by teacher participants during on-site observations were associated to specific actions carried out by the participants. Each participant

also identified traits that would describe him- or herself on a personal and professional level. Traits that surfaced from four or more of the participants were displayed in Table 4. In some cases the traits were synonymous and identified by participants using different verbiage between interviews. Four categories of traits emerged from this study and included work ethic, instructional demeanor, disposition, and attitude.

The strategies most commonly used by highly effective teachers were featured in this chapter. During on-site observations, participant behavior and instruction were scripted while being digitally recorded. Field notes were reviewed and matched with digital recordings in order to ensure accuracy. Scripted notes were coded where categories and themes began to naturally take shape. The four themes that emerged from the transcribed notes and were presented in this chapter include (a) preventative maintenance and classroom design, (b) engagement, (c) differentiation, and (d) delivery of instruction. Chapter 5 presents conclusions, implications, recommendations, and further questions regarding the content of this study.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the traits of and strategies used by highly effective teachers. The field of education is ever changing; however, it is likely that this country will encounter a shortage of teachers as a rush of retirees exit the field. There will be an urgency to place teachers into classrooms across America, and it is important that school administrators instantly identify the traits most often displayed by effective teachers in order to ensure the appropriate candidates are chosen. When school administrators understand the strategies used by highly effective teachers, they can search for candidates who can articulate this experience of implementing such strategies. In addition to assisting school administrators with the hiring process, this study can also serve as a guide for teachers aspiring to improve practice. Teachers may or may not be aware of traits they possess as an individual; through a process of reflection and character enhancement, teachers may be able to intentionally exercise particular dimensions of their personalities, which may result in improved success. Strategies uncovered during this study can be replicated in classrooms across the country. Teachers may find that student achievement could increase after implementing a set of strategies that are of no cost and require very little time.

Numerous studies have been conducted to identify the impact teachers have upon student learning (Danielson, 2007; Goldhaber, 2002; Hamachek, 1969; Lanouette, 2012, Sanders &

Rivers, 1996.) Similarly, this investigation sought participants who were identified as being highly effective teachers based upon recommendations made by a school administrator. Principals in the EVSC were asked to recommend one to two teachers in their buildings that they considered highly effective. Once recommendations were made, the participant selection process considered gender, experience, and subject areas and/or grade level taught. Participants of this study represented teachers at the elementary level. Each participant represented a different grade level, and in one case, included a music teacher; this study did not include a first grade teacher. This study was driven by the following questions:

1. What are the traits of highly effective teachers?
2. What strategies are used by highly effective teachers?

This qualitative, multiple-site study examined the traits of and strategies used by highly effective teachers during on-site observations and participant interviews. A goal of this study was to capture the elements of effective teaching that emerge during any given school day. Another aspect of this study considered the perspectives of highly effective teachers in regards to the traits of and strategies used in order to reach student success; this information was collected during interviews that took place at each observation site. The data collected from each on-site observation and participant interview were analyzed during the coding process; thereafter, themes for traits and strategies naturally began to emerge.

Implications

Several implications can be derived from the results of this study. Many of the implications support current educational trends, while other implications contradict present day "best practice." Many of the findings from this study support research from Hattie (2003), which suggested that teachers' practices inside the classrooms have not only statistical but also practical

significance on student learning; such practices include providing formative assessments, acceleration, teacher clarity, feedback, and teacher–student relationship.

The first implication to be reported in this study considers the fact that the participants were simple, and their classrooms, as well as instructional activities, were simple. The term simple implies that the teachers only displayed visual resources that students would use on that day. The classrooms were not cluttered, and only necessary supplies and furniture were accessible to the students. Despite the simplicity factor present in each classroom, the activities which were created for students were powerful. Consider Karen's classroom and the multiple stations students participated in during the reading block. The stations were easy for students to understand and the students quickly began working when released during small group instruction. Stations designed by Karen targeted specific student goals in a most uncomplicated manner; Karen maintained a gradual release model that allowed for rigor during each instructional activity. Erin's room was extremely organized and only relevant resources were posted on the walls; her classroom had a very simple undertone, minimizing distractions and highlighting important learning goals. The highly effective teachers in this study were very simple, not complicated. They demonstrated the ability to highlight only the most important information and in a fashion that was easily understood by young learners. Being simple or the "less is more" concept was not featured in Chapter 2; however, this was an overarching implication that resulted from this study.

