Out of the Mouths of Babes: Eighth-Grade Students' Perspectives of Good Teachers

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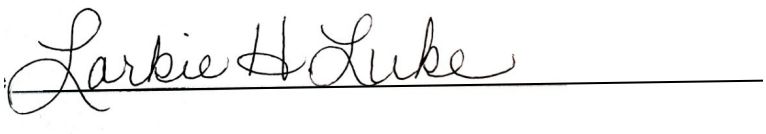
Signature 

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ABSTRACT

In this study, I used a qualitative design with a constant comparison of data to gain an in-depth understanding of rural South Georgia eighth-grade students' perceptions of good teachers. Students (n=211) on three teaching teams participated in the research, which used a constructivist grounded theory approach. Students completed a good teacher project that included an essay, cinquain, and metaphors about the same good teacher. I analyzed and compared writings by grade group, teams, and type of writing. This yielded 301descriptors of good teachers, which generated 97 descriptor groups that were arranged into 20 conceptual categories. Three core categories: personal, professional, and interpersonal attributes surfaced as qualities this group of students deemed necessary for good teachers. Each core category included multiple conceptual categories. Personal attributes of good teachers consisted of seven conceptual category groups: fun/happy, nice, charismatic, strong, pretty religious, and humble; professional attributes consisted of nine category groups: teaching skills, knowledgeable, dedicated, patient, interesting, leader, successful, proud, and perfectionist; and interpersonal attributes had four conceptual category groups: caring/loving, helpful, inspiring, and interacting. I developed a theory about good teachers grounded in the perspectives of the participants. For these eighth-grade students a good teacher has both personal and teaching attributes; a good teacher was not one or the other, and they used interpersonal attributes to build relationships with the students within the other two core categories.

Keywords: good teacher qualities, effective teachers, good teacher characteristics, good teacher attributes, students' perceptions

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"Persons choose to do research because they have a dream that somehow they will make a difference in the world through the insights and understandings they arrive at. But it is not enough to dream. Dreams must be brought to fruition."

(Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 15)

I would have never completed this dissertation without the urging of Dr. Lorraine Schmertzing. Thank you so much for pushing me to do my best and to finish this chapter of my life bringing my dream to fruition. A special thanks to Dr. Richard Schmertzing for inspiring me to undertake a qualitative study. Your stories and love for qualitative research motivated me to complete this process, and you showed me the way to bring my dream to fruition.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my entire family starting with the first teachers I ever had, my parents, Waymon and Jean Humphries, and my sisters, Tammy, Fran and Lorraine, each of you contributed to my learning in your own unique ways. Next, are my children, Emily, Katie Julia, and Jake; you were my reasons for starting all of this, and you supported and loved me through this entire process. My grandchildren, Dallas, Delilah, and Daisy; you make me want to be a LaLa you can be proud of and were my reasons to finish this. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Daniel; you encouraged me, listened to me, and most importantly never gave up on me. My final dedication is to Miss Mary Belle Godwin; no one will ever live up to you. I wish all my children and grandchildren could have you for a teacher. All children deserve a "Miss Mary Belle" in their lives.

My Mary Belle

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I address an interest in students' opinions about good teaching that I have had since my very first year teaching. My interest about this subject increased with my experience as a teacher and with motherhood. When my children started school, I became keenly aware of the impact a teacher can have on a student. I completed this qualitative study in not only my local school district but in the middle school in which I teach. I wanted an understanding of what eighth-grade students identified as qualities of good teachers. I sought out their voices by combing through their writings that of poems, metaphors, and essays. These students' perspectives provided insights into the diverse, and at times consistent, characteristics and strategies students valued in teachers. By sharing the students' perspectives, I hope to encourage teachers to recognize the importance of the students' opinions and how this recognition can help develop positive relationships with students in order to improve student learning within the classroom setting. These relationships can be the thread that keeps some students in school. Bill Gates (2009), in his annual letter to his foundation, said it best when explaining the importance of the teacher. He said:

> It is amazing how big a difference a great teacher makes versus an ineffective one. Research shows that there is only half as much variation in student achievement between schools as there is among classrooms in the same school. If

you want your child to get the best education possible, it is actually more important to get him assigned to a great teacher than to a great school. (para. 41)

This explanation has always resonated with me. I have witnessed teachers build students up and reach those who others thought were lost. I have also observed the opposite, which is unfortunate, but not a focus of my research. Students spend an enormous amount of time with teachers, and this contact can be either beneficial or detrimental. Teachers' impact on their students should not be downplayed. "Teachers play a major role in shaping students' experiences in school. A large part of a student's day is spent in verbal and nonverbal interactions with teachers" (Hallinan, 2008, p. 272). It is this interaction that is at the center of the problem upon which I focused this dissertation.

Background and Statement of the Problem

When I started trying to find background information about students explanations of good teachers, I found considerably more literature on the topic of effective teaching from the perspectives of teachers (Ahmed, Ismail, Amin, Riaz, Ramzan, & Husnain, 2012; Beutel, 2010; Dingle, Brownell, Leko, Boardman, & Haager, 2011; Hussain, Jamil, Noor, Sibtain, & Shah, 2011; Jang, 2011; Mercer & DeRosier, 2010; Mitchell, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2010; Sewell, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Ahmed et al. (2012) discovered differing views between teachers and students about teacher service quality. The researchers administered a questionnaire to 500 college students and 30 teachers and uncovered the fact that the students' view of instruction was different from their teachers' views in the areas of tangibles, assurance, and empathy. Students rated these areas of instruction as less important than their teachers' ratings of the same components, which supported my concern that students have a different perceptions of instruction than teachers do. Grieve

(2010) found that the 88 primary school teachers she surveyed placed importance on classroom relationships, communication skills and building relationships, yet they did not consider the students' thoughts. While the findings of Williams, Sullivan, and Kohn (2012) were somewhat different when they asked 223 secondary students what they thought of outstanding teachers. The researchers "discovered they wanted a teacher who related to them, enjoyed teaching, and can handle classroom management" (p. 113). The primary school teachers focused more on relationships and communication, and the secondary students were more concerned with having a relatable teacher who enjoyed their profession and could manage a classroom. Although these were primary school teachers and secondary students from two different studies, I wondered if students' perceptions of good teachers varied or were similar to that of teachers. This peaked my curiosity and inspired me to want to know what our local eighth graders thought in order to see if there was a difference in what they thought made a good teacher, and what I thought teachers thought. I wondered if this could be contributing to lesser achievement in our students, lesser than their potential. By knowing what students value, it is my hope that teachers can and will adjust to connect with every student in a manner that allows students to thrive, believe in themselves, and contribute to the overall positive experiences of learning in the classroom.

Researchers collected data on the subject of good or effective teaching from the students' perspectives with college students (Ahmed, et al., 2012; Helterbran, 2008; Legg & Wilson, 2009; Pepe & Wang, 2012; Rinaldo, et al., 2009; Shadreck & Isaac, 2012; Shah & Inamullah, 2011; Wilson, 2008) as well as with primary and secondary school students (Bru, Stornes, Munthe, & Thuen, 2010; Eilam & Vidergor, 2011; Hussain et al.,

2011; Mercer & DeRosier, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2010; Shadreck & Isaac, 2012; Williams et al., 2012). I found relatively little research reported with eighth-grade students on the topic of good teachers that did not include other grade levels. In my time teaching, I worked with grades 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. I found that eighth graders are particular interesting because they are young adults who appear to change both mentally and physically during their eighth-grade year of school. They start seriously considering their future by taking trips to nearby colleges and technical schools and deciding what areas they may want to focus when they transition to high school. I have also heard students of this age state how much they are looking forward to turning 16, not because they can get a driver's license, but because they want to quit school. As a teacher, this last year of middle school is the last chance to make an impression on these students, to hook them on gaining more education and help them develop skills that will help them be successful in high school and in life. The fact that I have not been able to locate significant amounts of inquiries involving eighth graders on the topic of good teaching contributed to my reasons for choosing this area as well as this age group for the focus of my research. I was also an eighth-grade teacher and therefore had a personal interest in their ideas about good teachers.

Kottler, Zehm, and Kottler (2005) discussed the idea that qualities students deemed valuable in good teachers are rarely the focus of teacher professional development. They pointed out, "In spite of [teachers'] own personal experiences being profoundly influenced by mentors and teachers who were eccentric, unique, or otherwise showed a distinctive character, there has not been a lot of attention directed to this important subject" (p. 3). Researchers have written little about the qualities of those

teachers who left a lasting impression on their students from the students' perspectives. These qualities could be some of the same qualities eighth-grade students correlate with good teaching, or student expectations could be somewhat different. What those identified teachers did and the attributes they possessed and demonstrated that placed them in the good teacher category could be the key to reaching students. Educators could use this knowledge of these characteristics to develop behaviors in teachers that students deem favorable. "For practitioners, it seems imperative that primary grade teachers (and teachers at all levels) understand how powerfully beliefs about teaching are being shaped in their classrooms" (Murphy, Delli, & Edwards, 2004, p. 89). In other words, students as young as primary age are already formulating what they believe a good teacher is and teachers at every grade level could benefit from understanding what the students believe to be a good teacher. For this reason, I believe there is not enough known about student opinions at varying grade levels about what constitutes a good teacher and how it varies by who is asked. As I previously mentioned, eighth-grade students are at a pivotal moment in their education. They are just before going to a new school, and they are changing physically and mentally. What they look for in a good teacher may be different from what other students at different grade levels define as a good teacher. Essentially, in this study I let students define a good teacher and then sought to use the 633 descriptive writing pieces they generated to create a theory about what constitutes a good teacher from the perspectives of this group of students.

The following discussion of good teacher qualities I found is grounded in the literature I read before I began my study. This allowed me to attempt to derive a

definition of a good teacher. I will identify whether the qualities came from student-based, teacher-based, or other-based constituents.

Good Teacher Defined

There were many varying opinions about what characteristics defined a good teacher (Ahmed, et al., 2012; Bru, Stomes, & Thuen, 2010; Eilam & Vidergor, 2011; Helterbran, 2008; Hussain et al., 2011; Legg & Wilson, 2009; Mercer & DeRosier, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2010; Pepe & Wang, 2012; Rinaldo, et al., 2009; Shadreck & Isaac, 2012; Shah & Inamullah, 2011; Williams et al., 2012 Wilson, 2008). A fixed definition for good teacher was elusive because the definition changed based on who was asked. For the purpose of this research, a good teacher was one who students identified as good, which could have been for various reasons that I sought to discover. Generally, the majority of the literature used two broad categories of personal and professional traits to describe good teachers, which guided me through my initial data analysis. Personal traits included social skills and relationship building with professional traits being more focused on knowledge, instructional techniques, and classroom management (Beutel, 2010; Bru, et al., 2010; Dingle, 2011; Eilam & Vidergor, 2011; Grieve, 2010; Helterbran, 2008; Khohastemehr & Takrimi, 2009; Miller, 2012). There were some who focused on test scores to distinguish effective teachers (Dillon, 2010). The problem was multiple explanations of a good teacher, but not enough information from eighth graders on the topic.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The overall purpose of my study was to investigate students' thoughts and perspectives about what defines a good teacher and to address some of the issues I

discovered with defining good teacher qualities and this, in turn, contributed to the significance of my study. I witnessed firsthand how students' perceptions of a teacher can impact how and what that student learns. The first issue in identifying good teacher qualities was that there were many different ideas held by teachers and students in the literature about what constitutes a good teacher with the majority of these ideas based on what professionals thought were good teacher qualities. When students defined good teachers' qualities, there were discrepancies in the definition of a good teacher among students at different grade levels. An understanding of eighth-grade students' perceptions of good teachers could help eighth-grade teachers discover what this grade level of students expect and inform those teachers of ways to better meet their students' needs by using this knowledge to guide interactions with and the instruction of their students. It could be as simple as knowing character traits that students associate with good teachers and then have teachers demonstrate them. In today's time of shrinking budgets, administrations expect teachers to do more with less. Teachers teach more students more information with smaller funds set aside for doing their jobs (Freeman & Scheidecker, 2009). In their book, Freeman and Scheidecker (2009) summarized these points:

> We're into the second century of American public education, and if the press is at all correct, we haven't become much better at it. In fact, many people think we've gotten worse. Nevertheless, referendums continue to be defeated, classrooms continue to grow in size, and state and federal dollars continue to disappear. At the very same time, however, curricula continue to grow as education is given more and more responsibility to cure society's ills. (p. xi)

With class sizes growing and funds for education shrinking, teachers are expected to teach more and reach more, knowing what students believe to be qualities of a good teacher could be a cost effective means to reach some students and successfully improve their achievement. Therefore, another reason for the need to understand students' perceptions of good teachers was student achievement and the demands placed on teachers to close the gap between where students are academically and where they should be. High stakes testing was a reality for the students and teachers who participated in this study. The anxieties of scoring well were important not only for students, but for the teachers whose jobs might have been in jeopardy if their students did not perform as deemed necessary. Teachers who have knowledge of students' views on good teaching could assist other teachers to make connections with students who could then make the required gains on these tests. Meyers (2009), integrated research and theory to conclude, "Rapport impacts students' attitudes toward the class, their academic behavior, and the extent of their learning" (p. 206). He continued to point out students who think positively about a class will approach the material in that class in a different manner and will learn more, which creates a cycle of learning and achievement. University professors, Okpala and Ellis (2005, p. 379), provided the opinion, "The primary customers of educational organizations are the students, and quality teachers need to be committed to students and their learning goals." If the primary customer, the student, has an opinion about the characteristics of a quality teacher, then educators and those in this field could benefit from listening to the customer. Hallinan (2008) surveyed 35,132 public school students in grades 6, 8, and 10 and 4,421 Catholic school students who were also from grades 6, 8

and 10 and found that the way students think about school was impacted by teachers and that those thoughts were often ignored leading to stress for the students.

Some may think that young adults live a carefree life. However, this may be far from the truth and high-stakes testing may not be the only culprit. Collins (2018) conducted a survey of 35,878 teens; 44.88% of these teens stated they were stressed all of the time. This stress was attributed 51.77% of the time to relationships and teachers. It has been my experience that students encounter something new when they start middle school. For the first time, many of them are changing classes multiple times with various teachers at the helm of each class. This sometimes presents a problem because these students come to middle school accustomed to having only a few teachers in the course of a year, which lends itself to a more personal relationship with each teacher. "New classes, new teachers, and new routines can all be stressful for students, and take time to adjust to" ("Common Causes," 2018, para. 9). An eighth-grade student could easily have seven different teachers in one day and even more teachers for an entire school year. Even though my school has implemented several things, such as teams at the sixth-grade level, to ease students into their middle school schedules, eighth graders have more freedom than the other grade levels and their teachers are not on teams. At this grade, their schedule reflects an effort to emulate a high school schedule. I noticed that establishing a good relationship with teachers made a difference in some students experiencing success or falling through the cracks and failing. I also wondered if students notice the same thing, and if this is something they look for in a good teacher. In other words, in order for a teacher to be considered a good teacher by students, does he or she have to build a relationship with students? According to Jerome, Hamre, and Pianta

(2009) who worked with 878 children whose ages ranged from kindergarten to sixth-grade level, "Despite the potential importance of these relationships, we lack thorough understanding of how relationship quality changes over time as children form new relationships with different teachers each year" (p. 915). Understanding students' perceptions about good teaching could help teachers recognize students' views on the subject and encourage them in ways that could be beneficial in establishing positive relationships with these students in their classrooms. These positive relationships could help with the students' achievement and their stress levels, which overall could enhance the students' academic experiences.

Middle school years are a crucial time for students and attention needs to be given to their insights. Most of the research in the area of students' perceptions of teachers has been completed with high school and college students (Ahmed, et al., 2012; Helterbran, 2008; Legg & Wilson, 2009; Pepe & Wang, 2012; Rinaldo, et al., 2009; Shadreck & Isaac, 2012; Shah & Inamullah, 2011; Wilson, 2008) with little attention given to middle school students and what they believe constitutes a good teacher. There is a need to know if these perceptions are the same or different from those of eighth graders. Eighth-grade students are at a pivotal moment in their education. They are transitioning to high school and are reaching the age when they are old enough to drop out of school if they so choose.

Davis (2017) reiterated the importance of these years, calling them stressful and pointing out students make decisions during this time that have the potential to impact them for the rest of their lives. He followed one student through her journey from middle to high school and interviewed others going through the same transition. These students

were apprehensive about their teachers and this added to their stress. It is vital to get these eighth-grade students' perceptions in order to reach and help prepare these students for high school, giving them the support necessary for their successful transition. Jerome et al. (2009) stated, "Although it is generally accepted that students need more supportive and positive relationships during this developmental period, these relationships may be less available during middle school. It is possible that teacher-child relationships generally decline in quality during this transition" (p. 917). There is a need to listen to what eighth graders say about good teachers in an effort to build relationships with them that will hook them on their own education during this crucial moment in their lives. Davis (2017) called for teachers and administrators to take note of what students in eighth grade perceive as issues and stressors and use this information to implement valuable approaches that will help students be successful in school.

As mentioned, there is a need to understand the views of all students, including those students who are not as resilient as the students who end up going on to higher learning. Goldhaber (2002) pointed out,

> Good teaching is clearly important to raising student achievement. In fact, most research suggests that the benefit of improving the quality of the nation's teaching workforce is far greater than other policy interventions, such as lowering class size. However, while we know that good teaching is important, it's far less clear what makes for a good teacher. (p. 6)

Students are in a position to identify what qualities their good teachers possessed. Emanuel and Adams (2006) worked with college students and found, "Their perception is their reality and it is incumbent upon those seeking to provide excellent service to take

note" (p. 542). By investigating an entire team of eighth-graders, I was able to include the views of a diverse group of students, not just the educationally prosperous ones. Jerome et al. (2009) discovered, while working with K-6 students, "Increasing our focus on the importance of relationship quality in education may be especially helpful to children who enter school at a higher risk of poor relationships and the poor academic and social outcomes associated with lower quality relationships" (p. 943). The aforementioned poor relationships were those students developed with various teachers throughout their educational career. Jerome et al. (2009) believed schools, administrators, and teachers should find ways to focus on those relationships and develop them in ways that benefit students.

Since my teaching debut in 1994, the idea that some students thrive while under the care of certain teachers, and seemingly shrivel when in the presence of other teachers, intrigued me. My experience led me to believe, it really depends on the student's perception of the teacher, an explanation offered in the literature (Chen, 2012; Faranda & Clark III, 2004; Frisby & Martin, 2010; Meyers, 2009). If there is any connection between students' performance and their perception of the teacher, then my curiosity related to student perceptions of teachers is certainly warranted and a proper focus for research. I often wondered why students perceive some teachers as being good and not others. My own three children's experiences in school heightened this interest, and after serious consideration, I decided to pursue the subject with an analytical eye. My fascination with the subject is rooted in my own perspective about good teachers, an area of subjectivity that I will explore in depth before and during the research process.

To recapitulate, the problems that guided me to conduct this research were simple. First, the belief that understanding of what students' perceived as good teachers could help teachers better address their students' needs both academically and emotionally. This same understanding could help the teachers make the connections needed to boost student achievement and keep the students secure in their education during this critical eighth-grade year. These eighth-grade students are at a key time educationally when they have more teachers and are getting close to the age when they can legally quit school. The last issue I noticed from the research was the fact that little was known about eighth graders' views of good teachers, and the definition of good teacher changed with the age group (Ahmed et al, 2012; Beutel, 2010; Bru, et al., 2010; Dingle, 2011; Eilam & Vidergor, 2011; Grieve, 2010; Helterbran, 2008).

Learning eighth graders' perceptions of good teachers will help identify characteristics the students recognize as beneficial in a teacher. In turn, these characteristics could be highlighted to inform school reform, develop instruction, and cultivate better relationships between teacher and students in order to better meet the needs of the students. Additionally, students' perceptions of good teaching could influence and guide staff training opportunities for both inexperienced and seasoned teachers alike along with other staff members. The themes that I discovered from this research could be used to create a survey that could be administered to students at the beginning of each year in an effort to understand their perspectives about good teaching before instruction even begins. The results of the research have the prospect of inspiring others to make positive change at the classroom level, grade level, school level, district level, and even beyond. "It appears that the most important thing a school can do is to

provide its students with good teachers" (Goldhaber, 2002, p. 2). Teachers can do better when they know what is expected of them, and students can enlighten educators as to what their expectations are of a good teacher. There is a need for students' voices to be heard and taken to heart. Their opinions of what constitutes a good teacher are important. After all, it is their education that is at the forefront of educational debate. Thus, the findings could lead to constructive change not only in my school and for my school district, but also for others who are willing to listen to the voices of students. "As a nation, we've wasted what students know about their own classroom experiences instead of using that knowledge to inform school reform efforts" (Dillon, 2010, para.15). By understanding what students appreciate in teachers, positive relationships between students and teachers can be developed and nurtured. These same relationships can carry students to adulthood and aid them to be productive beyond the doors of the school (Jerome, et al., 2009; Meyers, 2009).

