A Grassroots Approach: Voicing the Students' Perspective to Create a Positive School Climate[*]

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1 Introduction

Student achievement, or lack thereof, is a major topic of interest today to policymakers, educators, and
parents. The single most important teacher factor influencing student achievement is that of teacher effectiveness (Jordan, Weerasinghe, & Mendro, 1997; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). As aptly noted by Henson (2008),
"Good teachers make the difference in who succeeds in school" (p. 2). Effective teachers have an influence
on students that is powerful and long-lasting, an idea that is emphasized in the federal government's "highly
qualified teachers" component (The No Child Left Behind Act, 2001, Title IX, 9191{23} A-C; U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Unfortunately, in our opinion, the federal government's focus is overly narrow as
passing tests and earning credentials essentially comprises effective teachers for the federal government.

    Previous researchers, however, have well documented that effective teachers have not only content knowledge expertise but, also important, possess the ability to connect, emotionally and socially, with their

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students (Aagaard & Skidmore, 2002; Foote, Vermette, Wisniewski, Agnello, & Pagano, 2000; Henson, 2008; Quereshi, 1980). Far too many other researchers and organizations have contended that the affective domain must be given credence as well (e.g., Cotton, 2000; Good & Brophy, 2003; Goodlad, 1984; Minor, Onwueg-buzie, Witcher, & James, 2002; National Association of Secondary Principals and The Education Alliance, 2008; Peart & Campbell, 1999; Witcher, Onwuegbuzie, & Minor, 2001). In addition, concerns exist about the social and cultural contexts of teaching (e.g., Banks, Gay, Nieto, & Rogoff, 2007; Lopez, Gonzalez, & Fierro, 2006), meaning that effective teaching occurs within the context of schools and schooling.

Several researchers (e.g., Minor et al., 2002; Wang, Gibson, & Slate, 2007; Witcher et al., 2001) have provided lists of effective teaching characteristics for K-12 teachers. For example, Wang et al. provided 24 discrete effective teaching characteristics: helping; teaches well; motivating; teaches for understanding; service; explains material well; caring; communication; fun; good attitude; builds relationships; uses different modalities; challenges students; makes learning interesting; passion; involving; being understanding; patience; friendly; being respectful; and, being fair (p. 286). Many of these themes fit under Witcher et al.'s (2001) more global analysis: student-centeredness; enthusiasm for teaching; ethicalness; classroom and behavior management; teaching methodology; and knowledge of subject (p. 49). Similar findings were present in Minor et al.'s (2002) study: student centered; effective classroom and behavior manager; competent instructor; ethical; enthusiastic about teaching; knowledgeable about subject; and professional.

Readers should note that these effective teaching characteristics were generated for K-12 teachers and not specifically for teachers at the elementary, middle, or high school levels. Only two studies were located in which effective teaching characteristics were delineated for teachers at a specific school level. Slate, Capraro, and Onwuegbuzie (2007) analyzed 72 undergraduate teacher education students' stories of their best K-5 teachers. Fourteen themes emerged that they indicated were indicative of effective teaching at the elementary school level: female teachers; caring; good attitude; uses different modalities; involving; teaches well; passion toward job; fun; motivating; creative; builds relationships; respectful; makes learning interesting; and classroom management. More recently, Schulte, Slate, and Onwuegbuzie (2009) analyzed 615 college students', predominantly Hispanic, characteristics of effective high school teachers. Their qualitative analyses revealed 24 themes: caring; communication; creative; disciplinarian; fairness; flexible; friendly; fun; knowledgeable; listening; manages classroom; uses different modalities; involving; motivating; organized; passion for teaching; patience; builds relationships; shows others respect; challenges; service; teaches well; good personality; and understanding. Both studies have characteristics in common, both with each other, and with the studies depicting characteristics of effective K-12 teachers.