The second implication to be reported from this study is that highly effective teachers create an environment where students have the ability to thrive. The teacher participants explicitly stated expectations, routines, and boundaries. Turnbull (2013) identified effective teachers as having the ability to deal with stress, manage time well, deal with challenges in an

assertive manner, understand how to build and manage relationships, listen attentively, and communicate clearly. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Molly reviewed classroom expectations and goals each morning. Ryan repeatedly stated what he expected the students to do before each task. Throughout the six observations there was not a situation where a student refused to comply or attempt to achieve a task. The notion that someone might fail was not observed in any of the participants' classrooms. The classrooms included in this study seemed to be safe zones; students were not intimidated by the possibility that they may not be able to achieve a specified task and were willing to attempt each challenge. The participant called Derek faced very different challenges than the other participants of the study. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Derek spent a portion of the morning allowing the students to settle before presenting a task. Derek's students demonstrated great potential for producing negative behaviors; however, due to his coach-like teaching strategies, he eliminated the possibility for failure, and all students willingly accepted each challenge that was presented throughout the day-long observation. Much like Derek, Erin, Ryan, Bob, Karen, and Molly all demonstrated the attitude of success. There was never a moment of doubt displayed by any of the participants. According to Breaux and Whitaker (2006), the best teachers actually tell the students what they will be able to do at the end of the lesson. The best teachers understand that they must set high expectations for students but also understand that they are the variable when students succeed or fail. It is likely that students are confident, are willing to attempt difficult tasks, and accept failure if they understand routines and expectations, receive explicit instructions, and are coached during the learning process.

The third implication resulting from this study suggests that modeling a positive attitude; explicitly stating, building, and maintaining relationships; and constantly reviewing procedures

and expectations may be more powerful and necessary than a specific classroom management system. The participants of this study displayed various visual management systems that monitored behavior; however, these systems were rarely used. Molly allowed kindergarten students to tally table points on the board and Ryan verbally awarded points to students throughout the day. The four remaining participants rarely referred to the behavior monitoring systems in their classrooms. Research suggests that building relationships with students increases their likelihood for success; according to Peart and Campbell (1999), academic success of at-risk students is enhanced if a personal connection that communicates respect and caring exists between the teacher and the student. Furthermore, it is likely that participants in this investigation established and maintained relationships with students but in an indirect manner. For example, relationship building occurred while engaging in a lesson, reading to students on the floor, or during teacher/student data chats. This information may suggest that less time be spent developing a behavior management system and instead focusing on components resulting from this study such as preventative maintenance and classroom design, engagement, differentiation, and instructional delivery.

The fourth and final implication from this study challenges the theory that teacher collaboration is critical when considering successful teaching. "Cultivating and capturing teacher expertise is one of the most grossly underused assets in education" (Schmoker, 2001, p. 1), and while the participants in this study appeared to be leaders among colleagues, offering guidance and insight, not one credited collaboration as the single most important factor when considering instructional success. Three of the participants mentioned that they regularly participated in collaboration; one mentioned that collaboration rarely occurred, and another mentioned that collaboration took place before the school year. It may be determined that

collaboration has the potential to increase the overall performance of a school because teachers who are not as skilled have an opportunity to learn from the best teachers. The participants in this study were concerned with what was going on around them but were focused on their mission and the work that they were responsible for accomplishing. With or without collaboration, highly effective teachers are likely to succeed.

Conclusions

It can be difficult to identify why some teachers are highly effective and others are mediocre. Teachers typically understand the fulfillment that is redeemed after each school year ends; however, it is also possible that many teachers who are presently teaching question why they chose the teaching profession. The conclusions of this study can provide insight on what it takes to be a highly effective teacher. Individuals who are contemplating entering into the teaching profession, and practicing teachers who want to enhance their performance, may benefit from the results of this study. Furthermore, the results of this study may assist school administrators through the hiring process and leading teaching improvement efforts.

The first conclusion from this study suggests that specific personality traits can support the execution of instructional strategies and increase student success. For example, traits that were grouped into the work ethic category, such as being committed, dedicated, passionate, and sincere, have the potential to drive the highly effective teachers toward successful engagement and differentiation. Teachers who are committed to teaching, and sincerely believe in what they do, may utilize instructional delivery strategies that could lead to positive student outcomes. It is likely that highly effective teachers do not represent all of the traits captured in the four categories; however, all participants in this study demonstrated each trait and implemented the strategies featured in all four themes. The teachers in this study did not appear to alter their

personalities when interacting with students; rather each interacted with students in a friendly manner that seemed to be based upon a mutual understanding and acceptance of one another.