The goal of my research was to determine how eighth-grade students expressed the concept of a good teacher in multiple forms of descriptive writing. The characteristics of good teachers gleaned from my research could be useful for novice and veteran teachers to help them adjust their demeanor, pedagogy, and classroom management in order to appeal to students. For this to be accomplished, teachers need to understand what students consider as skillful teaching and what kinds of relationships the students perceived as beneficial. Previous research findings on this topic made it clear that students' perceptions were often different from their teachers', school administrators' and policy makers' views with the former valuing a teacher who was relatable, enjoyed teaching, and could handle a classroom and the latter valuing relationships and

communication more (Ahmed, et al., 2012; Mercer & DeRosier, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2010; Murphy et al., 2004). I believe that students' perceptions are the students' realities, and no matter what teachers do, if teachers do not live up to the students' expectations, they are missing out on an opportunity to make a positive impact on the students. Hallinan (2008) analyzed survey and achievement data from sixth, eighth, and 10th graders in public and Catholic schools in Chicago and discovered that teachers making connections with students can positively impact the achievement of those students. My research has the potential of benefiting both teachers and students and may add to the existing literature on effective teachers. It may also fill a gap that exists where eighth-grade students' perceptions of good teaching are concerned, and how they articulate those perceptions. I completed this research in order to meet several goals and contribute to the academic body of literature in several ways, which I addressed in the following section. In order to achieve those goals, I had two overarching research questions.

Research Questions

The questions for the research were: What are the perceptions of rural South Georgia eighth-grade students from the same middle school about the essential characteristics of good teachers? In what ways do rural South Georgia eighth-grade students from the same middle school refer to good teachers through their essays, poetry, and metaphors? How do the descriptions of good teachers of rural South Georgia eighth-grade students' from the same middle school vary across their essays, poetry, and metaphors? In describing good teachers, how do rural South Georgia eighth-grade students' from the same middle school connect teacher quality to their learning experience?

Overview of Methods

In order to ensure the perceptions of eighth-grade students were the focal point of the research, I used a qualitative design. It was important for me to understand what these eighth-grade students thought to be qualities of a good teacher and a qualitative design offered the best means to ensure that their perspectives were prominent.

Charmaz (2006) explained,

> Methods extend and magnify our view of studied life and, thus, broaden and deepen what we learn of it and know about it. Through our methods, we first aim to see this world as our research participants do—from the inside. Although we claim to replicate their views, we can try to enter their settings and situations to the extent possible. Seeing research participants' lives from the inside often gives a researcher otherwise unobtainable views. You might learn that what outsiders assume about the world you study may be limited, imprecise, mistaken, or egregiously wrong. (p. 14)

As a writing teacher, I believed having students use various forms of writing would give me a glimpse of the participants' views and experiences from their "inside."

I based my approach for the research on the constructivist grounded theory approach of Charmaz, (2006). This involved the use of a constant comparison of data in order to piece together students' perceptions of good teachers. I used the students' own words to develop codes and from these codes, categories were formed. Charmaz (2006) explained,

> As grounded theorists, we study our early data and begin to separate, sort, and synthesize these data through qualitative coding. Coding means that we attach

> labels to segments of data that depict what each segment is about. Coding distills data, sorts them, and gives us a handle for making comparisons with other segments of data. (p. 3)

Simply put, I compared data from three different assignments, an essay, a cinquain, and a metaphor, from each student. From each writing, I developed codes that were in the students own words. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) referred to this type of coding as In Vivo coding. I wrote memos to keep track of my thoughts about the data and to keep track of codes.

To review, I researched what eighth-graders identified as qualities of good teachers and how they expressed those qualities across three different forms of creative writing in order to understand the way they experienced the positive side of their teachers and how it influenced their learning experiences. I believed that understanding what qualities they view as beneficial in a teacher could help teachers in an effort to give the consumers of education, the students, not only what they want, but what they need to achieve at higher levels. In the next section, I share how literature provides information about the uniqueness of eighth-graders and offers insight into how various age groups identify characteristics of good teachers. It also provides various ways individuals have communicated the qualities they find beneficial in good teachers.

Chapter II
LITERATURE REVIEW

The process of providing a rationale for the research "forces the qualitative researcher to conduct at least some preliminary work to ascertain if the proposed study or something similar has been conducted before, to identify gaps in the literature and to justify why a grounded theory approach is needed" (Walls, Parahoo, & Fleming, 2010, p. 12). It was for these reasons that I highlighted research that focused on characteristics of eighth-graders, various perspectives of effective teaching, and the use of different forms of writing as data. I felt, by delving deeper in these three areas, I would gain a better overall view of various aspects that were integral parts of my research. Creswell (2009) warned, "In a qualitative study, use the literature sparingly in the beginning in order to convey the inductive design, unless the design type requires a substantial literature orientation at the onset" (p. 28). I kept this in mind as I conducted a review of the literature and revisited it while dissecting my own data in an effort to make sure I did not try to make my data fit any preconceived notions I may have inadvertently developed about good teachers.

Existing Literature on Eighth Graders

In looking for research involving eighth-grade students, I wanted to answer a couple of questions that I had about this age group. First, what makes eighth-graders so

special or different from other students, and next, why should their opinions about good teachers be important? Eighth-graders are unique for several reasons.

The first thing that makes many eighth-graders unique is that they are completing a transition grade where they will be going to a new school the following year. "Transitions between schools are often difficult times for students, a point at which grades decline and behavioral difficulties increase" (Weiss & Baker-Smith, 2010, p. 825). This transition was described in the research as a stressor (Spier, 2010). "Such stressors in adolescence include physical, cognitive, and social changes, as well as the transition to high school with its anticipatory anxiety" (Spier, 2010, p. 75). Spier, in a single case, mixed method approach completed in 2010, used art as an intervention for six students who had inadequate coping skills. The average age of the participants was 13.2 years and each benefited by demonstrating a decrease in disruptive behaviors and an increase in coping skills from expressing themselves through artistic means. This particular age group, eighth-graders, experienced many changes not only to their bodies physically, but also socially and mentally. These same students felt the added strain of a change in environment at the end of the school year. "It is evident that more research is needed to determine how to best meet the needs of eighth-grade students anticipating the transition to high school" (Spier, 2010, p. 82).

Weiss and Baker-Smith (2010) specifically studied the transition that eighth-graders make by comparing academic and social outcomes for students who attended middle schools and those who attended K-8 schools. The researchers analyzed data from multiple schools from the Philadelphia Education Longitudinal Study on students before and after they transitioned to ninth grade. Through quantitative means, they discovered

that students who attended middle schools did not fare as well as those students who attended K-8 schools. "There are compelling reasons to think that features of the sending school (e.g., middle school) might influence how successfully a student makes the transition into a receiving school" (Weiss & Baker-Smith, 2010, pp. 826-827). The school in which I completed my research was a middle school. The fact that the aforementioned research concluded that students entering ninth grade from middle schools were at a disadvantage academically and socially when compared to those students entering high school from K-8 schools, contributed to my wanting to understand the eighth-graders perceptions at my middle school.

Aypay (2011) completed research with 691 students in an effort to develop a burnout scale for grades sixth through eight. Initially, the researcher asked a group of 150 same aged students to report any negative feelings toward school, and why they thought they had them. From these responses, Aypay developed a 50-item survey that measured student burnout as it related to school. He then administered the developed burnout scale to 691 students from 10 different schools. He found that students in these grades started experiencing burnout even before reaching high school. Aypay contributed this burnout to school activities, family, inadequacies of the school, and an overall loss of interest in school.

The previously mentioned burnout could contribute to a loss of motivation for learning in school. Mizuno, Tanaka, Fukuda, Imai-Matsumura, and Watanabe (2011) discovered in their research that junior high school students demonstrated a reduction in intrinsic motivation and in turn often experienced less success academically than they had in primary or elementary school. They investigated the relationship between cognitive

function and decreases in motivation of 267 adolescent students from fourth through ninth grade using a multivariate logistic regression analysis of data gained from a questionnaire. Seventh and eighth-grade students' intrinsic motivation for learning was significantly lower than those students' measured intrinsic motivation for learning at fourth, fifth, and sixth grade levels.

Decreased motivation often leads to overall poor school success. Mason and McMahon (2009) used action research and implemented an intervention aimed at helping students who were at risk of failing at an urban middle school. The intervention was developed after "teachers expressed frustration with eighth grade students' exhibiting poor school success behaviors, such as missing assignments, turning in incomplete work, and poor study habits" (Mason & McMahon, 2009, p. 2). The intervention included group sessions with 52 students who were selected due to failing at least three subjects. The group sessions highlighted positive accomplishments of group members. There were also individual meetings with the counselor to review grades, optional tutoring sessions, motivational speakers, and pep rallies that included parents. After the intervention, grade point averages and competency scores increased for all participants.

Not all data about eighth-grade students were dismal. There existed some ways to motivate and inspire students by increasing their attachment to school.

> Research has shown that students who like school have higher academic achievement and a lower incidence of disciplinary problems, absenteeism, truancy, and dropping out of school than do those who dislike school. Thus, one way to improve academic outcomes is to increase students' attraction to school. (Hallinan, 2008, p. 271)

Hallinan (2008) highlighted the fact teachers are in an exceptional position to make a difference in students' school experiences by helping students become more attached to their schools. "The unique role that teachers play relative to students and the kinds of experiences that teachers create for students suggest that teachers may exert a powerful influence on whether students like school" (Hallinan, 2008, p. 271). The researcher made connections by using descriptive statistics and multivariate analyses between academic achievement and two ways teachers impact students' mindsets towards school. She stated, "Identifying characteristics of teachers that have a positive effect on students' feelings about school is one way to increase students' academic achievement" (Hallinan, 2008, p. 271). She conducted the research with sixth, eighth, and tenth-grade students who attended public and Catholic schools in Chicago. Students indicated through surveys that teachers were a deciding factor when it came to the students' attachment to their schools. "The results show that teachers who support their students by caring about them and by respecting and praising them satisfy students' needs and, in so doing, increase students' attachment to school" (Hallinan, 2008, p. 282). Hallinan (2008) summed up her study concisely.

> However, the study reported here identified another, often ignored, influence on students' feelings about school, namely, teachers. Even when students' school friendships and other personal and school-related factors, including school sector, are taken into account, the analyses reveal that certain characteristics of teachers have a significant influence on whether students like school. (Hallinan, 2008, p. 282)

The literature discussed here over eighth-grade students demonstrated the distinctiveness of this grade level. Many students at this age experienced a transition to high school at the end of the year, tended to have decreased intrinsic motivation for learning, and experienced higher levels of burnout than younger students. These students having a higher burnout rate translated into being at risk of failing or having an overall poor success rate in high school. As mentioned here, teachers influence students and by determining what students perceive a good teacher to be, teachers could ultimately affect whether the students like school, feel connected to school, and end up remaining in school. Lupascu, Panisoara, and Panisoara (2014) randomly selected 52 high school students and administered a questionnaire composed of a predetermined list of teacher characteristics in an effort to identify what the students deem as good or bad teacher attributes. They justified their research by explaining that when teachers understand what adolescent students consider appealing in good teachers, numerous school related problems such as violence, absenteeism, and dropping out decrease. They contended that teachers could use this information to change their own behavior to better suit the needs of their students. With this in mind, I delved into the research conducted about the qualities of good teachers.

Existing Literature on Good Teachers

The essence of good teaching varies to some degree with who is asked. Ahmed et al. (2012) discovered students' satisfaction was directly linked to the service quality provided by their teachers. The researchers chose 30 faculty members and 500 students for their cross sectional study and used questionnaires to gain data. The questionnaire included five dimensions of service quality that the participants rated using a seven point

Likert scale. The researchers considered the students the consumer with the teachers being major stakeholders. Ahmed et al. (2012) pointed out a difference in perception about the quality of service between the student consumers and teacher stakeholders. The students in the study believed they were performing well and the teachers did not. They perceived the quality of instruction lower than the teachers did. The researchers also found that both students' and teachers' satisfaction positively influence students' performance. The difference in perception between consumer and stakeholder was also apparent when it came to identifying teacher roles and beneficial qualities in teachers. The students rated tangibles, assurance and empathy more important to service quality than the teachers did.

Other researchers (Beutel, 2010; Bru, et al., 2010; Dingle, 2011; Eilam & Vidergor, 2011; Grieve, 2010; Helterbran, 2008) ascertained student fulfillment or learning was linked to teacher behaviors such as teaching skills and interpersonal skills. Beutel (2010) used a phenomenagraphic approach to guide his study of the interactions between students and teachers in relation to the process of teaching. Beutel's focus was on the experience of teaching as perceived by 20 teachers from a lower secondary school. The researcher used interviews to gather data from the participants. These teachers indicated that they maintained five different forms of interactions with their students. Interestingly, the teachers identified four interactions confined to the classroom setting: disseminating material, educating, aiding in learning, and managing participation. The last interaction the teachers identified was mentoring, which was viewed as long-term beyond school years. For the most part, these teachers viewed their job as more of an

emotionally distant one with a major focus on imparting knowledge or pedagogically related behavior rather than building relationships.

The Beutel (2010) focused on teacher perceptions. Dillon (2010) surveyed students about beneficial teacher characteristics and matched the surveys with student achievement data. He discovered:

> Teachers whose students described them as skillful at maintaining classroom order, at focusing their instruction, and at helping them [students] learn from their mistakes are often the same teachers whose students learn the most during the course of a year, as measured by gains on standardized test scores, according to a progress report on the research. (Dillon, 2010, para. 3)

Dillon (2010) made a strong case for understanding characteristics of effective teachers by directly linking them to student learning and achievement. The progress report discussed by Dillon (2010) was compiled using data gathered through surveys of students' perceptions and test scores that were a part of a 2-year research project funded by the Gates Foundation. Dr. Ronald Ferguson developed the surveys and stated that colleges and universities have made it a habit to ask students about their professors. However, he did not say the same for public school systems who rarely ask the opinions of students about their teachers.

In an effort to shed some light on what students thought were qualities of good teachers, Williams, Sullivan, and Kohn (2012) had pre-service teachers write letters to secondary students asking them about traits of teachers they deemed as outstanding. The schools included an upper-class suburban private Christian academy; a low socioeconomic rural middle school and high school; and a middle-class suburban high

school. The researchers received 223 response letters from students in those diverse areas. "Data analysis indicated that students, regardless of where they are enrolled, have similar views about outstanding teacher characteristics" (Williams et al., 2012, p. 106). Students' descriptors of teachers were counted only once, regardless of how many times the same descriptor was used by the same student. Sixty students shared the view that teachers should be friendly and caring, followed by 59 students stating the teacher needed to enjoy the subject and be knowledgeable about how to teach. Next, 49 students stated the teacher should have classroom management skills. Students made it clear that they wanted a caring teacher who would listen and connect with students. Another word, fun, was used by 31 students to describe good teachers. In fact, this adjective was often used several times in one letter to describe such things as the class, the assignments, the teaching strategies, and the teacher's sense of humor (Williams et al., 2012).

In another study, researchers investigated the perceptions of urban students about their teachers. Shaunessy and Mchatton (2009) used surveys and focus groups to gather information from 577 urban students in general, special, and gifted education in grades nine through 12. The surveys and focus group transcripts were analyzed using mixed-methods. Shaunessy and McHatton (2009) and a doctoral student analyzed and coded the transcripts from the focus group discussions, and the initial analysis of the transcripts produced 100 codes. After researchers combined and refined codes based on common characteristics 19 codes remained. "Following further analysis of the transcripts and codes, researchers collapsed these seven themes into two categories: (a) disappointment in teachers and the educational system, and (b) teachers' passion for teaching and engagement with student" (Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009, p. 491). The researchers then

statistically analyzed the results from the student surveys and found that male students and those students served through special education reported punitive feedback more so than females and students in general and honors education. The Hispanic learners reported more supportive feedback from teachers than did their fellow Caucasian classmates. Shaunessy and McHatton (2009) also discovered students related to teachers who were enthusiastic and knowledgeable about their subject matter. In discussing their findings, Shaunessy and McHatton (2009) stated:

> The need for teachers who are engaged in meaningful, supportive relationships with students transcends the waves of current politics and recent education issues, as students value care taken by educators to build relationships and support learning through persistence, innovation, and consistency. (p. 498)

Other researchers, Bru, Stornes, Munthe, and Thuen (2010), also sought to understand students' perceptions of teachers. However, they wanted to look at students' perceptions of teachers when students were at different levels of education. The researchers made clear that "several aspects of teacher support can be important for students' adjustment, motivation, and academic outcomes" (Bru et al., 2010, pp. 21-22). The students surveyed were 10 to 16 years of age and attended either a primary or secondary school. The researchers were interested in these ages due to the fact they transitioned from a primary school to a secondary school. Overall, 7,205 students completed the questionnaire, which underwent a statistical analysis. The students perceived the teachers at the secondary school as less supportive than those teachers at the primary school. This perceived decline in support grew with the age of the student.

In yet another quantitative study, 404 Jewish and Arab gifted students from elementary and junior high school were administered a questionnaire to measure their perceptions of desired teacher characteristics. The students identified personal and cognitive characteristics of teachers as being more important than pedagogical characteristics. The researchers considered cognitive characteristics to be those that promote thinking and pedagogical characteristics to be related to teaching modes and activities. Overall, older students rated the cognitive characteristics of teachers as more important than the younger, elementary students (Eilam & Vidergor, 2011).

Shadreck and Isaac (2012) focused on 60 secondary school students' views of quality science teachers. The researchers used a qualitative survey design that involved one on one interviews and group interviews where the researchers asked closed and open-ended questions. They discovered students identified with teachers who were caring, respectful, helpful, and had a knack for making learning fun.

> It is apparent from this study that quality teachers must embrace the vision of caring for students and their learning. The results of the research indicated that students highly value teachers who are both passionate about the subject taught and passionate about their students. Secondary school science students prefer teachers who teach science in a way that is both interesting and relevant to the student. (Shadreck & Isaac, 2012, p. 160)

Shadreck and Isaac (2012) analyzed and coded the data into three categories; teacher's social competence, teacher's pedagogical skills, and teacher's scientific knowledge. The students emphasized that good science teachers helped them understand and tried to explain if they did not get a concept. They also recognized that good teachers varied the

way they taught in an effort to make sure the content was understood and made the class both fun and interesting so that students wanted to learn (Shadreck & Isaac, 2012).

Pepe and Wang (2012) analyzed standard teacher evaluation forms completed by students at a metropolitan university in an effort to determine characteristics of teachers who received the highest ratings. The evaluation included a Likert scale with a rating from one to five and the data analyzed "contained 23 variables, 8,065 course sections and 294,692 student responses" (Pepe & Wang, 2012, p. 606). Students rated organization of the instructor and the communication skills of the instructor higher than other characteristics. These students viewed the ability to communicate effectively as a vital trait for teachers to have in order to be viewed as a good teacher. The students identified being able to facilitate learning as part of the teacher's ability to communicate. Students also associated respect and concern of instructors with an interest in student learning and valued intructors who were emphathetic and caring.

Students from an Islamic college offered some of the same opinions of instructors (Shah & Inamullah, 2011). The researchers randomly selected 100 college students to complete a 39 item questionaire that contained a five point Likert scale. Furthermore, the researchers in this quantitative study tabulated and analyzed the data using simple percentages to help them interpret the data. The students indicated that capable teachers were those who know their content, are enthusiastic about their content, and can explain their content in ways that are easily understood by their students. The students also pointed out that teachers should be caring, sympathic, and teach extensive knowledge (Shah & Inamullah, 2011).

Okpala and Ellis (2005) conducted mixed method research on teacher quality with 218 business students. The students completed a survey that was developed using a review of the literature on teacher quality. "The researchers utilized the sequential exploratory design method to examine the perceptions of college students on teacher quality components" (Okpala & Ellis, 2005, p. 377). This study began with a qualitative phase followed by a quantitative analysis of the qualitative data. Caring for students was ranked the highest by 39% students, followed by teaching skills at 34%, then content knowledge at 14%, and dedication to teaching 8%. Verbal skills were ranked lastat 5% by the college students. "It is apparent from this study that quality teachers must embrace the vision of caring for students and their learning" (Okpala & Ellis, 2005, p. 379).

In yet another study completed with 405 college students, Emanual and Adams (2006) used quantitative methods to evaluate completed surveys. Students identified reliability and responsiveness of the teacher as central to being a good teacher followed by assurance, tangibles, and empathy. In discussing the results from the surveys, the researchers stated,

> Students report that their experiences with instructors at this school consistenly fall below their expectations. An important caution is in order here. It may be that students' perceptions do not always line up with the kind of service they are actually receiving from their instructors. As stated previously, students must partipate in the service interaction in order to realize the full value of the service. However, their perception is their reality and it is incumbent upon those seeking to provide excellent service to take note. (Emanuel & Adams, 2006, pp. 541-542)

Helterbran (2008) gathered data from a web site where students can rate their teachers about 283 professors from three colleges. "According to the student comments gathered in this study, good teaching is exhibited and demonstrated in many ways by their professors and encompasses certain core attitudes and behaviors" (Helterbran, 2008, p. 129). The first category that emerged from the data was the knowledge of the professor and the way this knowledge is presented to students. The next category was personal qualities of their professors. These qualities included caring, being respectful, and demonstrating compassion. Instructional qualities made up the last category and involved the teacher being organized and being able to teach in a seamless manner. Helterbran (2008) offered this insight:

> Teaching at any level is complex, as are those who do the teaching. At its core, good teaching involves the interweaving of content knowledge, pedagogy skills, and a knowledge and appreciation of the multifaceted nature of students to, in the end, be able to point to evidence that learning has occurred. Personal characteristics, however, are integral in the overall potrait of a professional teacher, too. Most educatorscan reflect on their past formal education and identify a teacher who they remember fondly. Although it is quite possible that this rememberance may be heavily influenced by this teacher's formidable content knowledge or captivating methods of instructional delivery, it is also those intangibles, those elements of personality and practice that blended into the mosaic of being a good teacher. (p. 126)

Shahini and Daftarifard (2011) administered a questionnaire to 51 Iranian college students that evaluated their thoughts about effective teachers. The questionaire had 36

items that were rated using a five point Likert scale. The researchers used descriptive statistics and chi square through Crosstab to analyze the results. The first three characteristics of a good teacher that were rated highly dealt with the ability of the teacher to actually teach. These included techniques, profiency, and knowledge. The next two characteristics identified by the students involved the way the teacher approached the learner and included showing respect for the learner and motivating the learner. Students viewed evaluation techniques as the least important attribute of an effective teacher.