The culture of teaching includes teacher preparation/orientation programs, as well as the sentiments which can be attributed to the teaching profession. Educating teacher candidates can be a lesson in the perpetuation of a cycle—we, teacher educators, tend to produce teachers just like ourselves. Teacher candidates mimic and replicate practices they witness from their mentors (Kagan, 1992), teachers and professors they have had in their preparation programs as well as their own experiences as students in classrooms. Although an abundance of research exists that identifies strong, positive changes for teacher education programs, people still tend to be wary of outside sources of information when it comes to education and they tend to connect their current practices to their educational instructors. As Lortie (1975) alleged, people tend to believe they know what it encompasses to be a teacher, because, after all, they have spent many years in the classroom. Outside knowledge—outside of the teacher candidates' own knowledge base, still occupies the realm of esoteric knowledge. Therefore, exploring teacher candidates' perception of best teacher characteristics is worth investigating to address what they believe and the suitability of these beliefs within the realm of best practices for the classroom.

1.1 Relevance for Educational Leaders

School climate, and its importance for student and school success, is difficult to overstate. Who better to help establish the quality of the school climate than the site-based administrator? As aptly stated by Stover (2005),

"In the final analysis, researchers say, any serious look at school climate and culture should lead pol-

icymakers to a simple – and challenging – conclusion: Almost everything depends on leadership. Forget about fancy programs or interventions. Attitudes and behaviors in a school are not going to change unless the principal understands how to work with the existing culture – and knows how to help it evolve into a healthier one." (p. 1).

To build a supportive school climate, it is imperative to cultivate in teachers and students what Schunk and Pintrich (2002) identified as the crucial aspects of working toward that goal; (a) a sense of community and belonging, (b) warmth and civility in personal relationships, and (c) feelings of safety and security. Researchers have documented that the presence of a positive relationship among students, teachers, administrators, and the community generates a positive school environment. In this study, we focused specifically on students' views regarding their experiences in high school concerning their best teachers.

It is one issue to ponder what makes an impact on a school climate, impose it, and hope for the best. It is entirely another issue to conduct research to determine what actually makes an impact. Thus, we looked inward, toward students, and gave them a voice. In doing so, we determined what students identified as the qualities of best teachers, therefore providing grassroots credibility to a belief in the effectiveness of these qualities. The Consortium to Prevent School Violence (CPSV) has pointed out that, while differences exist between schools, large differences exist between classrooms within the same school. Therefore, it is important that positive "best teacher"- student relationships are developed, particularly through a whole school approach. Thus, if the site administrator works to foster these qualities in teachers through in-services and workshops as well as hiring practices, then the characteristic of a positive school climate, as identified by CPSV, might be more likely to become a reality.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The limited empirical research that exists on preservice teachers' views of excellent teaching consists primarily of lists of characteristics (e.g., Carson, 1999; Henry, 1977; Saban, 2003; Willie, 1985; Witcher et al., 2001). Included in these studies are characteristics of effective teachers as well as characteristics of ineffective teachers. Moreover, most researchers have focused on K-12 teachers in general, rather than at a specific school level. Therefore, in concordance with Willie's (1985) recommendation, we had a sample of preservice teachers share their experiences about what they perceived to be characteristics of good teachers and teaching practices. As such, we utilized these individuals' experiences in hopes of helping us to "define themes that schools of education should emphasize to assure production of effective teachers" (Slate et al., 2008, p. 56).

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of preservice teachers in a secondary education program in regard to their *best* teacher, based upon the respondents' experiences as students in grades 7-12. Using the respondents' own words, we sought to identify the characteristics of a *best* teacher. In doing so, we hoped to have preservice teachers would consider the appropriateness of the qualities they identified and then determine the teaching practices that they would execute in their own classrooms. In this way, we reinforce the concept of reflective practitioners.

1.4 Research Question

This study was designed to answer the following question: What are the characteristics of the *best* grade 7-12 teachers, as perceived by preservice teachers in a secondary education program?