The students in the observed classrooms mimicked many of the traits demonstrated by their teachers. The students were comfortable, confident, engaged, and friendly with one another and seemed to take full advantage of the time allotted to learn. It may be concluded that if all teachers are aware of the traits displayed by the highly effective, and intentionally execute these traits, students in every classroom may also begin to develop such traits.

The second conclusion of this study suggested that specific strategies are commonly used by highly effective teachers that may increase student performance. The participants of this study consistently exercised strategies found within each of the four themes—experience, gender, or grade level taught—unlikely influenced the participants' execution of the identified strategies. The six participants in this study were randomly chosen from 25 recommendations; therefore, few commonalities existed except for the fact that they all taught within the EVSC. The participants were of varying ages, and although many had attended the same university, there was a significant lapse of time. It can be concluded that highly effective teachers prioritize and execute specific strategies that may not seem significant to the layperson but are critical to the climate and learning that exists in the classroom. It was determined that being proactive and executing a strategy of preventative maintenance throughout the school year was important for all participants. The teachers also designed an environment that was conducive to learning, minimized off-task time, and allowed for easy movement throughout the room. Several strategies executed by the participants make up the first theme derived from this study; these strategies mentioned in Chapter 4 were consistently implemented by all six participants and signify the importance of this theme. Three other themes emerged from this study and were the

basis for the success of each classroom. They include engagement, differentiation, and instructional delivery. The themes suggested that highly effective teachers view each student as an individual and deliver instruction based upon the needs of their students. Finally, the most successful teacher understands not only that engaging the student is necessary for success but also being an engaged teacher is also significantly important.

The results of this study may be useful for teacher candidates as they develop the foundation of basic skills necessary to lead a classroom. Teachers can refer to the strategies presented in this study and begin to draw from the four themes, embedding each into the instructional planning process. It is imperative that school administrators also identify strategies that will directly impact positive student outcomes. The results from this study present several strategies commonly used by highly effective teachers in four simple themes that can be easily interpreted. In many cases principals do not have the opportunity to observe teacher candidates prior to hiring; during interviews administrators can filter for specific personality traits, understanding that such traits may also indicate strategies the candidate is capable of executing. For example, a teacher candidate who may demonstrate a sense of confidence, comfort, frankness, and realism could potentially execute strategies found among the four different themes. Principals may also want to consider this study as they begin to plan professional development. There is a potential that many teachers possess several of the traits described in this study, but have not learned to execute the strategies used by highly effective teachers. Through a process of self-reflection, it is hopeful specific strategies could be implemented throughout many classrooms.

Summary of Conclusions

It can be concluded that there are specific traits executed by highly effective teachers. The 16 traits identified in this study can be placed into four different categories and represent teacher work ethic, instructional demeanor, disposition, and attitude. Furthermore, specific strategies executed by highly effective teachers are likely supported by the traits mentioned in each of the four categories. Themes naturally emerged from the data collected and are identified as preventative maintenance and classroom design, engagement, differentiation, and instructional delivery.

Recommendations for Further Studies

It is important that researchers continue to investigate the phenomenon of highly effective teachers. As a rush of retirees leave the teaching field, it is urgent that their replacements understand the fundamentals of teaching. Many of the strategies executed by the highly effective teachers in this study can be enhanced with practice; however, teacher education programs must provide student teachers with the opportunity to develop and polish the identified strategies. Future investigations may consider the personality traits of pre-service teachers followed by their success once assigned permanent positions. The opportunity to conduct a long-term case study may help to prove that the success of a teacher can be predicted prior to hiring or, in some cases, completing the teacher education program.

Additional studies may also consider the link between student success and the identified traits and strategies presented in this study. Student data was not a factor in this study; however, it may be beneficial to triangulate traits, strategies executed, and student data. An investigation that includes participants who utilize the strategies identified in the four themes, compared to

individuals who do not use any of the strategies identified, may ensure reliability and validity of this study.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the traits of and strategies used by highly effective teachers. During six on-site observations and participant interviews, multiple traits were demonstrated and spoken of by the participants. Participants also executed and referred to multiple strategies that foster a successful learning environment. There was not a magic recipe uncovered from this study; rather, practical strategies emerged that were consistently implemented by individuals who are passionate about teaching. All six of the participants included in this study acknowledged the level of difficulty that comes along with teaching; however, from the perspective of the individual teacher, the work was all a part of the success reached at the end of each school year. The participants represent healthy and simple personality traits that can be executed by the average individual. Overall, there must be a drive to be a leader of learning, and with this drive, the practical strategies discussed can be successfully executed.