Although college students are much older than eighth graders, these same students were once in middle school and managed to make it through the eighth grade. I believe that the views they expressed in the aforementioned research were developed over time and have their roots in their earlier education. It is possible that the eighth graders in my research have similar perceptions about good teachers.

Grieve (2010) surveyed 88 teachers who were considered excellent teachers by their department lead teachers. The survey was comprised of 44 characteristics of excellent teachers that the participants ranked on a scale between one and five, with five being the highest mark for a characteristic. He discovered that establishing a positive classroom environment and having positive relationships with students were rated highly as desirable characteristics for teachers. "Practitioners consistently rated characteristics related to classroom relationships in action as essential characteristics for teachers of excellence" (Grieve, 2010, p. 275). Communication skills were also viewed as beneficial because good communication skills allow a teacher to deliver content effectively. The

participants rated personal qualities and positive relationships higher than the more concrete aspects of teaching.

Murphy, Delli, and Edwards (2004) collected data about good teachers and good teaching from 60 second-grade students, 61 preservice teachers, and 22 inservice teachers. "Whether education researcher or everyday citizen, most individuals have had some exposure to schools and teachers, and as result of that exposure almost everyone has some conception of the good teacher or good teaching" (Murphy et al., 2004, p. 70). The participants were given a teacher feedback form that used a four point Likert scale. The second graders and teachers were also asked to draw a picture of a good teacher. The researchers noted attributes that the teachers in the drawing had and from these attributes codes and categories were formed. This combined with the results from the teacher feedback form painted a picture of what the participants deemed characteristics of good teachers. "These data revealed that good teachers are caring, patient, not boring, polite, and organized" (Murphy et al., 2004, p. 78). The good teacher was also actively involved in the teaching process. The researchers found that students as young as second grade start developing beliefs about good teachers and often their beliefs differ from that of their teachers.

Patricia Miller (2012), a veteran teacher with an English language background, reflected on what she felt were characteristics of a good teacher and pointed out that she felt it was valuable to do so through the lens of a student. In her reflections from her perspective as a student, she discovered four major themes that she used to organize the characteristics. The first, affective characteristics, included what she described as both inborn and developed qualities such as humor and enthusiasm. According to Miller

(2012), “A teacher’s effectiveness depends on his demonstration of the affective characteristics” (p. 38). The other major groups for characteristics of good teachers were skills, classroom management, and academic knowledge. For the most part Miller believed that an awareness of most of these characteristics was enough for teachers to compensate for deficits in their teaching abilities. However, for knowledge of the content, Miller felt specific training to be a necessity.

Lupascu et al. (2014) completed quantitative research in the same area with 52 randomly selected high school students ages 15-17. The researchers stated they sought to clarify the meaning of *effective teacher*. The students were administered a questionnaire on which the participants chose from characteristics they admired or disliked in a teacher. From the data collected, the researchers categorized the characteristics as either personal or professional traits. The students most often identified tolerant, humorous, friendly, prepared, and calm as characteristics they deemed necessary for a teacher to be effective.

In reviewing the literature on good teaching, Maruli (2014) pointed out that, “Teacher quality is the single most important feature of the schools that boost student achievement and the second most important determinant of student learning after family background” (p. 193). After sifting through research and data on the subject of quality in teaching, he identified three broad categories under good teaching, which were similar to what Lupascu et al. (2014) discovered. One of these was the characteristics of the teacher which they described as “What teachers bring to the classroom” (p. 196). They described the next as what the teachers actually do in the classroom, which he called teacher practices, and the last was moral acts or traits of the teacher. In my own review of the literature, I discovered many different qualities that defined good teachers. The

definition changed with who was asked and how they were asked, which left me more curious about good teacher characteristics. Much of the data I reviewed was gained by predetermined characteristics that researchers used on surveys or questionnaires of good teachers. I was interested more in students' own perceptions of good teaching and the best way to solicit those perceptions without placing words in the students' mouths. In the next section, I explored the literature on varying ways writing has been used for data.

Existing Literature on Using Writing as Data

As mentioned earlier, most of the research involving perspectives on teacher quality involved surveys or questionnaires (Bru,et al., 2010; Eilam & Vidergor, 2011; Emanuel & Adams, 2006; Helterbran, 2008; Jang, 2011; Legg & Wilson, 2009; Okpala & Ellis, 2005; Pepe & Wang, 2012; Shadreck & Isaac, 2012; Shahini & Daftarifard, 2011; Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009). However, Williams et al. (2012) used letter writing as a means to gain the perspectives of good teaching from seventh through twelfth-graders. In this study college students wrote friendly letters to students and asked them about characteristics of outstanding teachers. The students had to write letters using their own words to describe good teachers. These letters included the students' ideas about good teachers without the researchers deciding for them what attributes a good teacher had and making them rank predetermined good teacher qualities. This was the students' interpretation of what it means to be a good teacher. Students' comments were grouped into categories with tallies kept for each trait cited. The researchers found that students had similar views about good teachers. In the students' own words, in 223 letters, they characterized good teachers as being friendly, caring, enjoying teaching, knowledgeable, and listening.

Another genre of writing, poetry, has been used frequently as a data source in qualitative studies (Bordelon, 2006; Burdick, 2011; Carr, 2003; deVries, 2007; Fuller, 2010; Furman, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c; Henderson, 2002; Shapiro & Stein, 2005; Wiseman, 2011). Poetry has even been used to highlight details and develop further meaning from interview transcripts. In research by Burdick (2011) two teacher-participants and the interviewer created found poetry from the interview transcripts that used phrases or words originally found in the interview transcripts. These found poems were then analyzed for metaphors and themes. "Found poetry is a particular form that can be especially helpful to researchers as a way to see static data-driven text" (Burdick, 2011, p. 3). In this instance, poetry offered another way of viewing the data that may help uncover hidden themes that were not apparent in the interview transcripts.

Carr (2003) used this same format to poetically express the themes from her previous ethnographic research where she investigated the vigilance of family members who stayed by the bedside of sick relatives. She explained that once she revisited transcripts from the interviews of these family members it was apparent that, "The richness of the data was captivating and required another form of expression" (Carr, 2003, p. 1325). The researcher went through her transcripts in order to pull information with which she could write poems, and in doing so she discovered underlying themes that were missed originally. Carr (2003) added, "Poetic transcription, as an experimental text, can inform and inspire us by transforming qualitative interview data into meaningful expressions of the lived experiences of others" (p. 1330).

Furman (2004b) used two different sets of poems to portray the lived experience of those being studied. Specifically, the researcher explored realities in Latin America.

The first group of poems were interpretive and meant to capture the moment. For the second set of poems the researcher took field notes she coded and wrote poetry that reflected the themes. The researcher explained that this elevated the data by not just re-representing it but by presenting a synthesis and interpretation of the data. "By evaluating their own experiences of being with people, as opposed to merely documenting them, researchers are encouraged to explore and unpack their own biases" (Furman, 2004b, p. 99).

In the same manner, de Vries (2007) took interview transcripts and wrote poems to reflect the themes in the transcipts. The researcher conducted a musical parenting workshop that concluded with surveys filled out by the participants. Three of the 23 participants responded in an in-depth manner to the final question that asked if they had anything else to add. These three participants were then asked to be interviewed. After the interview the researcher presented the transcripts and themes to the participants to review. In all three cases the participants showed little interest in reading the transcripts. The researcher decided to write a poem that reflected the information gained from the interviews. What emerged from creating a poem from the interview transcripts were themes that the researcher had not even contemplated for the previously administered surveys. All three participants could see themselves, their insights, their voices in the poems.

Poetry has been used in the medical field to gain various insights (Carr, 2003; Furman, 2004c; Henderson, 2002; Shapiro & Stein, 2005). Shapiro and Stein (2005) used student poetry to gain an undertanding of the relationships medical students had with supervisors and patients and the patients' families. "Studying medical student

poetry is a legitimate method for learning more about how students attempt to make sense of the different relational systems in which they participate during their educational years" (Shapiro & Stein, 2005, p. 286). Poetry offered these students a way to reflect and analyze their thoughts. Henderson (2002) found the same when he examined three medical students' poems about death and discovered different perspectives about how to approach a dying patient.

Furman (2004c) used poetry that he had created previously to get to the heart of his experience with his father having cancer. He suggested that autobiographical poetry be used to help family members understand their feelings as they experience a loved one enduring cancer. He added, "By exploring death metaphorically through writing poetry, family members can begin to deal with potential grief and loss perhaps less directly and less overwhelmingly" (Furman, 2004c, p. 169).

Furman (2004a) took 60 prose poems that he had written about different friends and investigated the loss of friendship either due to death or simply severing ties. After each poem the researcher reflected on the meaning behind the poetry. Although themes were not explicitly discussed, the reader gained an understanding of the themes, which were implicitly discussed through the poetry and in the researcher's commentaries.

Bordelon (2006) involved 13 women who were enrolled in group therapy class in writing poetry about their experiences. "Through self-reflection, poetry has the power to enable group members to evaluate their subjective experience belonging to a group" (Bordelon, 2006, p. 376). This process allowed the women to ponder their experiences in group therapy and attach meaning to the experience. Bordelon (2006) stated, "Both clients and group facilitators benefit from a subjective evaluation process. Evaluation

gives group leaders useful information that can inform and hone their leadership skills" (p. 376).

In research completed by Fuller (2010), students from 11 primary and secondary schools were asked to compete in a poetry competition. Participation was voluntary with the topic of the poetry contest being "An English Lesson" with emphasis placed more on what the students said instead of the form of their poetry. From the poems the researcher was able to extract what the students thought about English lessons with the hope of informing teacher practices. "The poems reveal a variety of key features of English lessons that might warrant further exploration such as the representation of teachers; classroom settings; classroom routines; attitudes to English (not all positive) and so on" (Fuller, 2010, p. 148).

Wiseman (2011) was interested in eighth-grade students' perspectives and how these students demonstrated knowledge through poetry. She evaluated 22 students' poetry by inductively coding and developing categories that represented themes in the poetry. Wiseman (2011) stated:

> Poetry can provide a way for students to communicate topics that bridge their personal knowledge with the school curriculum through metaphor, imagery and creative expression. Furthermore, poetry can incorporate the understanding that comes from being engaged in multiple contexts, cultures and identities, where both the student and the teacher contribute to the curriculum and communicate their learning. (p. 70)

Although poetry often uses metaphors to convey deeper meaning, metaphors have been explicitly used in some qualitative research (Dogan, 2012) to also gain deeper

understandings. Dogan (2012) asked 218 preservice teachers to write a metaphor for the phonics-based sentence method and then provide a reason for the metaphor. Only 197 of the original metaphors were used because five of the participants could not create metaphors. The remaining metaphors were coded with four main themes evolving. The number of metaphors that were represented by each theme was counted with a percentage given to each. The themes offered insights into what prospective teachers really thought about this method of phonics instruction.

Ida (2017) worked with two different classes of 11th grade students to determine what the students thought were characteristics of good teachers. One group of 22 students filled out a questionnaire, and another another group of 21 wrote a composition about what constituted a good teacher. The researcher added the second group because he was concerned that the questionnaire limited the students to only certain, predetermined qualities for teachers. Ida pointed out that he wanted an accurate, objective picture of good teacher characteristics. The second group of students was simply told to write an essay about what made a good teacher. The students highlighted numerous qualitites for good teachers that fell under three broad catagories, "personality traits, eight teaching competencies and factors contributing to good teacher-student relationship" (p. 146)

The last three studies discussed, Wiseman (2011), Dogan (2012) and Ida (2017) guided my choice of writings. They offered ways to get eighth grade students to express their thoughts on good teacher qualities. Not having a lot of information about eighth-graders' perception of good teachers made me select types of writings that would allow

the students to freely highlight those qualities of good teachers without limiting what they could say.

As I mentioned, research and information on the subject of good teachers was scant from the eighth graders' point of view. However, the literature offered an abundance of facts about this age group that indicated a need to understand their opinions about good teachers. These students are at a key moment in their development. During this period, their bodies are challenged mentally, physically, and emotionally; they near the age where they could quit school, and for the first time, many of them have to adapt to having more than one or two teachers. All of this contributes to overall stress levels of these students.

Khohastehmehr and Takrimi (2009) discovered that secondary English teachers' descriptors of effective teachers fell under four different effectiveness factors: instructional strategies, communication or social skills, personal characteristics and knowledge. The focus of my study was to determine what descriptors eighth-grade students used when asked about a good teacher, to learn how students referred to good teachers and to determine if their descriptors varied across three different writings. I also wanted to understand how students connected teacher quality to learning. I wanted the students to explain in their own words what they believed to be good teacher qualities.

Most of the research reviewed involved a quantitative analysis that used predetermined characteristics of good teachers in data gathering. Participants would fill out surveys or questionnaires that contained these characteristics, which they would rank or complete a Likert scale that indicated importance of the characteristics. My study allowed participants to create their own descriptors. Overall, a review of literature in the

area of writing yielded a way to gain rich data about good teaching from the students' perspectives. Which is why I chose to use three forms of writing; essays, cinquains, and metaphors. Furthermore, the information gained from the literature review in the areas of the characteristics of both eighth graders and good teachers and writing provided me with justification for the age group I chose and gave me a way to conduct qualitative research that would truly give insight into what eighth graders' perceptions of good teachers were. The literature review and reflection on my own thoughts about the topic at hand began my journey to developing my conceptual framework.

Conceptual Framework

After reviewing the literature, I made some specific decisions about my study. First, I knew I was interested in what a particular group of eighth-graders thought about good teachers. I believed that students' school experience is enhanced by interactions with teachers they deem good, and I wanted to understand their perceptions without forcing them to choose qualities of good teachers from a predetermined list. Three types of writing were used to accomplish this. I did not want the students to have to do any extra writing beyond what was already expected in their classes, so I used types of writing that were embedded in the curriculum. I believed that if the students viewed it as extra writing, they would rush through it, and sincerity would be lost. I also realized that my own knowledge and beliefs guided all of these decisions. Considering all of these factors contributed to my development of the conceptual framework of my study.

Various conceptual or theoretical frameworks emphasize "different questions and how these particular emphases can affect the analytical framework that guides fieldwork and interpretation" (Patton, 2002, pp. 77-78). It is important to know the framework in

which research is situated so that one can understand how the data was interpreted and analyzed. Charmaz (2006, p. 169) offered this insight, "Theoretical frameworks in grounded theory differ from traditional quantitative research. We do not use theories for deducing specific hypotheses before data-gathering." She continued to explain that the researcher's own views inform the way data is obtained and examined. "The theoretical framework locates the specific argument that you make. Here, how you use and develop a theoretical framework takes a new twist: It emerges from your analysis and argument about it" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 169). As a researcher, I could not view my data from all perspectives. By identifying the lens through which I viewed my research problem, I gave insight into how I analyzed and interpreted my data.

A couple of perspectives provided context for my study and for interpreting my findings. I framed my research using the social constructivist and symbolic interaction approaches to grounded theory. Charmaz (2008) stated,

> A social constructionist approach to grounded theory allows us to address *why* questions while preserving the complexity of social life. Grounded theory not only is a method for understanding research participants' social constructions but also is a method that researchers construct throughout inquiry. Grounded theorists adopt a few strategies to focus their data gathering and analyzing, but what they do, how they do it, and why they do it emerge through interacting in the research setting, with their data, colleagues, and themselves. (pp. 397-398)

The aforementioned approach allowed me to acknowledge that being an educator and a mom had an impact on my expectations going into the research. My perspectives also guided on what I focused in the data. It also provided me a way to understand what these

eighth grade students' constructed as good teachers qualities. Charmaz (2008) further explained the approach,

> The form of constructionism I advocate includes examining (1) the relativity of the researcher's perspectives, positions, practices, and research situation, (2) the researcher's reflexivity; and (3) depictions of social constructions in the studied world. Consistent with the larger social constructionist literature, I view action as a central focus and see it as arising within socially created situations and social structures. Constructionist grounded theorists attend to what and how questions. They emphasize abstract understanding of empirical phenomena and contend that this understanding must be located in the studied specific circumstances of the research process. (p. 398)

As emphasized by Charmaz (2008), this approach not only allowed me to admit my perceptions of good teachers, it provided me with a way to examine my beliefs about good teachers and acknowledge my preconceived notions. This also held true for what I thought about students' beliefs on the subject matter. I believed that students' interactions with their teachers, and how the students interpreted these interactions established whether the teachers were deemed good or not in the students' minds. I further believed that the same group of students would share some of the same beliefs about good teaching. Symbolic interaction "places great emphasis on the importance of meaning and interpretation as essential human processes in reaction against behaviorism and mechanical stimulus-response psychology. People create shared meanings through their interactions, and those meanings become their reality" (Patton, 2002, p. 112).

I started my research by contemplating any biases I may have had and made sure to be transparent with my views on the subject of good teachers. My views also guided my choice of data collection methods and the way I analyzed the data. I was interested in the reality of the students in my research, a reality that I believed they shared about good teachers. My review of the literature supported my choices and helped me situate my study using the social constructivist and symbolic interaction approaches. These two approaches were useful when I considered where and with whom I was completing my research. As explained in the next chapter, I enhanced my research design and methods by my choice of conceptual frameworks.

Chapter III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

It has always been my desire to help better the school system in which I teach. I have several reasons for wanting to see the students in this small school system be successful. First, as I mentioned previously, my own children have all completed their schooling here, and now I have grandchildren who will do the same, which leads to my other reasons; I am a member of this community and this school system. Therefore, before I give you the demographics of the county, that include the site and participants where the research was completed, allow me to describe it from my viewpoint in order for you gain overall feeling.

The county consists of four small towns where everyone knows everyone. The school system in which I teach is nestled in the largest of the three towns, the county seat. There is really only one large industry in the county and many smaller, family owned businesses. Farming and other agriculturally related work are the backbone of the community. There are at least 14 different places to eat in the county seat; people love to congregate to drink coffee, discuss politics, and the weather. It is a common occurrence for me to run into current and former students in the grocery store or have them wait on me when I go out to eat. I know just about every teacher that teaches in my school system, and if you want to find someone on Friday night, and it is football season, the best place to look is at the high school football field. In fact, I conduct many parent

contacts at sporting events. The county, in my opinion, is a safe, friendly, and inviting place to work, live, and raise a family. It is for all of these reasons that I was led to complete my research here, where I live, raise my family and teach, and to do so using qualitative methods. Creswell, 2009) pointed out, "Qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study" (p. 175). Thus, the site for my study was my little community and school where I live and work and a qualitative approach will show the site to be more than just statistics.

Research Site

As noted, the site of the study was a rural, South Georgia, middle school. More specifically, I conducted the research in three, eighth-grade, English language arts classrooms that were located on the same hallway. The school housed grades six through eight where each grade was contained on its own hall. The middle school was one of five public schools in the county. According to Public School Review, overall, 3,121 students attended these schools and 76% of the students were White, and 24% were minorities who were majority Black. The system had an overall 15 to one student to teacher ratio. The middle school where the research was completed educated 687 students where 79% were White and 21% were majority Black minorities. The middle school was in the top 30% of schools in Georgia based on test scores and employed 47 teachers. Eighty-three percent of the students at the middle school qualified for free and reduced lunches. The county in which the research was completed had 19,252 residents; of those 82.3% were White, 10.8% were Black and 4.9% were Latino. It was within this context that I selected participants.

Participants

The research included the entire eighth grade of a rural, South Georgia, middle school. Due to absences, 211 of the 220 students participated in the research. Of the 211 students, 46% were female and 54% were male, 160 were White, 45 were Black, and 6 were Latino. On the eighth grade hall, three teachers taught English language arts, three teachers taught math, and three teachers taught science and each of these nine teachers also taught social studies. Teachers who taught English language arts were responsible for teaching both reading and language during their class period. Students were on a block schedule, which meant they attended three, two-hour classes per day, with two of these academic and one either a physical education or a connection class. The next day the student would attend the classes he did not have the prior day. For example, if a student had math, social studies, and connection classes on Monday, then Tuesday he had English language arts, science, and physical education classes. On Wednesday, the student would attend the classes he had on Monday, and on Thursday, he would attend the classes he had on Tuesday. The student had all classes on Friday for a shorter amount of time.