2 Method

2.1 Setting

The study was conducted with participants from a College of Education in a large suburban university in Southern California. Participants were students who were enrolled in courses in the Department of Secondary

Education and who were pursuing a teaching credential. As such, these students are referred to as preservice teachers. In California, a bachelor's degree in a specific subject area (e.g., math, English, science, social sciences) is required before entering the teaching credential program which is a post-baccalaureate program. Preservice teachers are prepared to teach in grades 7-12 public school settings. Present in the preservice teacher program is a fieldwork component that requires preservice teachers to spend time in actual diverse classroom settings beginning with their first class in the program. This fieldwork component mandates that the preservice students work alongside with the master or mentor teachers by observing, co-teaching, planning, conferencing and, finally, student teaching the class (classes) on their own.

2.2 Participants

A total of 257 preservice teachers participated in this study, of whom 147 (57.2%) were female and 106 (41.2%) were male, and 4 persons did not provide this information. Participants indicated that they were at various stages of the credential program, but all had had experience in 7-12 classrooms through the fieldwork requirement. Each participant had to meet the GPA requirement of 2.75 to be accepted into the program. Respondents were predominantly White ($n = 126$; 49.0%), followed by Hispanic/Latino ($n = 66$, 25.7%), Asian/Pacific Islander ($n = 36$, 14.0%), African American ($n = 5$, 1.9%), and Other ($n = 24$, 9.3%). Participants ranged in age from 20 to 58 years ($M = 27.0$, $SD = 7.0$). Additionally, 71 (27.6%) persons reported that they were the first in their family to attend college, whereas 182 (70.8%) indicated that they were not the first person in their family to attend college. A small percentage of participants (17.9%) stated that they were parents.

2.3 Instrumentation

The survey used in this study consisted of 7 demographic questions, 10 descriptive statements, and 2 open-ended questions. We adapted Slate, Capraro, and Onwuegbuzie's (2007) instrument to meet the needs of our target population (i.e., secondary education preservice teachers). The 10 descriptive statements were posed in a 5-point Likert format in which participants were requested to specify their levels of agreement or disagreement with statements that pertained to teacher effectiveness (1= "strongly disagree" to 5= "strongly agree"). Six of the 10 questions were positively phrased and 4 were negatively phrased, and as such, were reverse-coded prior to data analysis.

Participants' Responses to Best Teacher Items

Effective 7-12 Teachers are:	Agreement%age	Neutral%age	Disagreement%age
Enthusiastic about teaching	90.7	4.7	2
Are **NOT** experts in their subject areas	15.2	17.9	64.2
Do not know how to discipline students	82.8	11.3	3.1
			continued on next page

Do **NOT** show concern for students	3.9	5.1	87.9
Connect with students well	88.4	7	1.6
Respect students' ideas	86.8	8.6	1.2
Do **NOT** use a variety of teaching strategies	5.5	8.2	83.2
Treat students fairly	86.8	5.4	3.5
Present materials in a clear and understandable manner	87.6	6.6	1.6
Do **NOT** return students' work on time	7.8	15.2	72.8

Table 1

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to analyze the data using a sequential mixed analysis (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003; Tashakkorie & Teddlie, 1998). Frequency counts were used to analyze participants' demographic information and responses to the 10 Likert-scaled statements. Using Strauss and Corbin's (1990) qualitative method of constant comparison, participant responses to the two open-ended questions were coded and categorized allowing several themes to emerge.

To facilitate our analysis of the participants' responses to the survey's 10 Likert-style statements that describe the characteristics of "Effective 7-12 Teachers" we combined the two categories on each side of neutral. The categories of "strongly agreed" and "agreed" were combined and renamed as "Agreement". Similarly, the categories of "strongly disagree" and "disagree" were combined to create a new category of "disagreement". As shown in Table 2, the category of neutral and the newly combined categories of "agreement" and "disagreement" were used as headers. It is important to note that the four negatively stated items on the survey were *not* reversed coded, but instead used to reflect participant responses to the statements as phrased. Participants were cautioned to pay close attention while reading the survey statements because some of the items were negatively phrased. Placing negatively phrased statements into the survey occurred to increase the likelihood that participants would pay careful attention to the wording of each statement.