The conclusions of this study may be valuable for many stakeholders. Individuals instructing and leading teacher education efforts may refer to the results of this study, ensuring that student teachers have the opportunity to exercise and demonstrate specific personality traits. Additionally, student teachers should be given the opportunity to learn about the foundational groundwork that will increase the potential for success once they enter the classroom.

School administrators and teachers may also refer to the results of this study when hiring new teachers and leading professional development initiatives. It may be difficult to instill specific traits collected from this study; however, through self-reflection efforts teachers may

become more aware of the personality traits that could increase instructional success in the classroom. Teachers who can demonstrate the 16 traits identified in this study may also be able to execute specific strategies that increase the potential for successful student outcomes.

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APPENDIX A: COVER LETTER TO PRINCIPALS

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE TRAITS OF AND STRATEGIES USED BY HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

An experiment is being conducted and you are being asked to recommend one to two teachers in your building who you believe to have an incredible influence on student learning. As you read this letter names and faces of those who you have observed throughout the school year, or past years might instantly come to mind. A study will be conducted, consisting of teacher observations and interviews, in order to investigate commonalities or unique practices among the identified highly effective teachers. These interviews and observations will be conducted by Stephanie Ciolli-Stewart as part of a doctoral dissertation with Dr. Todd Whitaker serving as the faculty sponsor from the Department of Educational Leadership at Indiana State University.

The goal of this study is to gather firsthand information from the identified individuals who have had a profound impact upon student success, specifically seeking information about the practice deployed in order to reach such success. Several outlets of teaching will be discussed during researcher and teacher dialogue, including topics such as classroom management, instructional preparation and delivery, training and professional development, influences, experience, and specific strategies deployed; unexpected components could emerge through teacher interviews and observations. A one-day visit to the recommended teacher's classroom will be scheduled at the convenience of the teacher and school administrator. It is the intention of the researcher to have the opportunity to emerge into the regular day of the most effective teacher, thereby, observing instruction and engaging in dialogue with the teacher. The classroom observation will be digitally recorded, and dialogue between participant and researcher audio recorded, so that each participant's practice can be examined by the researcher. Specific details of each classroom observation will be reviewed and compared to other participants of the study. Common themes which emerge from classroom observations will be categorized and cross referenced with interview responses.

Teacher Interview Questions:

1. Can you describe your philosophy of teaching? What do you believe "works" in regards to your teaching?

2. What specific things do you do in your classroom that you know has a positive impact on every child?

3. How do you handle discipline?
    a. How much of a priority is classroom management?
    b. Do you have a classroom management system?

4. Can you describe the "key" to success? This can be professionally for you or for your students.

5. How much of your success do you attribute to a teacher training program (traditional or non-traditional), or professional development you have participated in during your career?
    a. Do you feel as if this has an impact on student learning?

6. How important do you think experience is when considering the success to every learner? This could be any type of experience, life experience, educational learning, etc.

7. Do you have a regular routine you follow at any particular time of the calendar year? If so, can you describe this routine?

8. Can you describe the relationships you have with the parents/guardians of your students?
    a. How much time do you invest with the parents of your students?
    b. How important do you feel the support of the parents/guardians is to a child's education?
    c. What role do you believe parents play in their child's education?

9. If you could change anything in education what would that be? Would you change education in more than one way?

10. Do you ever feel as if you need support?
    a. If so, who do you call upon?
    b. Do you have a mentor?
        i. If so, how do you go about using this system?

11. What resources do you need in order to be successful?

12. What is the most important time of the day and what do you do during that time?

13. Are their barriers you encounter that challenge your success as a teacher? If so what are these barriers you must work through?

14. What do you do if you find a child is not learning or progressing at the appropriate rate?

15. Do you have additional ideas about your teaching which enables you to lead each child to success?

This is an assets-based study; therefore no harmful effects are predicted to occur. At the point when principal recommendations are reviewed, the participant selection process will consider male and female teachers with varying years of experience, race affiliation, and teachers from multiple subject areas and/or grade levels.