I gained access to the site by getting permission from the superintendent, assistant superintendent, the principal of the middle school, and the three teachers of the eighth-grade English language arts classes. I was one of the three English language arts teachers in my study. Initially, I considered only completing the research with my team of students with the thought that they represented the eighth grade at my school. In this case, my sample selection would have been one of convenience. However, after further consideration, I decided to conduct the research with the entire eighth grade at my school.

After all, I was interested in the perspectives of the entire population of eighth grade students at my school, and I was not certain one team would give me the rich data that truly represented the eighth grade students as a group. As such, I purposefully selected this group of students because their perceptions of good teaching were the ones I was interested in understanding. According to Maxwell (2005), purposeful selection "is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other choices" (p. 88).

Purposeful sampling gave me the representativeness that Maxwell (2005) described as being the epitome of, in my case, typical eighth grade students who attend a rural South Georgia school. In further support of this choice, Maxwell (2005) noted, "There are few circumstances in which random sampling can be useful in a small-scale qualitative study" (p. 89). Tam, Heng, and Jiang (2009) used purposeful sampling to select experienced college students to gain their perceptions of their professors. Harcourt and Mazzoni (2012) used purposeful sampling to gain insights about teacher quality from children ages three to five.

Data Collection

I used a grounded theory approach to frame my study and the constant comparative method for implementing my inductive data analysis in order to build a theory about how students perceive good teachers. Patton (2002) pointed out "that how you study the world determines what you learn about the world. Grounded theory depends on methods that take the researcher into and close to the real world so that the results and findings are grounded in the empirical world" (p. 125). He recognized the strength of this method as being able to produce theory in a real world setting and not in a

laboratory. I found this beneficial, because a natural setting for students to produce various writings for a purpose was the classroom, and it offered a seamless way for them to reflect on good teachers.

My effort was concentrated on looking at what students wrote about good teachers, and from their words, I derived meaning. In order to gain insight into the students' perceptions, I read the essays, poetry, and metaphors that they created about what makes a good teacher and good teaching. The poems the students created were cinquains, poems that consisted of five lines and met certain criteria. These three pieces of writing were part of the students' good teacher project and were part of the curriculum at their school (See Appendices A, B, C, and D for types of writings and directions). I focused my attention on the three kinds of writings and compared the adjectives and descriptions that the students used to describe good teachers and teaching across the three writings. According to Patton (2002), inductive analysis involves "immersion in the details and specifics of the data interrelationships to discover important patterns, themes, and; begins by exploring, then confirming; guided by analytical principals rather than rules; ends with a creative synthesis" (p. 41). Initially, I read the pieces of writing to get an overall idea for what the students were saying about good teachers, highlighting descriptors as I read. The descriptors I highlighted were adjectives, phrases, and examples the students used to describe their good teachers. After I completed this with one teacher's three classes, I then started recording the descriptors per student for each of the three class periods. The descriptors were used as In Vivo codes. "In Vivo codes help us to preserve participants' meaning of their views and actions in the coding itself" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55). This type of coding may also be called emic coding, which

indicates the codes were taken from the participants' viewpoints and words (Maxwell, 2005). After I recorded descriptors per student for each of the three writing pieces, and all three, class periods, I began to list the descriptors the students used, at first I kept up with this information on sticky notes. However, this proved to be too difficult to track, so I started using a three by three grid that resembled a tic-tac-toe board. I wrote the class periods across the top horizontally and the data for the essays, poems, and metaphors down the side vertically (See appendix E for an example of the data grid). I created this grid for each descriptor used by the students and tallied each for each piece of data, then added these together for an overall total for each descriptor. After I completed this process for of the writings for each teacher, I added the totals per descriptor for all of the teachers' classes, thus I gained a total number for the entire eighth grade. I then decided if any of the descriptors were synonyms for each other, and if so, I combined them. For example, I combined intelligent, wise, and smart together. I also compared descriptors across the three writings that the students completed. Merriam (2002) referred to this as the constant comparative method and described it as the foundation of grounded theory with the researcher deciding what data has meaning and then making comparisons to make categories. This comparison helped me clarify what the students meant. For example, the word strong when used to describe a physical education teacher lifting weights was different from an academic teacher described as strong-minded. I relied on the students' words to clarify what they meant. Being able to look at three separate writings from each student allowed me to compare how a student used a word in each of his three writings.

Murphy et al. (2004) encouraged using several sources of data that enhance each other when inquiring about beliefs. In my study, having an essay, a cinquain, and metaphors from each student added to my understanding of the students' perceptions. Patton (2002) identified documents as an unobtrusive form of data. These documents can be used "to generate research case data in situations where no human subject protection permission is required because the data are routinely collected and findings will be reported only in the aggregate" (Patton, 2002, p. 191). This was the case in this study because writing assignments were part of the language arts curriculum for all eighth-graders at the school. The students were very comfortable completing the tasks and did not find them out of the ordinary.

By collecting data using essays, cinquains, and metaphors from each student, I was able to use their words to gain an understanding of their perspectives about good teachers. "The strengths of qualitative research derive primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than numbers" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 22). I took their words, and through careful consideration of how they were used and by comparing their writings was able to narrow down their words in order to get to the core of their beliefs. Creswell (2009) stated, "Grounded theory is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of the participants" (p. 13). He continued to describe qualitative research as an inductive process where the researcher extrapolated themes from the data and developed theories in relation to the information gained. Any conclusions I made about good teachers and teaching were firmly grounded in the views of the students who completed the writing assignments. Researchers have

employed grounded theory in various studies with children of different ages and students of diverse levels (Barnett, 2012; Gregory & Jones, 2009; Mettas & Norman, 2011). Grounded theory was an ideal way for me to gain an understanding of something that was occurring in a school setting in a real world, natural setting. However, along with the advantages of this approach there are also some issues.

Validity and Reliability Issues

My own bias as the researcher could have been a principal threat to the validity in this qualitative study. Since I used grounded theory to research students' ideas of effective teaching qualities, I was careful not to assume what I would discover as themes in the data (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002). The grounded theory I used was based on a constructivist paradigm. Charmaz (2006) explained that in this paradigm, the researchers understand that their ideas and values can influence what they discover in their data and the meaning they construct. For me, this meant that I needed to be aware of any opinions I had about good teachers and teaching. I knew that not only did I need to be aware of any preconceived ideas I had about good teacher qualities, but I also needed to make those clear and bring them to the surface as I reviewed the data from the students' writings. It was imperative that I highlighted the students' perceptions, and limit the influence my own perceptions or values had on my study both while gathering and while analyzing the data.

Patton (2002) warned, "Qualitative inquiry, because the human being is the instrument of data collection, requires that the investigator carefully reflect on, deal with, and report potential sources of bias and error" (p. 51). Peshkin (1988) further explained,

> Subjectivity is not a badge of honor, something earned like a merit badge and paraded around on special occasions for all to see. Whatever the substance of one's persuasions at a given point, one's subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed. (p.17)

I believed that I could identify and monitor my subjectivity in order to limit its impact on my research. In pondering my own subjectivity, I realized that being a mother, a student, and a teacher influenced my beliefs about the topic of good teaching. I witnessed my own children often shut down and not learn because of the way they perceived a teacher. Those who I thought were really good teachers, my own children had the opposite sentiment about them and their practices. As a student, I have had what I considered good teachers. I remember the way those teachers made me feel, not so much how they taught, or even what they taught. I also noticed some students thrive emotionally and academically in some teachers' classes and then underachieve and even exhibit behavioral issues in other classes. I wondered if this was simply related to the subject matter or to the perception the students had of the teachers. When I questioned my own three children, it all seemed related to how they connected to the teacher and not the subject matter. In fact, I noticed that my own children sometimes performed well in subjects that typically were not strong areas for them if they perceived the teacher was interested in them. For this reason, I believed being a good teacher involved more than just knowing the content. Knowing that I had this thought made me careful to not assume that I would discover this in my data. It made me reflect even more on the students' words and make sure I could put my finger on the data that backed up my findings. As far as having preconceived ideas about the characteristics of good teachers,

I believe different individuals value different characteristics in teachers, and maybe there are a few characteristics that most individuals would identify as those of a good teacher. I have honestly read too many opinions on the subject and heard too many ideas from my own children to hold fast to any real notion of what eighth-grade students will deem characteristics of good teachers. However, I do believe there is something there that students understand about good teaching and whatever it is affects their learning and the way they interact with teachers.

In an effort to get in touch with my subjective I's I completed a researcher identity memo before starting my research. This got me in tune with my own subjectivity. Peshkin (1988) described a subjective I as an intense knowledge of one's own subjectivity. By completing an identity memo, I focused on things in my own background that could play a role in how I viewed the data from the three writings from the students. This activity helped me self-monitor my subjectivity and hone in my objectivity to ensure my perceptions did not taint the students' perceptions about good teaching. Peshkin (1988) further clarified,

> I advocate the enhanced awareness that should result from a formal, systematic monitoring of self. Speaking personally—but meant generally—I see this monitoring as a necessary exercise, a workout, a tuning up of my subjectivity to get it into shape. It is a rehearsal for keeping the lines of my objectivity open—and straight. And it is a warning to myself so that I may avoid the trap of perceiving just that which my own untamed sentiments have sought out and served up as data. (p. 20)

It was, with the aforementioned in mind, that I started considering aspects of my life that influence my ideas about good teaching. Four dimensions of my life work together and affect my perspective of good teachers; I am a daughter, a student, a teacher, and a mother. In order to tune up my subjectivity and monitor it, I reflected back on my various roles and how these roles have informed my opinions about teachers.

My informal education began for me as a daughter at home with my mother and father and the example they set for me from the beginning. They both had strong work ethics and took pride in their jobs. My mother had a thriving daycare center that opened around six every morning and finally closed most evenings, if we were lucky, around six. Parents from every lifestyle trusted her and her employees with their children. I remember children coming home with us because their parents were going to be late picking them up. Some nights kids would still be in my mother's care at bedtime. After years of this, my mother decided to call it quits and took a job at a local shirt factory. She carried her commitment to her work with her to her new job. I know this because I had the opportunity to work with her for approximately a year during the time I was transitioning from high school to college. My mother could sew any part of the shirt and understood how to operate all of the machines, and the boss knew it. She was punctual, never left work early, and always made production quotas. Since her retirement, her former boss asked her to return on numerous occasions.

My father was the head machinist at my hometown's thread mill and would often get off work and go straight to a second job painting houses. He even picked up cans in his spare time. Like my mother, people trusted him. As head machinist, my father was responsible for keeping the machinery at the mill running smoothly. Often he created

parts for individual machines that saved the mill a tremendous amount of money. Patents for some of his inventions exist because they were such valuable components of the machines. I can remember having trouble with my math homework and him showing me how to figure out the math problems using pencil and paper. He could always show me several different ways to derive an answer, and he never used a calculator. I would not have survived math without his extra guidance, which occurred after he had worked two jobs, and I know he was exhausted.

My parents retired for a second time from their own recycling business. Their business thrived due to their commitment and determination. From them, my first teachers, I learned how determination, commitment, and hard work get results. I believe teachers should have these same attributes.

From being a daughter, I equated a good teacher with someone who had strong work ethics and was trustworthy. Early on, my parents, who were my first teachers, were creative and determined individuals who were committed to any endeavor they undertook. I also learned it was a good feeling to be encouraged.

Being a student also affected my thoughts about good teaching. In contemplating the start of my formal education, I cannot excuse the impact of one very special Sunday school teacher, Miss Mary Belle. If I had to identify just one good teacher from my past, it would be her. To me, she exemplifies goodness. I started attending her class when I was 3 years old and stayed in her class until I was approximately 10 years old. According to her, I was too young to be in her class to begin with, but she took me anyway. I remember sitting next to her as she taught lessons. This was her way of making sure I was all right and keeping me away from some of the older kids in the class.

She made me feel safe and comfortable. Miss Mary Belle would enter the classroom with her books and materials in-hand. She was always prepared, and she knew her information. She would answer all questions, and if she did not know the answer, she would search for it. She had an essence about her that was warm and inviting. I loved being near her. In fact, I loved it so much that when it was time for me to move to an older class I was devastated. I remember sitting in the doorway of the new classroom and looking down the hall at Miss Mary Belle's class. She saw me and motioned for me to come to her room, and that is where I stayed for a couple more years. In all, I think she taught me for about 6 years, maybe even longer. I still call her to talk and visit my hometown church with the hopes of seeing her. When she walks down the aisle and makes eye contact with me, I feel overjoyed. My own children have grown to love her as much as I do.

I think Miss Mary Belle was a tough act for my teachers at school to follow. I measured all of my teachers against the standard she set every Sunday. Although I had some decent teachers, I never really enjoyed school. By third grade, I would do anything to get out of going to school. I detested it to the point that I was physically ill. This is one of the sources for my desire to understand good teachers from students' perspectives. I remember seeing my classmates enjoy school, and I felt different because I would have rather been anywhere but there. I think teachers can help students feel more connected to their schools. My parents realized how unhappy in school I was in third grade, and they understood that something had to change in order for me to learn and be engaged in that learning. I was tested, and I started a private school in fourth grade. This school was in a neighboring town, and I remember it being difficult for them to get me to and from

school. It was vastly different from my prior school. The classes were smaller, and the teachers placed a strong emphasis on achievement, which they closely monitored along with their students' behavior. I remember the rooms were well kept, and the overall atmosphere was cozier than my previous school. I no longer detested school and learned to tolerate it.

Finally, in seventh grade a teacher measured up to Miss Mary Belle. Her name was Mrs. Shiver. I had her for homeroom and for language arts. Mrs. Shiver treated everyone equally; she did not appear to have any favorites. This made me feel as important as the person sitting next to me. What I saw before me was a level playing field. Something else that was unique about Mrs. Shiver was you could ask her anything. If she did not know the answer, she would get back to you as soon as she did. I remember asking her why when people breathe air in their stomachs go in and not out. This simply did not make sense to me. I was naive and did not have the Internet to which to turn. She said she had never really thought about it, and she would ask her husband. He was a doctor and would be able to tell us the exact reason why. She returned the next day and explained how the lungs expanded with air and this made the chest grow larger and the stomach appear smaller. Looking back on this, I think she acted as if she was asking her husband to make me feel like my question was important. I trusted her. I knew that if I went to her with a problem, she would help me resolve it. She never gave us busy work, and we never slowed down learning. I looked forward to not only her class, but having time in homeroom to talk to her. She was approachable and spent time having conversations with all of us. She made me feel smart and like she valued me as

an individual. That year she gave me the first award I had ever received at school. It was for good citizenship for the year, and she only gave one. I still have the trophy.

Throughout high school, I enjoyed learning under teachers who were not afraid to teach in many different ways. I learned the most from these teachers because they never gave up on their students and did not blame the students for not learning. They seemed to take the failure of their students personally and looked for better and diverse ways to teach and reach them. It is because of the "Mary Belles" in my education that I had the confidence to go to college to become a teacher.

In college, I had three professors that I considered good teachers. Dr. Larry Wiley taught me to overcome my fear of statistics. He gave out a list of key terms that helped me understand the language of the class, and he had us complete a notebook that demonstrated our comprehension of the subject matter. He would first teach how to work out the statistical problems on his dry erase board. He never seemed to mind reworking problems or giving more examples. His depth of knowledge was impressive. We would then work in the computer lab using software to complete the same types of problems. Knowing how to work the problems by hand helped me to understand what the computer was calculating. The fact that he took grades on not only tests, but also varying tasks, allowed me to demonstrate my complete knowledge of the subject matter. Dr. Larry Wiley was very approachable and available to answer questions and work with me on an individual basis if needed. On one occasion, I had to miss a test. I went to him with my dilemma, and he was more than happy to schedule a time for me to make up the work. His class remains one of the hardest I have ever taken. However, he made it less stressful and an enjoyable challenge.

His wife, Dr. Ellen Wiley, was my advisor for my doctoral program. She was my go to person for any questions or concerns, and in my opinion, she was one of the most intelligent, efficient people with whom I have ever worked. I never actually sat in a classroom with her; she taught several on-line classes that I had the opportunity to take. What I appreciated the most about her teaching was her high expectations, and the way she dissected what she expected down to manageable parts making the task doable. There were no surprises in her classes. She spelled everything out in the syllabus, and she held all of her students' feet to the fire. All of the tasks that I completed for her were meaningful and not busy work. She also smiled a lot when we had sessions online, and her warmth shown through the computer screen. She made me want to do my best, and if it were not for her, I do not know how I would have fared in the doctoral program.

The last teacher I need to discuss is Dr. Richard Schmertzing. I never anticipated discovering such a wonderful person on a college campus. I absolutely loved attending his classes and listening to his enchanting stories of his qualitative journeys. Not only did he know the content from the textbook, he had lived it. This allowed him to present information in a believable and real way. He opened up a completely new world for me. You see I had been interested in good teachers, and the fact that students' perceptions may not be the same as those of teachers or administrators. Until I had his class, I had no idea how I would research the topic. In fact, in the past, some professors discouraged me and made me think the topic was not worthwhile. Dr. Richard Schmertzing built my confidence and showed me a way to tackle the topic. I learned an enormous amount from listening to him, completing observations he required and making a notebook that

documented my experiences. Everything he had me do in his class prepared me for my research.

Being a student influenced my views about what constitutes a good teacher. As a student, I valued teachers who made me feel safe, who answered questions, did not seem to have favorites and were flexible. I also appreciated those teachers who were knowledgeable and taught in many different ways. All of these traits, I believe are indicative of good teacher.

My teaching experience has equally affected my perception of good teacher qualities. Being a teacher is my next subjective I. Each year, I strive to make students feel safe enough to take risks, but not relaxed enough to take advantage of me. I want students to enjoy class and become active in their own learning. I want to be their "Mary Belle," and this desire to be a better teacher for more students drove my desire to understand students' perceptions of good teachers.

My peers chose me for teacher of the year, and this was a huge honor. However, it meant more to me for the students to dedicate their yearbook to me because I felt the students really knew who I was as a teacher. In the dedication, the students stated:

> Mrs. [Luke] is a superb teacher that makes learning fun and exciting. She has the ability to connect with her students and make learning relevant to our lives. You Tube, music videos, and entertaining activities are used in her classes every day. Her bubbly and sassy attitude makes her personable and enjoyable to be around. She has a true love for teaching and shows it every day. (Mikell, et al., 2012, p. 5)

Later, the process for choosing teacher of the year changed in order for parents, students, and teachers to be able to make nominations. Several students and parents nominated me. This really touched me because I value their opinions. Students are whom I am around the most, and I believe it is important for me to understand what they are thinking as far as their education is concerned. For me, as a teacher, it is necessary to be responsive to their educational needs, and to recognize them as individuals with varying perspectives. As a student myself, I sat in classrooms where teachers taught one way, and did not adjust their teaching to their students' needs. Those were the moments that I was the most lost, confused, and helpless. It was in those moments that I decided if I ever got the chance, I would do things differently.

Being a mother is yet another subjective I that influences my ideas about good teachers. More so than my educational and teaching experiences, my own children and their educational endeavors have influenced my perception of good teaching. I know, based on their perceptions, that there is not one correct answer for the question of what constitutes a good teacher. My three children have had different teachers and at times had some of the same teachers. What I found interesting was the fact that one of them would say a certain teacher was the best and the other would chime in with a resounding she was my least favorite teacher. In the case of my children, even though they all came from the same family, each had individual quirks, and each had a distinctive personality. What was a good fit for one was a horrible fit for the other. I think that it is important for teachers to recognize that each child may have different expectations, and that each enters into the classroom with a clearly different background that is unique to the individual student.

My daughter, Emily, was a senior the year I defended my proposal, and after sitting through my defense commented to me, it is not enough for a teacher to care about students. She added that the most caring teacher she has ever had was not a good teacher. She believed that a teacher should care, but more importantly, know the subject matter and when needed, be able to teach in different ways. My other daughter, Katie Julia, is currently in the 12th grade and does well with all types of teachers. This is not to say she likes or has liked all of her teachers because she has truly detested some, mostly for the way she witnessed them treat other students. However, she has never let her opinion of a teacher interfere with her learning. Her favorite teachers were approachable, making it easy for her to ask for clarification when she needed to. She went with, and continues to go with the flow, adapting her own behavior to the teacher. My son, Jake, a current 10th grader, is the polar opposite of both of my daughters. For him, if a teacher does not demonstrate he or she cares, then he does not listen or learn anything in that class. With him, the fix would be easy. My children made it clear to me that the qualities of good teachers were as diverse as the needs of the students.

Being a student, a teacher, and a mother all influenced my ideas about what constitutes a good teacher. It is difficult for me to separate which subjective I influenced which ideas about the subject. Therefore, to summarize, for me, treating students with dignity has always been a given. In my opinion, teachers need to care about students, but not to the point that they are friends; they should mutually respect each other. Teachers also need to know their content and be responsive to their students' educational needs. Understanding these needs require the teacher to gain knowledge about their students' interests and diverse backgrounds. In other words, teachers need to understand that

students are individuals with unique characteristics and adjust their teaching accordingly. Teachers should work hard and be committed to their work, and as a result, their students. So, for me in this research endeavor, "I opt for subjectivity as a strength of qualitative approaches rather than attempt to establish a detached objectivity that I am not sure I want or need" (Eisner & Peshkin, 1990, p. 131).