2.4 Limitation of the Study

It is important to note that although this study focused on 257 preservice teachers from a large, suburban university, our findings should not be generalized to a national audience.

3 Results

A content analysis of the respondents' answers to the open-ended questions yielded eight emergent themes as shown in Table 2. The theme that was stated by the largest number of participants ($n = 120$; 48.2%) concerned the participants' best teachers as those teachers who incorporated a variety of teaching strategies into their teaching. We named this category "teaching strategies." Responses relevant to this theme generally began with participants citing their best teacher as one who incorporated many different strategies into their teaching, followed by a description of its meaning to them.

Participants' Emergent Themes for Their Best 7-12 Teachers

Theme	n	Percentage
Teaching Strategies - Combined Characteristics: Builds confidence, BLOOM, fun, challenging, accountable	120	48.2
Caring/Concern - Combined Characteristics: Encourages/supports, compassionate, open-minded	102	41.0
Rapport - Combined Characteristics: Funny, interactive, personable	70	28.1
Passionate - Combined Characteristics: Inspires contents, enthusiastic, energetic	68	27.3
Committed/Professional - Combined Characteristics: Available, trustworthy, role model, dependable and poised	40	16.1
Classroom Management - Combined Characteristics: Fair, discipline well	37	14.9
Knowledgeable - Combined Characteristics: Intelligent	26	10.4
Respect - Combined Characteristics: Listens to students' ideas	11	4.4

Table 2

In their description, participants incorporated and explained subsets of this theme, which included the following descriptors: build confidence, incorporated Bloom's taxonomy, fun, challenging, accountable. For instance, when speaking of teaching strategies, participants mentioned that teachers challenged them to move from lower level (concrete) to higher level (abstract) (i.e., Bloom's taxonomy). This response means that learning at higher levels is dependent on having attained prerequisite knowledge and skills at lower levels. As such, this approach addressed the students' diverse and varied levels of thinking skills, which then aided in their learning by providing opportunities for more in-depth learning of the material presented.

3.1

My sophomore Language Arts teacher was absolutely phenomenal. She could relate on our own level, yet push us and inspire us to do our best. Her assignments were innovative and creative that integrated (listening, speaking, reading and writing) all in one to ensure that everything we did was meaningful. (Crystal)

The best teacher I had was a math teacher. Algebra II was difficult for me and he helped me on lunch break many times. Also, he was able to show me several ways of solving a problem. This often helped me identify an alternative way of completing a problem which I understood. (Andrew)

...he always pushed us to challenge ourselves to do more than people expected of us. HE made lectures interesting and challenging. (Paul)

The second most salient theme that emerged in our participants' descriptions of their "best teacher" was "caring/concern" ($n = 102$, 41%). The subsets that emerged from this theme included encourag-

ing/supportive, compassionate, and open-minded. Our participants' descriptions were based upon the teachers' level of concern and support for their students. Participants considered the characteristics of encouraging/supportive, compassionate and open-minded as indicative of a teacher who exhibited a high level of caring and concern for their students.

3.2

My favorite teacher was ironically teaching my most hated subject science: chemistry. I am a math person so going into that class was a nightmare for me. Subject wise; but as an environment of people I was in a dream. He was so great!! He taught and treated everyone in equals, he had no favorites. We (all the students) respected him for that. He was also very calm and patient and always seemed to be there when you needed him. All these qualities were only amplified when he was diagnosed with colon cancer. His spirit was so strong that he did not stop teaching going through treatments. His illness never changed him. Sadly he passed after I graduated. (Meiko)

This teacher took time to listen to my problems I was having with my family, classmates, etc. This teacher always made time out of the classroom to support the student's academic or personal struggles. (Mark)