Your recommendation will remain anonymous; participants will be informed on the study selection process. If applicable, pseudonyms will be used for all teachers and schools involved in the interviews and observations. There is no cost for participation, or reimbursement for those who agree to participate. Please recommend one to two teachers from your building by accessing the link to the Qualtrics web survey site. Once you access the survey site you will be provided with an on-line form that will allow you to submit necessary information. Once all participant information has been collected and analyzed using the Qualtrics system, the teacher or teachers will be delivered a letter describing the specifics of this study. In the letter provided to teachers, each will be given the opportunity to: 1) be excluded from the study, 2) learn more about the study, or 3) agree to participate in the study, based on the information provided. Once all participants have been identified, teachers and administrators will suggest the best time for the researcher to observe in the classroom.

The information obtained from the classroom observations and dialogue between participant and researcher, will be summarized in the dissertation developed by Stephanie Ciolli-Stewart and will be accessible for administrators and teachers to review. It is the intention of this study that the uniqueness of the most outstanding teachers will be uncovered and replicated in all classrooms. The Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation consists of numerous teachers who have an incredible skill and a profound ability to educate all children. Responses from this study could possibly be used at a later date to investigate the influence, and preparation higher education systems offer pre-service teachers.

If you have any questions please contact Stephanie Ciolli-Stewart at 917 S. Dexter Avenue, Evansville, IN 47713, (812) 476-1321 or Stephanie.Stewart@evsc.k12.in.us. You may also contact Dr. Todd Whitaker at Indiana State University, UH 317B, Terre Haute, IN 47809, (812) 237-2904 or Todd.Whitaker@indstate.edu.

Teacher Interview Questions:

1. What is something pre-service teachers or individuals contemplating going into the teaching field should know about teaching?

2. Are you impacted by negativity?

3. What specific strategies do you implement that increase student learning?

4. What personality traits would you use to describe yourself personally or professionally?

5. How do you handle discipline?
   a. How much of a priority is classroom management?
   b. Do you have a classroom management system?

6. Do you have a regular routine you follow at any particular time of the calendar year? If so, can you describe this routine?

7. Can you describe the relationships you have with the parents/guardians of your students?
   a. How much time do you invest with the parents of your students?
   b. How important do you feel the support of the parents/guardians is to a child's education?
   c. What role do you believe parents play in their child's education?

8. Are their barriers you encounter that challenge your success as a teacher?

9. How much of your success do you attribute to a teacher training program (traditional or non-traditional), or professional development you have participated in during your career?
   a. Do you feel as if this has an impact on student learning?

APPENDIX B: TEACHER PARTICIPANT LETTER

Dear (Teacher's Name),

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Stephanie Ciolli-Stewart, M.S., a doctoral student under the supervision of Dr. Todd Whitaker at Indiana State University Department of Educational Leadership. This research is being conducted for completion of a doctoral dissertation. Your involvement in this study is entirely voluntary. Based on a multi-step process of professional recommendation and a targeted sample selection process you have been selected to participate in this experiment c The selection process used to recruit participants for this study considers factors such as gender, years of experience, race affiliation, grade level or subject area taught, and level of effectiveness. This study will take a close look at teacher traits and strategies that are implemented in the classroom. As a participant in this study you would be asked to allow me to visit your classroom from the start to finish of your school day. Another feature of this study would be to engage in dialogue with you throughout the course of your day (when time is available,) so that I can obtain an understanding of your perception of teaching. At any time during the observation and or dialogue you will be able to ask questions and receive answers for your questions. You are not obligated to participant this study and can withdraw from the experiment at any time.

There are no known negative risks that may result from this study, however, by agreeing to this study you would allow for me to be present in your classroom for one day. Additionally, there is no cost or reimbursement of any kind when participating in this study, but the

contribution you make to the field of education will be priceless. Your identity will remain confidential throughout the course of this experiment, and when necessary pseudonyms will be used for all teachers and the schools in which they teach.

If you would like to learn more about this study or agree to be a part of this study please fill out the attached form and mail to Stephanie Stewart using the self-addressed and stamped envelope. There is also an option on the attached form for you to exempt yourself from this experiment if you are not interested in participating at this time. You may contact me at 812-454-6212 or Stephanie.stewart@evsc.k12.in.us with specific questions about the experiment. As a fellow educator I cannot express in words how important your talent is to the future of our children and the success of our community. I look forward to meeting you and observing you in action!

Sincerely,

Stephanie Ciolli-Stewart