Along with my own biases, reactivity was another concern for the validity of the research. Maxwell described this as "the influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals studied" (2005, p. 108). The fact that the eighth-graders' perceptions I was interested in attended the school at which I taught, and some were my students, could pose a problem for my research. However, "Interpretive qualitative methods mean entering research participants' worlds" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 19). First, I was not around when the other two teachers gathered data from their three classes. The other two English language arts teachers assigned the work as part of the curriculum. The students were accustomed to these teachers, routines and rapport was already established. As for the group of students I worked with, the same could be said. I worked with these students for nearly an entire year. They were familiar with me getting them to complete assignments, and I had already established rapport with them. For me and the other two teachers the students viewed completing this assignment as business as usual and nothing out of the ordinary.

The data collected by all three means and my researcher memos gave detail to my study. Merriam (2002) elaborated,

> Providing rich, thick description is a major strategy to ensure for the external validity or generalizability in the qualitative sense. This involves providing an

> adequate database, that is, enough description and information that readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match, and thus whether findings can be transferred. (p. 29)

In my study, each student wrote about a good teacher in three different ways. Students first wrote an essay (See Appendix A for an example of the student writing prompt). The students were free to choose the teacher and the words they wanted to use to describe the teacher. Next, students wrote poems in the form of cinquains (See Apppenix B for cinquain directions). Cinquains have specific formats and contain five lines. On the first line, the students wrote the name of the good teachers who they wrote about in their essays. On the second line, students wrote two adjectives that described the teachers from the first line. For the third line, the students wrote three words that ended with –ing that described the good teacher. On the fourth line, students wrote a phrase that described their good teachers followed by one word that described the same teachers for their fifth and final line. Students were able to look back over their essays for words to use in their cinquains. I believed the style of this type of poetry forced the students to focus on important characteristics of their chosen good teacher. The last writing piece the students had to complete was metaphors that described the same teachers they had used for their essay and cinquains (See Appendix D for the metaphor worksheet). There were 15 metaphors to be written with a specific type followed by an explanation. For example, the students were given the word cartoon. They had to develop a metaphor that compared their good teachers to cartoons. Then, they had to explain the comparison. Students did not have to do all 15 metaphors, but they were expected to do as many as they believed helped explain the qualities of their good teachers. To be clear, each

student completed all three types of writing over the one teacher that they identified as good. All of the details the students provided gave me a suitable database (Merriam, 2002) that had sufficient descriptions of good teachers by the students in order for others to decide if they could transfer the results of my research to their situations and that it made sense to them.

By using three forms of writing to collect data, student essays, student poems, and student metaphors and by keeping memos about the research, triangulation of the data was established. "This strategy reduces the risk of chance associations and of systematic biases due to a specific method, and allows a better assessment of the generality of the explanations that one develops" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 112). I looked at what each student said in his essay then compared it to what the student wrote in the cinquain and what metaphors the student developed. I monitored my thinking as I compared the three writings and wrote a quick note if I had an epiphany. For example, a student named Mia described a teacher that kept teaching a math skill different ways and repeatedly until she understood the concept. Mia later described the same teacher as stubborn in her cinquain, and on the metaphor sheet compared the teacher to Wonder Woman because, "She's more stubborn than Wonder Woman." Being able to look across the three writings helped me piece together the students' exact meanings and ensured my interpretation was accurate and trustworthy. This method of using numerous forms of data can also "be seen as a strategy for obtaining consistent and dependable data that are most congruent with reality as understood by the participants" (Merriam, 2002, p. 27).

My researcher memos provided an audit trail about not only the way I thought about the data, but how I regarded the information I was reading. For example, when I

read Mia's three writings, I jotted down a note about her use of the word stubborn because to me stubborn could have both positive and negative connotations. My note simply said, "What does stubborn mean? Is it good or bad?" This forced me to back up and reread her essay for examples of how the teacher was stubborn. After which I determined the word had a positive connotation, and I knew I truly understood what she meant when she used the word. I also made a quick note that I believed that I would have gained better data if the students had been completely responsible for writing fewer metaphors without prompts. The process of writing memos made certain I kept my own subjectivity out front as I reviewed the writing pieces. They also provided a trail of my thoughts as I read over the data. "An audit trail in a qualitative study describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry" (Merriam, 2002, p. 27). This practice not only helped build the validity of my research but also its reliability. Reliability for qualitative research is not found in the capacity that others can replicate the research. "That is, rather than insisting that others get the same results as the original researcher, reliability lies in others' concurring that given the data collected, the results make sense—they are consistent and dependable" (Merriam, 2002, p. 27).

To further increase the validity of my research, I used a peer debriefer. Creswell (2009) explained that this involves finding someone to read through the qualitative study and ask questions about the information found in it. This process aids in making sure "the account will resonate with people other than the researcher" (Creswell, 2009, p. 192). I found it helpful to explain my research and discoveries in the data to someone not in education and not sensitive to the subject matter. My peer debriefer ended up being a

local farmer, my husband, Daniel. I did not initially start out with him picked for this job. However, he kept being the person available when I had moments of clarity and moments when I struggled to make sense of my data. In Mia's case, when I finally thought I understood what she meant by stubborn, I handed him the three writings and let him also determine her perception of stubborn. Some of the descriptions I felt were ambiguous, he understood with clarity, making me take a closer and different look at the data. By doing this, I discovered areas for which I needed a better understanding, and this helped me interpret the data in a way that I was confident coincided with the students' understanding of good teachers.

> "Readers not so closely involved can also be helpful in assessing the suitability of my analytical concepts, my sensitivity to the people involved, or the adequacy and appropriateness of interpretations made and lessons drawn. Readers who disavow their expertise or their familiarity with protocol in qualitative research may offer valuable suggestions about style and sequence, may question inadequate explanations or definitions, or may express straightforward but intuitive reactions conveyed in such statements as, "I just don't see what you're getting at here." (Eisner & Peshkin, 1990, p. 132)

I also explained to Daniel the way I was recording my data. I knew he would honestly tell me if he understood what I was doing and how I was doing it. He was the reason I decided to change to using a grid (See Appendix E for the attribute grid) to record my data. He told me the original way was difficult for him to follow. He listened to me narrate my findings and the simple act of hearing my results helped me question more and look deeper. He often said, "I don't know what I just did, but you are welcomed." I

believe having a debriefer who was male and not in the field of education helped me better understand my data and take a harder look at it.

I used quasi-statistics to support my conclusions. Quasi-statistics involve simple statistics such as a count of how many students identified a certain characteristic of a good teacher. In this case, simple numbers added to the validity of my research (Maxwell, 2005). These numbers were an appropriate way to represent the big picture of what students deemed as characteristics of good teachers. I used the totals to guide my discovery of the rich, descriptive, complexity of good teacher qualities from the students' perspectives. This tabulation helped me identify the descriptors the students were using the most and brought to the forefront what they believed to be the most important characteristics of good teachers.

The overarching ethical issues related to this proposed research had their roots in the fact that I was an eighth-grade, English language arts teacher at the school where my research took place. However, I believe what could have been an ethical and validity issue of teacher power over students, ended up strengthening the reliability of my data and findings. Let me start by stating that my being a teacher at the school was a positive and not a negative. I had already established great working relationship not only with my students, but also with the two other teachers who gathered data for me. These same teachers used codes for each student to insure anonymity. The students wrote these codes on each of the three writings they produced. This gave the students the opportunity to write about their beliefs without the concern of a teacher knowing what they had written. This further increased the validity of my research. One of the teachers even offered to code the writings for all three teams. The codes consisted of a letter and a number for

each student. There was a team A, B, and C. Students for each team received the letter assigned to their team and a number. The students used this same letter and number on the essay, poem, and metaphor worksheet. The use of these codes protected the identity of each student. By using a letter, I was able to identify what information I gathered from what team. I did not anticipate needing this information. However, just in case something unexpected appeared in the data, I would be able to work my way backwards and determine from where the data originated. I also designated a color of paper for each team. I used this to help me keep all of the writings organized by team. I assigned blue paper to team A, green paper to team B, and pink paper to team C. All materials that I gave the teachers to give to students I copied on that team's color. Again, I did this because I have always been a visual learner and this helped me to stay organized and know at a glance what team the information originated. I reported my findings for the entire group, and when I needed to quote a student's words, I simply referred to the student using a pseudonym. I used the same procedure for the teachers. I also used this method to gain a better understanding of students' word choices. For example, if a student used the word comforting, I looked back to that student's essay to determine exactly what the student meant by comforting.

Students did not receive any special treatment for producing these three writings and this contributed to the validity of my study. In fact, students completed the essay, poem, and metaphor worksheet as part of the curriculum they already receive. Teachers graded them in the same manner they graded other work in the past. The students viewed the writing assignments as business as usual and did not treat it any differently than past writing assignments.

As far as students trying to say what they thought we as teachers wanted to hear by possibly identifying one of us as their chosen good teacher, I purposely included in the essay prompt (see Appendix A for writing prompt) the fact that students could not choose their current eighth-grade English language arts teachers in an effort to make their writings more reliable. I did this in order to increase the validity of my study by making sure students were not able to write about a current English language arts teacher with the hopes of buttering her up and possibly getting special treatment. The teachers the students wrote about were not aware that the students mentioned them as a good teacher.

My findings are limited to the group of eighth-grade students at the rural South Georgia middle school. As such, a limitation of my research lies with its generalizability. However, the findings have what Maxwell (2005) quoted Judith Singer as calling "face generalizability" where "there is no obvious reason not to believe that the results apply more generally" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 115). My focus for the research was generating a theory that could be applied to other similar cases (Maxwell, 2005). "Probably the most common way generalizability has been conceptualized in qualitative research is as reader or user generalizability. In this view, readers themselves determine the extent to which findings from a study can be applied to their context" (Merriam, 2002, pp. 28-29).

Students' essays

The students' teachers asked them to write essays about a good teacher of their choice not including myself or either of the other two eighth-grade English, language arts teachers. The teachers gave the students directions that prompted them to include any characteristics they remembered about the good teacher and develop either a persuasive or an expository essay (see Appendix A for student writing prompt). Previous research

studies (Beishuizen, et al., 2001; Tam et al., 2009) made use of analyzing student essays in order to gain an understanding of the good teacher. I intented to extend that goal to eighth-grade students in a rural, South Georgia, middle school. Santangelo and Olinghouse (2009) pointed out that writing should have real-world value and be for a real purpose. The writing described gave students an opportunity to write for a real reason. The writing prompt that the teachers used with the students accomplished this by setting up a hypothetical situation where the students had been asked to help with research on good teachers. I considered using a survey instead of essays, after all the survey would have been less time consuming. However, a survey would have forced me to choose what qualities I felt were worthy of being placed on the survey, or I could have chosen a prexisting survey that someone else had created for the same purpose. What if students had experienced goodness in teaching in different ways? What if students used different adjectives or descriptors that were different than those I would use to describe a good teacher? Murphy, et al. (2004) adminstered a survey to their participants that included predetermined characterictics of good teachers. The researchers followed the survey with the participants drawing a picture of a good teacher and good teaching. They discovered that the pictures offered characteristics that were different than those on the survey. I wanted to make sure that the students were free to use their own words based on their own thoughts and not be forced to choose someone else's words that may not align with their exact beliefs about good teachers.

Students' poems

After completing essays about a good teacher, students then wrote a poem about the same identified good teacher. The poem took the form of the cinquain. Taylor

(2012) described the cinquain as being structurally complicated. For this reason I adapted the form for use with eighth-graders (see Appendix B for cinquain directions). Directions were very specific in an effort to make the process of creating the cinqain easier so that students could focus on the qualities of the good teacher they wanted to include in the poem. The poem was about a specific proper noun, the name of the good teacher, and included adjectives, and other words and phrases, that described the chosen teacher. By having the students name the good teacher, the students were forced to visualize the teacher and reflect on his or her specific qualities. Various professionals from vast backgrounds have conducted qualitative research using numerous forms of poetry (Bordelon, 2006; Burdick, 2011; Carr, 2003; deVries, 2007; Fuller, 2010; Furman, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c; Henderson, 2002; Shapiro & Stein, 2005). "A poem has spinning and whirring components that maintain its structure so that the poem's message emerges" (Bordelon, 2006, p. 375). The message of good teaching and good teachers from the students' perspective was central to this research, and I believed the use of poetry, especially the very structured cinquain, would help students pull what they believed about good teaching to the surface. Poetry would allow the students to "convey complex and powerful emotions" (Furman, 2004a, p. 182) and getting them to compose a specific type of poetry, a cinquain, would force them to delve deeper into their beliefs about good teachers.

Students' metaphors

Another component of the students' good teacher project was the completion of metaphors (see Appendices C and D for teacher directions and metaphor worksheet). Students compared their chosen good teacher to various things such as a movie,

superhero, or a song. The students then explained each metaphor. It is in these explanations given by the students that characteristics of good teachers became even more apparent. Dogan (2012) used creating metaphors as a way to uncover what prospective teachers' thoughts were about a teaching method they had learned in the course of their studies. Participants wrote a metaphor then explained the metaphor they created. "The produced metaphors gave details about how the teaching of reading-writing with phonic-based sentence method progresses" (Dogan, 2012, p. 148). I believed, with the support of a specific category, the students could write metaphors and justify the metaphors with an explanation of the comparison made between the teacher and something else. These detailed explanations gave me another source of insight into what these eighth graders believed about good teachers and helped me make sure the discoveries I made were valid.

Researcher memos

As I have previously discussed, I kept memos of my thoughts and ideas throughout the entire data collection process. In fact, I kept memos for the duration of the research. I felt it was important for me to track my thoughts from the very beginning of the study until I recorded the last word describing the research. Maxwell (2005, p. 96) contended, "You should write memos while you are doing data analysis; memos not only capture your analytic thinking about your data, but also facilitate such thinking, stimulating analytic insights." In this way, I kept track of my own thoughts about what was occurring. Cooney (2011) made it clear that recording detailed memos is a way to heighten the rigor of a grounded theory study. As suggested by Merriam (2002), I wrote "reflections, questions, and decisions on the problems, issues, ideas" (p. 27) that I

encountered as I completed the research and analyzed the data. Peshkin (1988) believed memo writing uncovered his own subjectivity. He explained:

> I looked for the warm and cool spots, the emergence of positive and negative feelings, the experiences I wanted more of or wanted to avoid, and when I felt moved to act in roles beyond those necessary to fulfill my research needs. In short, I felt that to identify my subjectivity, I had to monitor myself to sense how I was feeling. (Peshkin, 1988, p. 18)

He further explained that he would write on a notecard when he noticed his subjectivity coming to the surface. When I noticed my subjectivity aroused, I simply jotted a note or a question on a sticky note and placed it in the data where I noticed the feeling. If I did not have a question formulated, but knew something was going on, I would place a question mark on the spot. This process helped me make sure the meaning I was taking from the data was actually the students' and not my own. For example, a student, Taylor, described a good teacher as nice. I immediately wondered what the teacher did that was nice. I put a sticky note on the word and looked for examples of the teacher being nice in Taylor's essay, cinquain, and metaphors. I listed each example on separate sticky notes. In Taylor's essay, I discovered that she thought the teacher was nice when she stood at the door before class and said hi. She also thought it was nice that the teacher asked students questions about their weekend and then shared what she did over the weekend. The cinquain did not offer any clarity of the word nice. However, the word nice was part of the poem. I found another example of nice in Taylor's metaphors. Taylor compared the teacher to Wonder Woman, not because she had a truth lasso, but because the teacher had said some kind things about her to her mother and saved her. I then wrote more

about this in a notebook I kept for reflections and scratch notes about my study. In it I wrote, "Nice is such a broad term and can mean so many different things. To me, a student can be nice when he brings me chocolate, but this does not mean he is a good student. This student says this teacher is nice and then gave examples of how the teacher was nice. The teacher greeted students at the door, asked about the students' weekend, shared a personal story, and said nice things about the girl to the girl's mother. There is more to this word nice. This teacher made students feel welcomed and made connections to the students by asking about the students and sharing something personal. The teacher also connected to the student and parent by saying nice things about the student. I need to make sure I do not lose this translation of the word. The cinquain did not help clarify but did make it clear the word is important." These memos and reflections validated my use of the three types of writing in my study. I used memos not only reflect on the data but also to reflect on conversations with my peer debriefer and beliefs I had about the data. My use of the memos left a clear trail of my thoughts and beliefs and gave me a way to justify the choices I made about my data.

Constant Comparative Method

To limit biases and provide triangulation, I gathered data from several forms of students' writings and constantly compared them for similarities and differences of descriptors of good teachers across the data of each team, across each type of data, across all the data for all three teams, and across the three data forms per student. In other words, I started by reading and highlighting descriptors of good teachers in the essays, then the cinquains, and finally the metaphors for each of the three blocks per team for each team. I then went back to each team and created a sheet to record decriptors used by

the students for each type of writing per block. I listed the code for each student vertically down the side of the paper, and then I hand wrote the exact descriptors the students used in each writing (See Appendix F for a Record of Descriptors for Team B, 2nd Block Cinquains).

Next, I counted how many times each descriptor was used by the students for each type of writing. I decided to only count a descriptor once per writing in order to not inflate the numbers for a descriptor that is mentioned numerous times in one writing (See Appendix G for Totals per Descriptor for Team B, 2nd Block Cinquains). This was necessary to get all of my data organized in order for me to be able to make comparisons and analyze the data for triangulation. Mettas and Norman (2011) used analyses of the literature and interviews in conjunction with study of classroom activities. They stated, "These three data sources provided triangulation, as well as supporting the validation of the data obtained" (Mettas & Norman, 2011, p. 8). In the case of my research, I used three different forms of student work: essays, poems, and metaphors, and I obtained these three forms of writing were from three different teams from three different blocks or classes per team. This provided me with numerous ways to compare, contrast, and analyze the data.

I then used a three by three grid to organize data for each team by block and form of student writing for each descriptor used by students (See Appendix E for a Blank Descriptor Grid and Appendix H for Totals per Descriptor for Team B per Block and Type of Writing). I completed the aforementioned steps for each team. It was at this point I began to combine terms that meant the same thing. When this became difficult, I put the descriptors with their totals on different colored index cards. I did not have blue

index cards so I used orange for team A. I again used green for team B and pink for team C. In this way, I could track from what team the data originated. I wrote the total number of times each descriptor was used in the corner of each index card. When I believed I had descriptors grouped together for one team, I would stick the grouping on chart paper going straight down and then look to see if the other two teams used the same descriptors. If they did, I would stick the two other colored index cards with same descriptors going across. This allowed me to know at a glance the team the descriptor came from and what descriptors I grouped together (See Appendix I for Visual of Colored Index Cards with Descriptors). When I had doubts about combining descriptors, I looked back at the students' words and how they used the descriptors. I also returned to my memos and reflections and discussed my beliefs with my peer debriefer.

I then grouped my data by type of writing for all three teams, the entire eighth grade (See Appendix J for Totals per Descriptor for Entire Eighth Grade for All Types of Writings). I considered all of the descriptors from all three writings from all of the eighth-grade students in conjunction with my researcher memos and continued grouping the descriptors together. I found the students' insights helpful in determining what descriptors should be together. This constant comparative method "involves continually comparing one unit of data with another in order to derive conceptual elements of the theory" (Merriam, 2002, p. 8). As I compared the data, I kept track of my thought process by writing and updating my memos. "Through constantly comparing incident with incident, comparing incidents with emerging conceptual categories, and reducing similar categories into a smaller number of highly conceptual categories, an overall framework or substantive theory develops" (Merriam, 2002, p. 143).

Coding

The process I described when I explained how I compared my data and recorded was coding. The method of coding I used was In Vivo coding. "This is one of the most well-known qualitative coding methods. In Vivo coding uses words or short phrases from the participant's own language in the data record as codes" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 74). I read over the data in what can be best described as waves. I returned to my memos in an effort to describe the way I coded my data. It was in a memo of desperation I described all of the data I had, all of the writings, from all of the teams, as a tsunami. I immediately wrote a memo that stated, "If metaphors helped clarify students' beliefs about good teachers, then metaphors can help me clarify how I coded my data." Metaphors related to the ocean were a perfect way for me to describe this process.

At the beginning, my research was an ocean. The ocean represented all of the elements of my research. From the ocean, I gained my sources of data: the essays, the cinquains, and the metaphors. All of the writings were a tsunami. I needed a way to manage the tsunami. **"**Developing some manageable classification or coding scheme is the first step of analysis" (Patton, 2002, p. 463). In order to manage my data, I also used what Creswell (2009) called open, axial, and selective coding. This tsunami formed from the ocean and consisted of the information I needed to determine what this group of eighth graders believed about good teachers.

I used open coding to tame the tsunami. It became three huge waves as I read all of the essays, then all of the cinquains, followed by all of the metaphors for each team. At first, the three huge waves were made of the adjectives the students used in each type of writing. As I looked at the adjectives, descriptions, phrases, examples, and wrote

memos, these waves became more defined, and I decided to start referring to the adjectives and descriptions as descriptors. I used In Vivo coding, keeping the descriptors in the students' own words. The exact adjectives and descriptions the students used were the initial codes I called descriptors. I focused on the descriptors the students used. The three huge waves changed shaped, but remained huge, when I grouped the descriptors by type of writing for the teams. This was open coding, and as I compared the descriptors from like writings to one another, some of the descriptors like intelligent and smart I grouped together. I now called them descriptor groups.