The best teacher that I have was my art teacher in 12th grade. This instructor gave me the opportunity to explore the art world and never gave up on me. It really showed that she cared for me, and allowed me to explore many opportunities like entering in gallery exhibitions and drawing competitions. Best of all she had a classroom environment that I really enjoyed. (Jack)

We labeled the third most significant theme "rapport" ($n = 70$; 28.1%). These characteristics included ones of a funny, interactive, and personable teacher. Our analysis of what respondents described as "rapport" revealed that the teacher developed a good rapport with the students. Participants focused on the teacher's personality.

3.3

He was a very understanding man who got to know us personally. He allowed us to express our feelings and point of view and never made fun of us. (Jess)

The teacher had a love for students and a love for teaching. He had a good relationship with parents and school. (Jamie)

He was passionate, interested, dedicated, and intelligent. He was personable and found a way to relate to every student. (Kevin)

Showed interest in students individually and their unique interest. Gave assignments that left room for those interests to be expressed within the context of English. Showed up for extracurricular activities. (Miley)

Our fourth category is based on the participants' description of their best teacher as one who exhibited characteristics of being "passionate" ($n = 68$, 27.3%). These characteristics included the subset of those descriptions of a teacher who was inspiring in regard to the subject matter content as well as being enthusiastic and energetic. These teachers appeared to our respondents to love the subject that they were teaching and to be energized and enthused by it. These attributes stimulated the students, who felt that they were inspired by these teachers to learn the content, even though some students claimed to dislike the subject area.

3.4

Miss Ellis taught Algebra. I hated Algebra. I loved Miss Ellis and Miss Ellis actually made me like algebra...at least for the time I was in the class. She was constantly encouraging. (Niki)

I had a marine science teacher who was extremely passionate, vocal and animated about the subject. (Rob)

The best teacher I had was my Spanish teacher. She was very energetic and enthusiastic about teaching. She was always finding new ways to help students learn the material. She cared about her students and wanted them to succeed. (Alex)

The best teacher I had was an AP English teacher. She was incredibly passionate, which I think is her biggest attribute. It was her first time teaching an AP class and she really tried to unite the class into a team to get us to all pass the AP test. She did a good job. The pass rate was somewhere around 85%. She had a great personality, was very animated and really knew her content area. She never tried to act high and mighty; she always acted like herself and tried to make everyone feel special and a part of the team. (Joe)

"Committed/professional" is how respondents described best teacher characteristics for the fifth category ($n = 40$, 16.1%). It is interesting that the participants' definition of this category included the terms "available," "trustworthy," "role model," "dependable" and "poised." These characteristics were not a "warm and fuzzy" description; rather, they hinge on the students' accessibility to the teacher. In their discussion of a committed teacher, participants spoke of a person who was dedicated to teaching and students.

3.5

Grade 9 – U.S. History. He made it come alive- we did a lot of group projects and he didn't lecture too much. Really challenged us to think about the subject. He was also my first male teacher- he really connected with the students. (Justine)

I have many great teachers. They share a few characteristics in common: they cared they went to classes highly prepared, they encouraged students' input and they pardoned mistakes. (Paul)

"Classroom management" was the sixth theme ($n = 37$; 14.9%) that emerged in regard to the characteristics of a best teacher. Subsets for this category, as defined by participants, included terms such as "fair" and "disciplines well". These characteristics reflect a teacher who does not favor one student over another and who applies the rules and consequences to all students.

3.6

Junior English teacher. Firm classroom management. Firm but and engaging. (Luisa)

Algebra I – 9th grade very strict but thorough. He brought a lot to the table but expected a lot in return. (Ryan)

Mr. Tenno because he was very strict and at the time every student hated him for his strict rules. At the end, he got me prepared for the next level [college]. Without discipline, I would not be seated here today. (Abraham)

The seventh area was termed "knowledgeable" ($n = 26$, 10.4%). Descriptors used to define this category included "intelligent." Participants were aware of their teacher's knowledge of the material and content matter. In this theme, respondents described a teacher who was conversant in the subject area and who was able to reply in a knowledgeable fashion to questions about the material.

3.7

My World Civics Teacher was the best. History and social science is not my favorite subject, but the teacher taught so much beyond the text book. I can still remember that Agriculture is the greatest invention of all time. What made him great was his ability to connect with the students. His warm ups were always questions about life. (Dylan)

The best teacher I had taught my Biology and AP Bio class. He made the content challenging and interesting. He cared a lot about his students. He was an expert in the subject area. He answered all questions and encouraged discussion. He engaged all students and provided memorable experiences. (Ellie)

She really knew her material. She continued to study her field of knowledge even after she had earned her master's. She took time to get to know her students, build a connection with them, and work together

with them to help them succeed to the best of their abilities in her class. She became a mentor and a role model in addition to being a teacher. (Eric)

"Respect" held the eighth position ($n = 11$; 4.4%) of the themes of best teacher characteristics. As defined by our respondents, these teachers respected their students. They listened to student ideas and were not dismissive of them or their views. Students described feeling valued because they were treated with respect as a person and as a student.

3.8

The best teacher I ever had taught U.S. History. What made him my favorite teacher was that he genially had his student's best interest at heart. He developed fun and exciting lesson plans and made himself available if we had any problems, question or concerns. He also made it a point to go to some of his student's games and activity (and not just football, basketball, and baseball). (Kerry)

I had an eighth grade teacher. He actually taught my father so he had been there forever. He just had a way of making things fun. He really enjoyed his students and teaching. He respected his students and many would come back and visit him when they were in high school. (Jim)

The best teacher I ever had was Mr. Fujimoto, she was my avid teacher and she was caring and loving. I remember her because she motivated, influence, and inspired me to accomplish my personal desires. Mrs. Fujimoto would always be available for everything or everyone that needed help. (Brian)

The eight emergent themes can be separated into two larger overarching categories: those categories that pertain to the cognitive domain, including "teaching strategies," and "knowledgeable" and those categories focusing primarily on the affective domain, including "caring/concern," "rapport," "passionate," "committed," "professional," and "respect." Perhaps due to their cognitive development, the most salient theme that emerged was that the preservice teachers were more interested in the expansion of their knowledge base (cognitive domain) than that of teachers' personalities (affective domain). Participants' comments centered on those best teacher characteristics and focused on more than just the affective domain. They were also attentive to those teacher characteristics that fueled their interest in the subject matter. It was also suggested that teachers who possessed these best teacher characteristics were responsible for these preservice teachers' academic achievement. In our participants' own words, a good teacher is one whose characteristics enable their students, through whatever means, be it a caring, passion, commitment or rapport, to achieve academic success.

4 Discussion/Conclusion

Our teacher education preservice participants' involvement in an array of education classes, in accordance with their hands-on experiences in the classroom alongside their master/mentor teachers, affords them a view of teaching and teacher quality that is well informed. In addition to these experiences, 46(18%) reported that they were also parents. This added parental experience allowed for a type of triangulation of understanding of what constitutes best teachers.

Our themes of Rapport, Caring/Concern, and Teaching Strategies are congruent with Ruben and Justice (2005) who reported that their sample of preservice teachers viewed effective teachers as making learning fun, as being caring, and as being challenging. Our themes are also in agreement with a very recent study by Schulte, Slate, and Onwuegbuzie (2009) in which they asked 615 college students, not just preservice teachers, to list characteristics of effective high school teachers. In Table 2, readers can see that our themes and the characteristics subsumed under each correspond well to the 24 themes identified in their study: Caring; Communication; Creative; Disciplinarian; Fairness; Flexible; Friendly; Fun; Knowledgeable; Listening; Manages classroom; Uses different modalities; Involving; Motivating; Organized; Passion for Teaching; Patience; Builds relationships; Shows others respect; Challenges; Service; Teaches well; Good personality; and Understanding.