From these three huge waves, manageable, medium waves formed as I grouped the codes or rather descriptors together and referred to the context the students used the descriptors for clarity. I used axial coding to refine the medium waves. This meant I looked at the relationships among the descriptor groups, contextually clarified their meanings and combined them into conceptual categories. "As you work with your data and codes, you become progressively more analytic in how you treat them and thus you raise certain codes to conceptual categories (Charmaz, 2006, p. 12). I also looked at the totals for each descriptor, which allowed me to gain totals for conceptual categories.

Much like the currents and tides of the ocean form waves, I then used selective coding to refine the conceptual categories. For this, I again looked at the students' examples of the descriptors, contextual evidence in the writings, my memos, peer debriefing and the totals of the descriptors and conceptual categories to merge the conceptual categories. These groupings were small waves. These small waves were the core categories of my data, and I called them attributes, more specifically, personal,

professional, and interpersonal attributes. See Figure 1 for an illustration of the process I used to code the data from my research.

Figure 1 Coding Process for Good Teacher Data

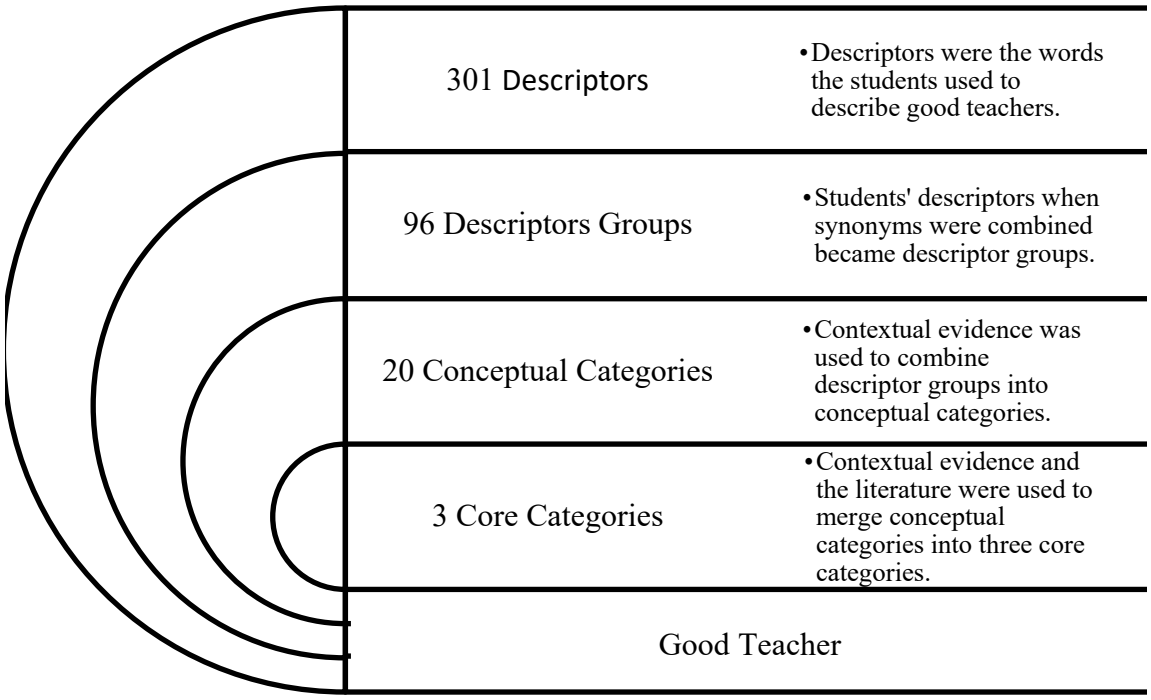


Figure 3. Illustration of the coding of the good teacher data. In Vivo coding was used to list students' descriptors of good teachers. Descriptors were combined and called descriptor groups. Descriptor groups were grouped into 20 conceptual categories that were then used to develop three core categories.

From these small waves of attributes of good teachers, I discovered an oyster on the beach. In this oyster was a pearl, the pearl, grew from many different forces in the ocean. It took the waves, current and sand working together to form the pearl. Just as it took all of the components of my research working together for me to form a theory about what eighth-grade students from a rural, South Georgia, middle school believed

about good teachers. My discovery of the students' beliefs about good teachers led me to a theory. The theory was the pearl of my research. "This theory [was] 'grounded' in the actual data collected, in contrast to theory that is developed conceptually and then simply tested against empirical data" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 43). In the next chapter, I explained and analyzed the data that was grounded in the students' perceptions of good teachers.

Chapter IV

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

I was amazed at the insight these students gave in their essays, poems, and metaphors. The students gleefully wrote about good teachers with enthusiasm. All three pieces of writing provided support to each other. The students filled their essays with descriptive adjectives and examples of the goodness they had experienced in teachers. In their poems, cinquains, the students focused on what they believed to be important about good teachers and provided both creative and in-depth explanations in their metaphors. In all, 211 students used 301 different descriptors. Students used these descriptors 2,846 times across their three writings. The students often wrote about the same characteristic of a good teacher but used a different descriptor. For example, several students used efficient, stays on topic, focused, and productive to describe teachers who kept the class moving and engaged. I used In Vivo method and open coding to list all of the descriptors the students used in all three writings, placed synonyms together, and ended up with 96 descriptor groups. Table 1 shows the totals for each of the 96 descriptor groups the eighth-grade students used in their three writings to describe good teachers.

Table 1

Totals for Descriptor Groups for Entire Eighth Grade for Three Writings

Descriptors	Total
Nice, Friendly, Kind, Sweet, Warm	327
Teaching Skills, Explains, Makes Easy to Learn, Teaches Over and Over	261
Descriptor Groups Continued	**Total**
Jokes, Playful, Sense of Humor, Funny, Joking, Goofy, Humorous	227
Caring	219
Helpful, Helps, Helping	152
Loving	135
Fun	132
Intelligent, Wise, Smart	121
Manages Class, Controls, Rewards, Consistent, Firm, Strict, Stern, Has Rules	96
Sets Goals, Encourages, Inspires, Motivates	78
Interacts, Talks To, Communicates, Converses, Greets, Gets to Know	72
Educated, Knows Content, Knowledgeable	54
Happy, Cheerful, Joyful	52
Determined	50
Patient, Takes Time, Doesn't Give Up, Makes Sure You Get It	48
Down to Earth, Relatable, Personable	48
Interesting, Captivating, Fascinating, Entertaining	46
Courageous, Adventurous, Daring, Brave, Bold, Fearless	43
Hard worker, Hardworking	43
Passionate, Dedicated, Committed	43
Strong	42
Laughs, Smiles	36
Outgoing, Active, Energetic, Healthy	33
Reliable, Dependable, Supportive	26
Calm, Laid Back, Easy Going, Free Spirited	26
Crazy, Looney	25
Honest, Truthful	21
Creative, Imaginative	20
Problem Solver	16
Relaxing	16
Encourages	14
Listens	14
Forgiving, Understanding	14

Descriptor Groups Continued	Total
Respects, Respectful	14
Pretty	14
Efficient, Stays On Topic, Focused, Productive	13
Thoughtful, Considerate	13
Charismatic	13
Exciting	12
Leader	12
Trustworthy	11
Challenges, Drives, Pushes	11
Prepared, Organized	11
Giving, Generous, Shares	10
Outspoken, Speaks Mind	10
Fair	9
Successful	8
Kind Hearted, Soft Hearted, Good Hearted, Strong Hearted	8
Protective	8
Silly	6
Answers Questions	5
Uncompromising, Stands Up For Beliefs	5
Loyal, Stands By You	5
Personality, Attitude, Good Natured	5
Spirited, Feisty, Sassy, Savvy	5
Tough	5
Loves Job	5
Adapts, Flexible	4
Comforting	4
Optimistic	4
Prays, Religious	4
Competitive	4
Open-minded	3
Curious	3
Gentle, Peaceful	3
Willing	3
Clever	3
Independent	2
Weird	2
Compassionate	2
Thinks	2

Descriptor Groups Continued	Total
Seasoned, Experienced	2
Proud	2
Available	2
Confident	2
Made Feel Special	2
Pleasing	1
Unpredictable	1
Opinionated	1
Can Understand	1
Diligent	1
Effective	1
Uplifting	1
Demanding	1
Careful	1
Welcoming	1
Courteous	1
Aggressive	1
Gives Good Advice	1
Perfectionist	1
Unafraid	1
Survivor	1
Enjoys Learning	1
Spontaneous	1
Humble	1
Responsible	1

In a memo, I commented that the descriptor groups that were used the most may contain conceptual categories that all of the original descriptors could be placed in. This was the start of me using axial coding to group and organize the descriptor groups. Overall, students used some descriptor groups a lot more than other descriptor groups no matter how I viewed the data from the writings. I looked at the top ten descriptor groups the students used the most and chose one of the students' words as a tentative conceptual category title. This first attempt at axial coding yielded the descriptor groups nice,

teaching skills, funny, caring, helpful, loving, fun, intelligent, manages the class, inspires, and interacts as possible conceptual categories for the descriptor groups.

Next, I grouped the descriptors groups in different ways. First, I viewed the descriptor groups by team. Table 2 shows the descriptor groups data for team A, Table 3 shows the data of team B, and Table 4 shows the data for team C. Again, I looked closely at the top 10 descriptor groups used for each team.

Table 2
Descriptor Groups Totals for Team A

Descriptor Groups	Essay	Cinquain	Metapho r	Tota l
Nice, Friendly, Kind, Sweet, Warm	19	42	30	91
Jokes, Playful, Sense of Humor, Funny	27	26	38	91
Teaching Skills, Explains, Makes Easy to Learn	70	5	6	81
Caring	19	45	10	74
Helpful, Helps, Helping	19	16	11	46
Loving	5	29	10	44
Fun	22	11	8	41
Interacts, Talks To, Communicates, Greets	15	14	7	36
Manages Class, Controls, Rewards	6	6	21	33
Intelligent, Wise, Smart	3	11	15	29
Sets Goals, Encourages, Inspires, Motivates	7	7	14	28
Interesting, Captivating, Entertaining	7	11	2	28
Determined	0	2	24	26
Outgoing, Active, Energetic, Healthy	1	13	10	24
Down to Earth, Relatable, Personable	16	1	7	24
Educated, Knows Content, Knowledgeable	9	1	13	23
Patient, Takes Time, Makes Sure You Get It	14	0	1	15
Strong	0	2	13	15
Creative, Imaginative	11	1	2	14
Happy, Cheerful, Joyful	2	2	10	14
Courageous, Adventurous, Daring	0	5	7	12
Hard worker, Hardworking	4	6	1	11
Reliable, Dependable, Supportive	7	2	1	10
Laughs, Smiles	1	7	0	8
Exciting	0	4	4	8

Descriptor Groups Continued	Essay	Cinquain	Metapho r	Tota l
Respects, Respectful	5	2	1	8
Calm, Laid Back, Easy Going, Free Spirited	5	0	3	8
Prepared, Organized	5	0	1	6
Thoughtful, Considerate	5	1	0	6
Honest, Truthful	2	2	2	6
Answers Questions	5	0	0	5
Trustworthy	2	1	2	5
Problem Solver	0	0	5	5
Efficient, Stays On Topic, Focused, Productive	5	0	0	5
Encourages	4	0	0	4
Forgiving, Understanding	3	1	0	4
Kind Hearted, Good Hearted, Strong Hearted	1	1	2	4
Uncompromising, Stands Up For Beliefs	0	0	4	4
Optimistic	2	0	2	4
Challenges, Drives, Pushes	0	3	1	4
Leader	0	2	2	4
Passionate, Dedicated, Committed	3	0	1	4
Listens	3	0	0	3
Adapts, Flexible	3	0	0	3
Open-minded	2	0	1	3
Crazy, Looney	0	3	0	3
Successful	1	1	0	2
Compassionate	0	2	0	2
Comforting	1	1	0	2
Thinks	0	2	0	2
Seasoned, Experienced	1	1	0	2
Protective	0	0	2	2
Gentle, Peaceful	0	2	0	2
Prays, Religious	0	1	1	2
Independent	0	0	1	1
Weird	0	0	1	1
Shares	0	1	0	1
Speaks Mind	1	0	0	1
Curious	0	0	1	1
Pleasing	0	1	0	1
Unpredictable	0	0	1	1
Opinionated	0	1	0	1

Team A used descriptor groups associated with nice, funny, teaching skills, caring, helpful, loving, fun, interacts, manages class, and intelligent the most. In addition, students on team A mentioned teaching skills in their essays 70 times. In looking at my memos and back at this team's essays, I believed the essays offered the students a way to elaborate more on certain qualities of good teachers. In this case, students described teaching skills in different ways, with each counted once. For example, Clint described his good teacher as making him understand what she was talking about, staying on subject, and using different teaching skills to help him. I counted this three times and grouped it with teaching skills. Clint gave the examples of working with a partner and projects, when he discussed teaching skills used by his good teacher. In this case, I treated the example of projects as a detail about teaching skills and did not count it again. I counted working with a partner as a type of grouping the teacher used and counted it with teaching skills. In a memo, I jotted down that teaching skills could involve activities and different groupings and both could be techniques a good teacher uses.

Table 3

Descriptor Groups Totals for Team B

Descriptor Groups	Essay	Cinquain	Metapho r	Tota l
Nice, Friendly, Kind, Sweet, Warm	19	61	51	131
Teaching Skills, Explains, Easy to Learn	111	0	7	118
Caring	9	68	18	95
Helpful, Helps, Helping	14	19	28	61
Jokes, Sense of Humor, Funny, Joking, Goofy	7	12	42	61
Loving	5	46	3	54

Intelligent, Wise, Smart	0	15	37	52
Fun	26	9	14	49
Passionate, Dedicated, Committed	6	3	27	36

Descriptor Groups Continued	Essay	Cinquain	Metapho r	Tota l
Manages Class, Firm, Strict, Stern, Has Rules	18	1	14	33
Happy, Cheerful, Joyful	9	8	14	31
Hard worker, Hardworking	4	19	7	30
Sets Goals, Encourages, Inspires, Motivates	5	18	5	28
Patient, Doesn't Give Up, Takes Time	12	4	6	22
Laughs, Smiles	8	2	10	20
Educated, Knows Content, Knowledgeable	7	1	11	19
Strong	0	0	17	17
Relaxing	15	1	0	16
Courageous, Brave, Bold, Fearless	0	0	14	14
Interacts, Gets to Know, Converses	10	1	2	13
Interesting, Fascinating, Entertaining	6	4	3	13
Charismatic	3	7	3	13
Crazy, Looney	0	0	12	12
Down to Earth, Relatable, Personable	11	1	0	12
Calm, Laid Back, Easy Going, Free Spirited	4	3	5	12
Encourages	2	4	4	10
Determined	0	0	10	10
Reliable, Dependable, Supportive	1	4	4	9
Outspoken, Speaks Mind	0	0	9	9
Efficient, Stays On Topic, Focused, Productive	4	3	1	8
Honest, Truthful	0	1	7	8
Listens	4	3	0	7
Problem Solver	0	0	7	7
Challenges, Drives, Pushes	4	1	2	7
Successful	0	3	3	6
Protective	0	0	6	6
Silly	0	0	6	6
Pretty	0	0	6	6
Fair	2	0	3	5
Loyal, Stands By You	0	1	4	5
Personality, Attitude, Good Natured	1	1	3	5
Spirited, Feisty, Sassy, Savvy	0	2	3	5
Tough	0	0	5	5

Creative, Imaginative	0	0	4	4
Giving, Generous, Shares	1	3	0	4
Exciting	0	4	0	4
Leader	1	1	2	4

Descriptor Groups Continued	Essay	Cinquain	Metapho r	Tota l
Thoughtful, Considerate	0	4	0	4
Competitive	0	0	4	4
Forgiving, Understanding	2	1	0	3
Active, Energetic, Healthy	0	0	3	3
Kind Hearted, Soft Hearted	0	2	1	3
Willing	0	3	0	3
Made Feel Special	1	0	2	3
Clever	0	0	3	3
Comforting	0	2	0	2
Curious	0	0	2	2
Proud	1	0	1	2
Available	2	0	0	2
Confident	1	1	0	2
Trustworthy	1	0	0	1
Independent	0	0	1	1
Weird	0	0	1	1
Respectful	0	1	0	1
Gentle	0	0	1	1
Religious	1	0	0	1
Can Understand	0	1	0	1
Diligent	0	1	0	1
Effective	0	1	0	1
Uplifting	0	1	0	1
Demanding	0	1	0	1
Careful	0	1	0	1
Welcoming	0	1	0	1
Courteous	1	0	0	1
Aggressive	0	0	1	1
Gives Good Advice	0	0	1	1
Perfectionist	0	0	1	1
Unafraid	0	0	1	1
Survivor	0	0	1	1
Loves Job	0	0	1	1

Enjoys Learning	0	0	1	1
Spontaneous	0	0	1	1
Responsible	0	1	0	1

The students from team B used the descriptor groups associated with nice, teaching skills, caring, helpful, funny, loving, intelligent, fun, dedicated, and manages the class in their writings more than any other descriptors. As with team A, the students on team B took the opportunity to highlight various teaching skills their good teachers used. Skylar never stated the good teacher she highlighted in her essay used teaching skills. However, she described her good teacher as explaining material, making up songs to help students remember information, giving brain-breaks, and doing an activity called four corners. I counted this twice, even though I could make the case for counting it five times. I believed explaining material was separate from the other four examples that described specific techniques or in the words of other students, teaching skills. Even with me not counting each instance of a teaching technique separately, students identified teaching skills and the related descriptors more in their essays than in their cinquains and metaphors.

Table 4

Descriptor Groups Totals for Team C

Descriptor Groups	Essay	Cinquain	Metapho r	Total
Nice, Friendly, Kind, Sweet, Warm	44	41	20	105
Jokes, Playful, Sense of Humor, Humorous	22	18	35	75
Teaching Skills, Explains, Makes Easy to Learn	56	0	6	62
Caring	8	36	6	50
Helpful, Helps, Helping	26	11	8	45
Fun	20	11	10	42

Intelligent, Wise, Smart	3	15	22	40
Loving	7	25	5	37
Manages Class, Has Rules, Firm, Consistent	19	4	7	30
Interacts, Talks To, Converses, Gets to Know	16	2	5	23
Sets Goals, Encourages, Inspires, Motivates	3	9	10	22
Courageous, Brave, Bold, Fearless	0	0	17	17

Descriptor Groups Continued	Essay	Cinquain	Metapho r	Tota l
Determined	3	0	11	14
Interesting, Fascinating, Entertaining	5	5	3	13
Educated, Knows Content, Knowledgeable	12	0	0	12
Down to Earth, Relatable, Personable	9	0	3	12
Patient, Doesn’t Give Up, Takes Time	11	0	0	11
Crazy, Looney	1	1	8	10
Strong	0	0	10	10
Laughs, Smiles	6	0	2	8
Pretty	0	1	7	8
Reliable, Dependable, Supportive	4	0	3	7
Forgiving, Understanding	5	2	0	7
Happy, Cheerful, Joyful	3	2	2	7
Honest, Truthful	1	2	4	7
Outgoing, Active, Energetic, Healthy	2	1	3	6
Calm, Laid Back, Easy Going, Free Spirited	4	1	1	6
Trustworthy	3	1	1	5
Giving, Generous, Shares	1	4	0	5
Respects, Respectful	4	1	0	5
Prepared, Organized	3	1	1	5
Listens	3	0	1	4
Problem Solver	1	0	3	4
Leader	1	0	3	4
Fair	4	0	0	4
Loves Job	4	0	0	4
Passionate, Dedicated, Committed	1	0	2	3
Thoughtful, Considerate	1	2	0	3
Creative, Imaginative	0	2	0	2
Hard worker, Hardworking	0	2	0	2
Flexible	0	0	1	1
Kind Hearted	0	1	0	1
Uncompromising, Stands Up For Beliefs	0	0	1	1

Prays	0	0	1	1
Humble	0	0	1	1

The students from team C used the descriptor groups associated with nice, funny, teaching skills, caring, helpful, fun, intelligent, loving, manages class, and interacts the most when completing their good teacher projects. As with teams A and B, team C also described good teachers as having teaching skills more often in their essays than in the other two writings.

This, along with the fact that students described teachers as caring more in their cinquains, made me want to look at the students' descriptors groups of good teachers gr by types of writings to see if the writing style influenced the students use of descriptor groups. Table 5 shows students' descriptor groups from the essays, Table 6 shows the students' descriptor groups from the cinquains, and Table 7 shows the students' descriptor groups from the metaphors.