Interestingly, our eight themes generated from students' stories of their best high school teachers were also congruent with a very recent study of the views of 437 Hispanic college students regarding characteristics

of effective elementary school teachers (Slate, Onwuegbuzie, & Schulte, 2009). In their study, Slate et al. reported five factors: (a) Student-centered and Transmitter; (b) Responsive; (c) Enthusiastic, Empathetic, and Communicative; (d) Professional and Director; and, (e) Expert and Connector in which 20 dominant themes were incorporated. All of the themes elicited in our study specifically for high school teachers fit under these five factors for effective elementary school teachers.

Some differences were present, as readers might expect, given the differences in the focus of high schools from elementary schools. Specifically, Slate et al. (2009) indicated that Loving was their seventh highest ranking theme, out of 20 themes, whereas the theme of Loving did not appear in our analysis. Similarly, more themes in the area of caring and being compassionate were also reported in the Slate et al. study than our sample of preservice teachers provided. In a study of the perceived characteristics of effective middle school teachers, Schulte, Slate, and Onwuegbuzie (2009) reported the presence of 38 dominant themes. This large number of themes, in our opinion, may reflect the complexity and uniqueness of working with middle school students.

4.1

Middle school teaching is highly complex—involving content knowledge, knowledge of young adolescent development, and dozens of interconnected skills (e.g., the ability to relate to and engage students, coach, present, reflect, and analyze). (Center for Collaborative Education, 2008, p. 1)

We contend that our results, along with the results of other studies discussed above, suggest that characteristics beyond content knowledge are essential for effective teaching. This finding came as a surprise to us because we anticipated that the concept of "content knowledge" would rate high on what secondary students deemed an important characteristic of a "best teacher." Adolescents, as Steinberg (2007) contended, are moving toward developing their independence and, as such, we had assumed that they would be less likely to value the characteristics of the affective domain. Our results, however, revealed that our sample rated affective domain characteristics quite highly. The themes of Caring/Concern, Rapport, Passionate, Professional, and Respect do not pertain to content knowledge but rather to characteristics that are present in the emotional/social realm (e.g., Cotton, 2000; Good & Brophy, 2003; Goodlad, 1984; Minor et al., 2002; Peart & Campbell, 1999; Witcher et al., 2001). These themes also could be considered aspects of what Reed and Bergemann (1992) referred to as non-measurable skills of effective teachers.

We believe that, to make the best use of our findings, teacher preparation programs and the faculty members involved therein need to include better screening of teacher education candidates to identify their possession of the above-mentioned characteristics. We also contend that consideration should be given to modifying teacher education curricula to include pedagogy that teaches candidates strategies to utilize these "best teacher" qualities within their classrooms. For faculty members, these characteristics need to become part of their instructional practices within the authentic environment of their own classrooms.

As stated in the introductory part of this article, we believe that our findings pertain to school climate. School climate refers to "the quality and character of school life. It is based on patterns of school life experiences and reflects norms, goals, values interpersonal relationships, teaching learning and leadership practices and organizational structures" (National School Climate Center, 2007, p.5). Who better to help establish the quality of the school climate than the site-based administrator? To generate a positive school climate, school leaders need to see that positive "best teacher"- student relationships are developed, particularly through a whole school approach. We contend that if the school administrator works to foster these qualities in teachers through in-services and workshops as well as in hiring practices, then the characteristics of a positive school climate, as identified by CPSV, may become a reality.

Finally, we believe that additional research is needed -to determine and differentiate the characteristics of effective and ineffective teachers as well as teaching practices at each of the three school levels: elementary, middle, and secondary. Identifying the unique characteristics of teachers and teaching practices has the potential to lead to changes in teacher education programs , at the university level as well as to generate professional development activities specific to each school level.

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