Table 5

Students' Descriptor Groups Total by Team for Essays

Descriptor Groups	A	B	C	Total
Teaching Skills, Explains, Makes Easy to Learn, Teaches Over and Over	70	111	56	237
Nice, Friendly, Kind, Sweet, Warm	19	19	44	82
Fun	22	26	20	68
Helpful, Helps, Helping	19	14	26	59
Jokes, Playful, Sense of Humor, Funny, Joking, Goofy, Humorous	27	7	22	56
Manages Class, Controls, Rewards, Consistent, Firm, Strict, Has Rules,	6	18	19	43
Interacts, Talks To, Communicates, Converses, Greets, Gets To Know	15	10	16	41
Patient, Takes Time, Doesn't Give Up, Makes Sure You Get it	14	12	11	37

Caring	19	9	8	36
Down to Earth, Relatable, Personable	16	11	9	36
Educated, Knows Content, Knowledgeable	9	7	12	28
Interesting, Captivating, Fascinating, Entertaining	7	6	5	18
Loving	5	5	7	17
Sets Goals, Encourages, Inspires, Motivates	7	5	3	15
Laughs, Smiles	1	8	6	15
Relaxing	0	15	0	15

Descriptor Groups Continued	A	B	C	Total
Happy, Cheerful, Joyful	2	9	3	14
Calm, Laid Back, Easy Going, Free Spirited	5	4	4	13
Reliable, Dependable, Supportive	7	1	4	12
Creative, Imaginative	11	0	0	11
Listens	3	4	3	10
Forgiving, Understanding	3	2	5	10
Passionate, Dedicated, Committed	3	6	1	10
Respects, Respectful	5	0	4	9
Efficient, Stays On Topic, Focused, Productive	5	4	0	9
Hard worker, Hardworking	4	4	0	8
Prepared, Organized	5	0	3	8
Intelligent, Wise, Smart	3	0	3	6
Encourages	4	2	0	6
Trustworthy	2	1	3	6
Thoughtful, Considerate	5	0	1	6
Fair	0	2	4	6
Answers Questions	5	0	0	5
Challenges, Drives, Pushes	0	4	0	4
Loves Job	0	0	4	4
Adapts, Flexible	3	0	0	3
Outgoing, Active, Healthy	1	0	2	3
Determined	0	0	3	3
Honest, Truthful	2	0	1	3
Charismatic	0	3	0	3
Open-minded	2	0	0	2
Giving, Generous	0	1	1	2
Optimistic	2	0	0	2
Leader	0	1	1	2
Available	0	2	0	2
Problem Solver	0	0	1	1

Successful	1	0	0	1
Strong Hearted	1	0	0	1
Comforting	1	0	0	1
Speaks Mind	1	0	0	1
Looney	0	0	1	1
Seasoned	1	0	0	1
Prays	0	1	0	1
Proud	0	1	0	1

Descriptor Groups Continued	A	B	C	Total
Confident	0	1	0	1
Good Natured	0	1	0	1
Courteous	0	1	0	1
Made Feel Special	0	1	0	1

Table 6

Students' Descriptor Groups Total by Team for Cinquains

Descriptor Groups	A	B	C	Total
Caring	45	68	36	149
Nice, Friendly, Kind, Sweet, Warm	42	61	41	144
Loving	29	46	25	100
Jokes, Playful, Sense of Humor, Funny, Humorous	26	12	18	56
Helpful, Helps, Helping	16	19	11	46
Intelligent, Wise, Smart	11	15	15	41
Sets Goals, Encourages, Inspires, Motivates	7	18	9	34
Fun	11	9	11	31
Hard worker, Hardworking	6	19	2	27
Interesting, Captivating, Fascinating, Entertaining	11	4	5	20
Interacts, Talks To, Communicates, Converses, Greets	14	1	2	17
Outgoing, Active, Energetic, Healthy	13	0	1	14
Happy, Cheerful, Joyful	2	8	2	12
Manages Class, Controls, Rewards, Consistent, Strict	6	1	4	11
Laughs, Smiles	7	2	0	9
Giving, Generous, Shares	1	3	4	8
Exciting	4	4	0	8
Thoughtful, Considerate	1	4	2	7
Charismatic	0	7	0	7
Reliable, Dependable, Supportive	2	4	0	6

Courageous, Adventurous, Daring, Brave, Bold, Fearless	5	0	0	5
Teaching Skills, Teaches Over and Over, Explains	5	0	0	5
Honest, Truthful	2	1	2	5
Encourages	0	4	0	4
Patient, Makes Sure You Get It, Takes Time	0	4	0	4
Forgiving, Understanding	1	1	2	4
Successful	1	3	0	4

Descriptor Groups Continued	A	B	C	Total
Kind Hearted, Soft Hearted, Strong Hearted	1	2	1	4
Challenges, Drives, Pushes	3	1	0	4
Crazy, Looney	3	0	1	4
Respects, Respectful	2	1	1	4
Calm, Laid Back, Easy Going, Free Spirited	0	3	1	4
Creative, Imaginative	1	0	2	3
Listens	0	3	0	3
Comforting	1	2	0	3
Leader	2	1	0	3
Passionate, Dedicated, Committed	0	3	0	3
Efficient, Stays On Topic, Focused, Productive	0	3	0	3
Willing	0	3	0	3
Knows Content, Knowledgeable	1	1	0	2
Trustworthy	1	0	1	2
Compassionate	2	0	0	2
Thinks	2	0	0	2
Strong	2	0	0	2
Down to Earth, Relatable	1	1	0	2
Determined	2	0	0	2
Gentle, Peaceful	2	0	0	2
Spirited, Feisty	0	2	0	2
Pleasing	1	0	0	1
Seasoned	1	0	0	1
Prepared	0	0	1	1
Opinionated	1	0	0	1
Prays	1	0	0	1
Can Understand	0	1	0	1
Loyal	0	1	0	1
Diligent	0	1	0	1
Effective	0	1	0	1
Confident	0	1	0	1

Uplifting	0	1	0	1
Demanding	0	1	0	1
Careful	0	1	0	1
Welcoming	0	1	0	1
Relaxing	0	1	0	1
Personality	0	1	0	1
Pretty	0	0	1	1
Responsible	0	1	0	1

Table 7

Students' Descriptor Groups Total by Team for Metaphors

Descriptor Groups	A	B	C	Total
Jokes, Playful, Sense of Humor, Funny, Humorous, Goofy	38	42	35	115
Nice, Friendly, Kind, Sweet, Warm	30	51	20	101
Intelligent, Wise, Smart	15	37	22	74
Helpful, Helps, Helping	11	28	8	47
Determined	24	10	11	45
Manages Class, Controls, Rewards, Consistent, Firm, Strict, Stern, Has Rules	21	14	7	42
Strong	13	17	10	40
Courageous, Adventurous, Daring, Brave, Bold, Fearless	7	14	17	38
Caring	10	18	6	34
Fun	8	14	10	32
Passionate, Dedicated, Committed	1	27	2	30
Sets Goals, Encourages, Inspires, Motivates	14	5	10	29
Happy, Cheerful, Joyful	10	14	2	26
Educated, Knows Content, Knowledgeable	13	11	0	24
Crazy, Looney	0	12	8	20
Teaching Skills, Explains, Makes Easy to Learn	6	7	6	19
Loving	10	3	5	18
Outgoing, Active, Energetic, Healthy	10	3	3	16
Problem Solver	5	7	3	15
Interacts, Talks To, Communicates, Greets	7	2	5	14
Honest, Truthful	2	7	4	13
Pretty	0	6	7	13
Laughs, Smiles	0	10	2	12
Down to Earth, Relatable, Personable	7	0	3	10
Outspoken, Speaks Mind	0	9	0	9
Calm, Laid Back, Easy Going, Free Spirited	3	5	1	9
Reliable, Dependable, Supportive	1	4	3	8

Interesting, Captivating, Fascinating, Entertaining	2	3	3	8
Hard worker, Hardworking	1	7	0	8
Protective	2	6	0	8
Patient, Makes Sure You Get It, Takes Time	1	6	0	7
Leader	2	2	3	7
Creative, Imaginative	2	4	0	6
Silly	0	6	0	6

Descriptor Groups Continued	A	B	C	Total
Uncompromising, Stands Up For Beliefs	4	0	1	5
Tough	0	5	0	5
Encourages	0	4	0	4
Exciting	4	0	0	4
Loyal, Stands By You	0	4	0	4
Competitive	0	4	0	4
Trustworthy	2	0	1	3
Successful	0	3	0	3
Kind Hearted…	2	1	0	3
Challenges, Drives, Pushes	1	2	0	3
Curious	1	2	0	3
Fair	0	3	0	3
Charismatic	0	3	0	3
Personality, Attitude, Good Natured	0	3	0	3
Spirited, Feisty, Sassy,	0	3	0	3
Clever	0	3	0	3
Independent	1	1	0	2
Weird	1	1	0	2
Optimistic	2	0	0	2
Prepared, Organized	1	0	1	2
Prays, Religious	1	0	1	2
Made Feel Special	0	2	0	2
Listens	0	0	1	1
Flexible	0	0	1	1
Open-minded	1	0	0	1
Respects	1	0	0	1
Focused	0	1	0	1
Gentle	0	1	0	1
Unpredictable	1	0	0	1
Proud	0	1	0	1
Aggressive	0	1	0	1

Gives Good Advice	0	1	0	1
Perfectionist	0	1	0	1
Unafraid	0	1	0	1
Survivor	0	1	0	1
Loves Job	0	1	0	1
Enjoys Learning	0	1	0	1
Spontaneous	0	1	0	1
Humble	0	0	1	1

Students used the descriptor groups of nice, friendly, kind, sweet, and warm second for each type of writing. In their essays, students used descriptor groups associated with teaching skills the most with a total of 237. This number is greater than the number of students because students represented teacher skills in many different ways. For example, Mack stated, "She has a great way of teaching. The best way is group work. Most of the time we work in groups, and we always make creative stuff in her room to help us remember things that were important." In this case, I counted that comment under teaching strategies 3 times, once for "great way of teaching," once for "group work," and again for "make creative stuff." In a memo, I wrote that I was impressed that the students were noticing when teachers used different types of student groupings such as independent, partner, and small group. Students also recognized when teachers varied the way they taught and used such things as projects, varied activities, or different strategies. I was amazed at how many different teaching skills the students mentioned in their writings. Kim mentioned "funny sayings" that the teacher used to help students remember important information. It became clear that these students valued a skilled teacher from the descriptor groups they used in their essays. Dan explained, "When it came to teaching us, she didn't give us a million papers to do. She would just teach us, and she would give us maybe one worksheet to do. She would also

give us fun activities to do." Students continued to discuss teaching skills as being import in order for a teacher to be good. Sam, when writing about a good teacher stated,

> Another thing that made her over the top effective is giving graphic organizers. In all the standards we went through, she always had a graphic organizer for it. In her graphic organizers, she didn't just have of bunch of notes. She actually broke everything down, giving step-by-step instructions and examples, never missing anything. One other thing that made her class so effective and enjoyable is Brain Breaks. After working for around forty-five minutes every day, she gives us a Brain Break, which is five minutes, more or less, of watching a video, listening to another song, or playing some game. Since it is nothing at all about math, it takes your mind off work and gives you a break!

Students wrote about good teachers in their essays by using detailed descriptions and examples of ways the teachers embodied goodness. I found the information in the essays useful in helping me create categories for the students' descriptors.

In their cinquains, students focused on good teacher characteristics with the descriptor they chose to include. One of the specifications for the third line of the cinquain was three words ending with "ing" that described the good teacher named on the first line. This could account for the descriptor caring being used the most in the cinquains. The metaphors offered a way for the students to think about their good teachers differently and make strong comparisons to demonstrate those descriptors they felt were important. For example, Ty compared his good teacher to King Kong. He explained she was strong-hearted and cared for her students. This would become important when I later placed strong hearted in the category caring/loving. Another

student, Amaya, compared her good teacher to Cleopatra because she rules over the class, keeping students in line. Ken compared his good teacher to Sandra Bullock. He explained that in her movies she is strict but still loving and caring. In my memo, I reflected on his use of strict in combination with loving and caring, "This statement makes me believe that loving and caring are synonymous and that students want teachers who manage the class without being too harsh." This led me to believe teachers needed qualities associated with teaching and qualities related to them as a person.

I compiled a list of the top 10 descriptor groups students used for each team for all writings, by each writing, and then for the entire eighth grade for all writings in order to rule out an inflating of descriptors due to type of writing. I believed this would give the essence of what this group of eighth-grade students believed were the characteristics of good teachers, and used them for axial coding. In Table 8, I used what I believed to be the main student descriptor groups associated with the descriptor group in order to make easier comparisons between teams and writings. Table 8 shows the top 10 descriptor groups used by students when grouped different ways.

Table 8

Top 10 Student Descriptor Groups Totals by Different Groupings

Team A		Team B		Team C	
All Writings	Total	All Writings	Total	All Writings	Total
Nice	91	Nice	131	Nice	105
Funny	91	Teaching Skills	118	Funny	75
Teaching Skills	81	Caring	95	Teaching Skills	62
Caring	74	Helpful	61	Caring	50
Helpful	46	Funny	61	Helpful	45
Loving	44	Loving	54	Fun	42
Fun	41	Intelligent	52	Intelligent	40
Interacts	36	Fun	49	Loving	37

Manages Class	33	Dedicated	36	Manages Class	30
Intelligent	29	Manages Class	33	Interacts	23

Three Teams' Essays	Total	Three Teams' Cinquains	Total	Three Teams' Metaphors	Continued Total
Teaching Skills	237	Caring	149	Funny	115
Nice	82	Nice	144	Nice	101
Fun	68	Loving	100	Intelligent	74
Helpful	59	Funny	56	Helpful	47
Funny	56	Helpful	46	Determined	45
Manages Class	43	Intelligent	41	Manages Class	42
Interacts	41	Inspires	34	Strong	40
Patient	37	Fun	31	Courageous	38
Caring	36	Hardworking	27	Caring	34
Personable	36	Interacts	20	Fun	32

Three Teams' All Writings	Total
Nice	327
Teaching Skills	261
Funny	233
Caring	219
Helpful	152
Loving	135
Fun	131
Intelligent	121
Manages Class	96
Inspires	78

After I focused on the top 10 descriptor groups in different ways, it was clear that the students used the descriptor groups "caring" more in the cinquains. However, after reviewing the complete list of descriptors and reading back over the other two types of writings, I believed students used other words to represent caring. For example, Heather

wrote in her essay, “Mr. Meeks is caring. He shows this by always being helpful no matter what we are doing.” I believe students used the word “caring” more in the cinquain because it summarized the descriptors they had used in their essays to describe good teachers. In a memo I noted that “caring” may be a core category for good teachers.

I started combining descriptor groups that were similar to form conceptual categories. I reflected on the descriptors the students used, I reread some of the essays to make sure that descriptor groups were related. I hesitated because I did not want to make assumptions, and wanted the students’ thoughts to be what surfaced in this process of chunking the data. At this point, my peer debriefer looked over my groupings and double-checked my totals for descriptors. He also helped by asking me why I had descriptor groups together. I referred back to student essays if he or I questioned a descriptor in a student’s poem or metaphors. The students’ words in the essays were beneficial in guiding decisions I made about the data. For instance, the word challenging could mean several different things. After reading back over three students’ essays, I grouped it with the descriptor groups: driving, demanding, and pushes. I continued this process of axial coding until I identified 20 conceptual categories. I used pseudonyms for students and teachers. See Table 9 for the 20 conceptual categories with the students’ descriptor groups for each conceptual category.

Table 9

20 Conceptual Categories with Students' Descriptor Groups

Conceptual Category: Fun/Happy	Descriptor Groups Total
Jokes, Playful, Sense of Humor, Funny, Joking, Goofy, Humorous	227
Fun	132
Happy, Cheerful, Joyful	52
Laughs, Smiles	36

Silly	6
Loves Job	5
Conceptual Category Total	458

Continued Conceptual Category: Teaching Skills	Descriptor Groups Total
Teaching Skills, Explains, Makes Easy to Learn, Teaches Over and Over	261
Manages Class, Controls, Rewards, Consistent, Firm, Strict, Stern, Has Rules	96
Creative, Imaginative	20
Efficient, Stays On Topic, Focused, Productive	13
Prepared, Organized	11
Adapts, Flexible	4
Can Understand	1
Conceptual Category Total	406

Conceptual Category: Nice	Descriptor Groups Total
Nice, Friendly, Kind, Sweet, Warm	327
Down to Earth, Relatable, Personable	48
Giving, Generous, Shares	10
Personality, Attitude, Good Natured	5
Courteous	1
Conceptual Category Total	391

Conceptual Category: Caring/Loving	Descriptor Groups Total
Caring	219
Loving	135
Kind Hearted, Soft Hearted, Good Hearted, Strong Hearted	8
Protective	8
Compassionate	2
Made Feel Special	2
Welcoming	1
Conceptual Category Total	375

Conceptual Category: Helpful	Descriptor Groups Total
Helpful, Helps, Helping	152
Reliable, Dependable, Supportive	26

Honest, Truthful	21
Problem Solver	16
Respects, Respectful	14
Forgiving, Understanding	14
Thoughtful, Considerate	13
Trustworthy	11
Fair	9
Loyal, Stands By You	5
Comforting	4

Continued Conceptual Category: Helpful Continued	Descriptor Groups Total
Willing	3
Available	2
Pleasing	1
Gives Good Advice	1
Responsible	1
Careful	1
Effective	1
Conceptual Category Total	295

Conceptual Category: Knowledgeable	Descriptor Groups Total
Intelligent, Wise, Smart	121
Educated, Knows Content, Knowledgeable	54
Clever	3
Thinks	2
Seasoned, Experienced	2
Conceptual Category Total	182

Conceptual Category: Charismatic	Descriptor Groups Total
Courageous, Adventurous, Daring, Brave, Bold, Fearless	43
Outgoing, Active, Energetic, Healthy	33
Crazy, Looney	25
Charismatic	13
Spirited, Feisty, Sassy, Savvy	5
Competitive	4
Optimistic	4
Curious	3
Open-minded	3
Weird	2

Spontaneous	1
Aggressive	1
Unpredictable	1
Conceptual Category Total	138

Conceptual Category: Dedicated	Descriptor Groups Total
Determined	50
Passionate, Dedicated, Committed	43
Hard worker, Hardworking	43
Diligent	1
Conceptual Category Total	137

Continued Conceptual Category: Inspiring	Descriptor Groups Total
Sets Goals, Encourages, Inspires, Motivates	78
Encourages	14
Challenges, Drives, Pushes	11
Uplifting	1
Demanding	1
Conceptual Category Total	105

Conceptual Category: Patient	Descriptor Groups Total
Patient, Takes Time, Doesn't Give Up, Makes Sure You Get It	48
Calm, Laid Back, Easy Going, Free Spirited	26
Relaxing	16
Gentle, Peaceful	3
Conceptual Category Total	93

Conceptual Category: Interacting	Descriptor Groups Total
Interacts, Talks To, Communicates, Converses, Greets, Gets to Know	72
Listens	14
Answers Questions	5
Enjoys Learning	1
Conceptual Category Total	92

Conceptual Category: Interesting	Descriptor Groups Total
Interesting, Captivating, Fascinating, Entertaining	46
Exciting	12

Conceptual Category Total	58

Conceptual Category: Strong	Descriptor Groups Total
Strong	42
Tough	5
Independent	2
Survivor	1
Unafraid	1
Conceptual Category Total	51

Continued Conceptual Category: Leader	Descriptor Groups Total
Outspoken, Speaks Mind	10
Leader	12
Uncompromising, Stands Up For Beliefs	5
Confident	2
Opinionated	1
Conceptual Category Total	30

Miscellaneous: Conceptual Categories	Total
Pretty	14
Successful	8
Prays/Religious	4
Proud	2
Humble	1
Perfectionist	1

Table 10 lists the 20 conceptual categories and their totals. I listed the six miscellaneous conceptual categories and counted them separately. These six conceptual categories made me reflect on the context in which the students used them. So, I returned to the students' writings for contextual clarification. First, the conceptual category

prays/religious became simply religious. I believed that if one prays, then he is religious, and this conceptual category was something personal, not all teachers are religious. Pretty described the teacher's appearance and humble described her behavior. Both of these were also personal. When students described their good teachers as successful, they mentioned different areas of teaching. The same was true for the conceptual categories proud and perfectionist. Students' described how the teacher was proud of students and a perfectionist when it came to the work completed in her class. I started going over the 20 conceptual categories considering if the conceptual category was personal or teaching related.

Table 10

Conceptual Categories of Students' Descriptor Groups with Totals

Conceptual Category	Total
Fun/Happy	458
Teaching Skills	406
Nice	391
Caring	354
Helpful	295
Knowledgeable	182
Charismatic	138
Dedicated	137
Inspiring	105
Patient	93
Interacting	92
Interesting	58
Strong	51
Leader	30
Pretty	14
Successful	8
Religious	4
Proud	2
Humble	1
Perfectionist	1

Considering the six miscellaneous conceptual categories was the start of me selectively coding the conceptual categories in order to place them into core categories. I used this and other research on good teachers as a springboard to help me with the theme of the descriptors the students used. These other researchers (Beutel, 2010; Bru, et al., 2010; Dingle, 2011; Eilam & Vidergor, 2011; Grieve, 2010; Helterbran, 2008) identified teacher behaviors such as teaching skills and interpersonal skills as being beneficial to good teachers. I had already started to group the conceptual categories based on whether or not the descriptor groups the students used were personal or teaching related. However, interpersonal skills related more to communication between individuals and relationships. I considered this as I continued to group the 20 conceptual categories into either personal or teaching related. I used the same process of returning to the students' writings for accuracy and contextual clarification. I had four conceptual categories that did not fit distinctly in either personal or teaching related. The conceptual categories were care/loving, helpful, inspiring, and interacting. I remembered Heather's words, "Mr. Meeks is caring. He shows this by always being helpful no matter what we are doing." Students also described teachers as caring when they interacted with students and got to know them. Students were inspired by the teachers who cared, and for these reasons, I grouped those four conceptual categories together and reflected on the definition of interpersonal skills. I decided that my 20 conceptual categories conceptually fit within three core categories. These core categories were personal, professional, and interpersonal attributes. I initially believed caring would be my third core category. However, I reflected on what Charmaz (2006) said about finding implicit meanings in the

In Vivo codes and thinking about the analytic category that caring/loving, helpful, inspiring, and interacting suggested. I considered all of these to be interpersonal attributes because they required both communication between the students and the good teachers, and they implied a relationship. Students mentioned this core category almost as much as they did professional attributes, and it could be displayed in both personal and professional ways.

I grounded my decisions about the conceptual categories in the descriptors the students used in their writings about good teachers. Personal attributes were comprised of seven of the 20 conceptual categories, and related to the good teachers as an individual and not as a teacher. Put differently, these good teachers were demonstrating personal attributes as the students described them even when they were not teaching. For example, a student spoke of bumping into the good teacher in the local grocery store and how she smiled at her and seemed happy to see her. The opposite was true for professional attributes. These were the nine conceptual categories that included descriptor groups that were specific to the good teacher as a professional educator. This is not to say that the good teacher could not exhibit some of the conceptual categories outside of teaching. It is that the students used the descriptors in the broad categories to describe the good teachers in the context of teaching. Table 11 shows the core categories with conceptual categories included in each with totals for each conceptual category with totals for each of the three core categories.

Table 11

Core Categories of Attributes for Good Teachers

Personal Attributes	Total	Professional Attributes	Total	Interpersonal Attributes	Total
Fun/Happy	458	Teaching Skills	406	Caring/Loving	354
Nice	391	Knowledgeable	182	Helpful	295
Charismatic	138	Dedicated	137	Inspiring	105
Strong	51	Patient	93	Interacting	98
Pretty	14	Interesting	58		
Religious	4	Leader	30		
Humble	1	Successful	8		
		Proud	1		
		Perfectionist	1		
Total	1,057		916		846

To summarize, after reading through and highlighting descriptors the students used in their essays, cinquains and metaphors, I discovered 301 different descriptors. Some of the students naturally grouped these descriptors, and after I placed them together, I had a list of 96 descriptor groups. These descriptor groups were In Vivo codes and included the adjectives, descriptions, examples, and phrases the students used to describe their good teachers. I then went through the data again and viewed it more personally. I considered not only the students' words in the context of their writings, but also my thoughts about what the students' were saying. I relied heavily on contextual evidence I located in the students' essays, cinquains, and metaphors. For example, students used the descriptors related to strong 51 times. The word itself is ambiguous, so I used content clarification to determine exactly what the students meant when they described their good teachers as strong. A student named Jack described his gym teacher as strong, "I was glad that I had Mr. Ray for weightlifting. He was strong and could lift a lot of weight. Most of the P.E. teachers are not in shape." In a memo I jotted down, "Not all physical education teachers are strong. They don't have to be to be a P.E. teacher. It

seems the student relates strength as something this teacher has personally." Another student, Lexi, described her science teacher as strong, not because she could lift a bunch of weight, but because she had recently had some hardships in her life and did not let them negatively affect her teaching. Both of these were examples of strong, and both were personal attributes the teacher had as an individual. I combined the students' descriptor groups even more and ended up with 20 conceptual categories. In this last round of filtering and scrutinizing the data, I considered not only the students' words and my thoughts, but also the ideas of others from my literature review and developed three core categories: personal, professional, and interpersonal attributes. All of the descriptors the students used were positive due to the fact they identified them as contributing to the teachers' goodness. Students mentioned good teachers being crazy 25 times, and each time students used it in a favorable manner with the students clarifying by stating, "Crazy in a good way." According to this group of eighth-grade students from a rural, South Georgia middle school, good teachers possess personal, professional, and interpersonal attributes. From these three core categories, I developed a theory that reflected the perspectives of the students in my research. "One of the strengths of qualitative inquiry is the inductive, naturalistic inquiry strategy of approaching a setting without predetermined hypotheses. Rather, understanding and theory emerge from the fieldwork experiences and are grounded in the data" (Patton, 2002, p. 129). I developed a theory only after inductively determining my three core categories and then deductively considering the relationships and connections between them. In the last chapter, I captured the essence of what this group of students identified as qualities of good teachers by drawing conclusions and interpreting my findings.

Chapter V

CONCLUSIONS, INTERPRETATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As I looked over all of the descriptors the students used to describe good teachers, which I had placed in my conceptual categories, it was clear that they could be grouped into three main, core categories: personal, professional, and interpersonal attributes. I believed interpersonal was my third category because the students described good teachers in ways that were both a personal attribute and a professional one. I grounded my decision for the three core categories in the students' perceptions of good teachers by going back to the context in which descriptors were used to validate and clarify my placement of conceptual categories into the final core categories. A student named Grant

summarized, “There are different qualities that make a teacher good. They have to have a certain quality combination. They can’t just be good at teaching.” This implied a connection between the three categories that embodied the descriptors the students used in their writings. In an effort to explain these connections, I took an in-depth look at each of the three core categories starting with the most elusive, interpersonal attributes.

Interpersonal referred to those descriptors and conceptual categories that involved relationships and interactions. These eighth-grade students used descriptors related to interpersonal attributes 867 times. I discovered the conceptual categories of caring/loving, helpful, inspiring, and interacting could be demonstrated by good teachers as either a personal or professional attribute. Students determined if, for example, caring was personal or part of teaching by the type of interaction they had with the teacher. In other words, a teacher could care about a lesson and have numerous activities and students would consider this a professional attribute. However, the same teacher could help a student get in touch with a parent about transportation home and that would demonstrate a more personal type of caring. In her essay, Kelly stated, “Mrs. Price is a good teacher because she helps you by explaining. She will help you until you get it. Once I couldn’t figure out how to do a box and whisker plot diagram, and she helped me until I got the idea. She never gave up on me.” The same student continued to describe Mrs. Price as caring, “She loves all of her students, and she shows it. She is always making sure we are okay. She also treats us like we’re her own children. At the beginning of the year she told us she would take care of us.” A student, Lee, also described a good teacher as caring when she “put in the time to get to know you.” These students also pointed out when good teachers showed they cared about the students’

education, “She knows how we hate math, but she still cares about us and does her best to help us pass.”

Using contextual evidence for clarification, I gained insight into how interpersonal attributes connect the students to their teachers and learning in both personal and professional ways. Students represented interpersonal attributes by good teachers in ways related to the way the teacher cared/loved, helped, inspired, and interacted with them. Based on my data, it is my belief that good teachers demonstrate interpersonal attributes in both ways, personally and professionally. These interactions, whether personal or academic in nature, fostered a relationship between the students and good teachers. The students’ descriptions of their good teachers caused me to believe this relationship developed due to the teacher’s interpersonal attributes and was the glue that kept the students secure with the good teacher. This security was attained when the students identified, personal and professional attributes they deemed to be good in the teacher.

One student, Ava, said, “A good teacher is like a sunny day, she makes you happy and makes you feel good to actually be at school.” This supported my thought that those personal attributes students mentioned 1,057 times were one of the main components of a good teacher. In a memo I wrote, “Personal attributes of good teachers make students want to come to school.” The words of another student, Axel, confirmed this, “The first step to being a good teacher is that you have to be kind. You have to be able to be nice to a student.” I added to my memo, “Personal attributes of good teachers are the ‘first step’ to being a good teacher and simultaneously could be the first step in interpersonal attributes as well. I wouldn’t think students seek relationships with mean teachers.”

Students used the words nice, sweet, and kind 391 times. "Teachers should be nice, if you have a mean teacher, you will hate going to school, and so having a nice teacher will make you want to come to school." Some of the examples students gave of nice were the teacher smiling, lending pencils, allowing celebrations, and being courteous. Another conceptual category that was a personal attribute for good teachers was charismatic. I determined from the students' writings that anything a teacher could do that drew the students into the teachers and made the students interested in the teacher could be considered charismatic. Ultimately, many of these descriptors closely related to fun, happy, and nice. Hence, the reason they were grouped together as personal attributes of good teachers.

Students also viewed their good teachers being fun or funny in the same manner. Fun/funny was the main conceptual category for personal attributes. Robert described a good teacher as being very funny. "She always made us laugh. Maybe that is one thing that I liked about her the most. She would always come up with funny little sayings to help us remember things." The students described these fun teachers as always smiling and being happy, which was very similar to their descriptions of nice teachers. I saw these personal attributes shifting back and forth in the students' writings from personal attributes to interpersonal and even professional attributes because in their words these same descriptors made them comfortable enough with the teacher to interact with her and form a relationship. Some of the personal attributes influenced the professional ones as evident by, "She would always come up with funny little sayings to help us remember things." I wrote a memo that stated, "Personal attributes inform the professional attributes and interpersonal attributes interact with the other two core categories."

Another student, Mitch, stated, “I think a good teacher is somebody who is friendly, nice, helpful, and knows what they are doing. To be helpful you must know what you are doing. To be friendly you have to be nice.” These words provided me with insight on something with which I had struggled, how these core categories fit together.

The aforementioned words sealed the fact that students felt that teachers should be skilled at teaching. Teaching skills were the main conceptual category under the core category professional attributes. Some of the teaching skills students wrote about involved hands-on activities. Olivia explained, “When we learned about eyes and sight, we dissected a cow eye. When we learned about circuits, we actually made one. Mrs. Moulton also reviews the standards with us each class and often includes videos to back them up. If we have questions, she answers them well. Before the test, she gives us study guides and reviews with Brain Pops. She teaches us what we need to know, she gives us what we need to know, and she tells us what we need to know, and I learn a lot in her class.” Other students described a plethora of educational games that good teachers used to help them learn along with different ways to group students. Students also described various activities, and different ways to teach based on student learning styles. For example, David described study guides that were different colors. He said this made it easier for him to find the correct study guide in class, and he could see the colored guides in his mind as he took tests. Teachers who “did whatever it took” to make sure students learned were perceived as good teachers by this group of students. Students used teaching skills 406 times and knowledgeable 182 times to describe good teachers. I found professional attributes in the students’ writings 916 times. A student said, “One thing teachers should have is a good education. If they don’t have a good education, then

how are we supposed to get one from them teaching?" Students elaborated on this by stating that good teachers know the content well enough to answer questions and change how they are teaching if students do not understand what the teacher is teaching.

A good teacher must have those personal attributes such as being nice and also possess those teaching traits such as teaching skills. For these eighth-grade students a good teacher has both personal and teaching attributes. To these students, a good teacher was not one or the other. The same good teachers also used interpersonal attributes to build relationships with the students within the other two core categories, and personal attributes of the good teacher informed some of the professional attributes. Students did not indicate in their writings that the professional attributes influenced the personal ones. Figure 2 depicts the interactions between the three core categories.

Figure 2 Interactions between three core categories

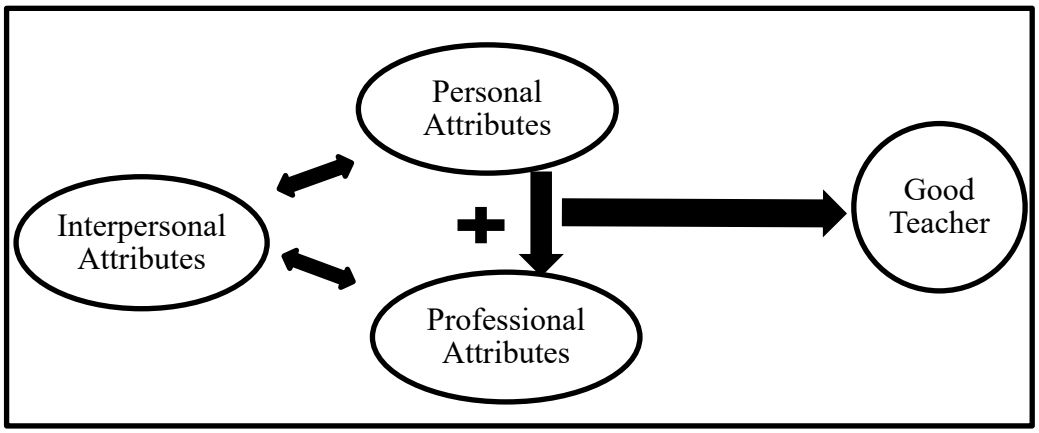


Figure 2 According to this group of eighth-grade students, a good teacher should have personal and professional attributes. Personal attributes inform the professional attributes. Interpersonal attributes could be part of the good teacher's personal or professional attributes and vice versa.

A student perfectly described the interaction between three good teacher core categories, "The teacher I am writing about made me laugh, and taught me well. She helped me when I had a problem. She made learning fun. She had a wonderful personality." The same student added, "A great teacher comes ready to teach with fun lessons." There were the three core categories I discovered in the students' essays, poems, and metaphors.

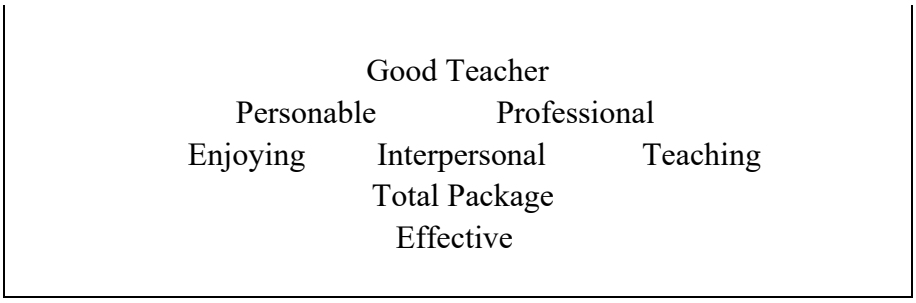
Answers to Research Questions

According to the perceptions of these rural South Georgia eighth grade students, three core categories defined good teachers. These core categories were personal, professional, and interpersonal attributes. Students' own words highlighted the fact that it was the three core categories, not one, or the other that made a good teacher. From the context of the students' writings and grounded in their perspectives, I developed a theory about how these three core categories were intertwined and resulted in what the students believed to be the qualities of good teachers. The personal attributes of the good teacher hooked the students and made them not only want to have a relationship with the good teacher but also made them want to learn. The professional attributes of good teachers enabled the students to learn and were influenced by good teachers' personal attributes. It was then the good teachers were able to firmly set the hook using interpersonal attributes to land the students, which resulted in the students continued interaction with the good teachers in both personal and professional manners. This theory encompasses the ways these rural South Georgia eighth-grade students from the same middle school referred to good teachers through their essays, cinquains, and metaphors because that is where this theory has its roots. The students' perspectives involved core categories filled

with conceptual categories grounded in the In Vivo descriptors, which were fluid, and moved from one category to another based interactions and the ways in which the students viewed their good teachers based the situation at the time. These same students described their good teachers in similar ways across all three writings. In the essays, the students had the freedom to elaborate and write as much as they liked about their good teachers. However, the cinquain and metaphors forced the students to focus on the characteristics in their good teacher essays and highlight those they believed to represent their good teachers.

In describing good teachers, this group of rural South Georgia eighth-grade students' from the same middle school connected teacher quality to their learning experience. For example, Toby commented, "I guess I should say that the more you understand your students, then the more you can help them, and the better the relationship, the better the chance of them understanding more and learning." Another student, Terrell, explained, "A teacher I consider a good teacher is Mrs. Mansfield. She is not just a good teacher; she is a good woman. She makes schoolwork or any other activities exciting and fun. She is very smart, funny, and fun. Mrs. Mansfield has always had my back. If I did not understand something, she would keep teaching and explaining it to me until I did. She left a great impression on me, and I learned a bunch from her." Not only do these comments support my theory about the relationships between the three core categories, they also make a connection between good teachers and student learning. To summarize my findings, I wrote a cinquain following the same guidelines as the students in my study (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 Good Teacher Cinquain



Relevance to the Literature

My findings support other research in the literature about good teacher qualities. Helterbran (2008) discovered students described good teachers in ways that were either personal or demonstrated instructional qualities. Lupascu (2014) concluded the same. A difference in their findings was in how they categorized caring under the personal qualities of good teachers. I categorized it as an interpersonal attribute which is not prominent in the literature. Murphy et al. (2004) investigated teachers' and students' perceptions of good teachers and found they both believed quality teachers were caring, patient, not boring, polite, and organized. Although these were some of the same descriptors the students used in my study; they were only components of the core categories I found in my research.

Maruli (2014), in his review of the literature on good teacher characteristics, stated that teacher quality is the most important feature for student learning. He identified what the teacher brings to the classroom, what the teacher does in the classroom (teacher practices), and moral acts of the teacher to be the core categories for teacher quality found in the literature. These core categories were similar to those I believed to represent good teacher qualities in my research. The personal attributes in my study included what the teacher brought to the classroom, professional attributes included

those things the teachers did in the classroom, and interpersonal attributes included moral acts of the good teachers.

Okpala and Ellis (2005) found that students perceived teachers as good if they cared, had teaching skills, content knowledge, and were dedicated to teaching. In my findings, teaching skills, content knowledge, and dedication were the top three broad categories followed by six more under the core category professional attributes. I found caring to be one of four conceptual categories under the core category interpersonal attributes.

Various studies in the literature found that student fulfillment and learning was linked to teacher behaviors such as teaching skills and interpersonal skills. My findings were similar in that one of my core categories was interpersonal attributes and teaching skills was a broad category for professional attributes.

Limitations

My research findings about good teachers are limited to this group of rural South Georgia eighth-grade students. This study only sampled a small portion of students, and therefore generalization is an issue. However, my in-depth descriptions of the students' perceptions of good teachers, along with my theory about the relationships between the core categories in my research, should allow individuals to decide for themselves if my findings are relevant to their particular situations.

Future Research

Future research with different grade groups, in different counties or regions of the state would be beneficial. Indeed, it would be advantageous to amass data on the subject of good teaching from all states in an effort to determine what students in general identify

as good teacher attributes. Future research in this area could focus on the traits of good teachers broken down by student gender in an effort to identify similarities and differences between genders. It could also focus on specific examples of professional attributes such as teaching skills.

I believe the use of the cinquain for the poetry portion focused the students' responses because they had to come up with what they deemed the most important descriptors of their good teachers. Older students may have more experience with poetry and not require the added support the cinquain offered the students in my study.

Implications

The data that I obtained could be used to create a survey for students to take at the beginning of the year to gain an understanding of what qualities students value in their teachers. This data could enhance recruitment and placement of teachers who have specific characteristics that may lend themselves to a particular grade of students. This could also help in identifying areas for staff professional development and in locating teachers who possess attributes that would make them good mentors for other teachers. It is my hope that findings add to the growing knowledge of good teachers and help guide practice in teaching.

Final Reflection

By completing this study, I not only grew as a person and a scholar, I also developed a deep appreciation for the students who shared their thoughts about good teachers. These students were passionate about their good teachers and presented me with thought provoking accounts of the teachers who had left a mark on them and their educations. The students' earnest insights and their maturity astounded me. This

dissertation is my opportunity to share their voices about good teachers. It is my sincere hope that others can learn as much from this as I did. It has changed the way I interact with my students, the way I listen to them, the way I instruct them, and the way I care about them. I never understood until now, how much students notice and truly appreciate their good teachers.

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Appendix A

Student Writing Prompt

Student Code_____ Good Teacher Essay Writing Prompt

You have been asked to participate in research about good teaching. The researcher is interested in what qualities you think good teachers possess. You have had many different teachers since you started your education in preschool, and the researcher considers you an expert at identifying the qualities a teacher needs in order to be considered a good teacher.

Write an essay about one specific good teacher. This teacher may not be your current language/reading teacher. However, any other good teacher may be the focus of your essay. Think about all of the good teachers who have taught you since you started your education. Choose one and write an essay detailing what made him/her a good teacher. Your essay may be expository or persuasive.

Attach this writing prompt to your prewrite and essay. All three should be stapled together with your **student code** written in the top left corner of each.

Appendix B

Cinquain Directions

Student Code_____ Good Teacher Cinquain Directions

Think of the teacher you identified as being a good teacher for your essay and develop a Cinquain. A Cinquain is a poem with five lines. The first line is a one word title. The second line contains two words that describe the title. The third line has three words that state an action. The fourth line has four words that express feeling and the fifth line concludes the poem by giving one word for the title. Follow the following format for your Cinquain.

Line One: The name of the good teacher identified in your essay
Line Two: Two adjectives that describe the teacher named in line one
Line Three: Three –ing words that describe the teacher named in line one
Line Four: A phrase that describes the teacher named in line one
Line Five: Another word for the good teacher named in line one

Write your Cinquain below.

1._____

2. _____ _____

3. _____ _____
_____

4. _____

5. _____

Appendix C

Teacher Directions for Metaphor Worksheet

Teacher Directions for “Metaphor” worksheet:

1. This is going to be a little more difficult. Read the directions and the example with students. Remind them to not write their names anywhere on this sheet.
2. Explain that they are actually creating metaphors by comparing their chosen “good teacher” to whatever is specified in the box. It is important that they explain why they chose whatever they chose.
3. I would love them to be able to complete all of the boxes. However, with backgrounds being so diverse, they may not be able to do all of the metaphors. They should complete as many as they can.
4. Remind them to write the teacher’s name on the line.

Appendix D

Metaphor Worksheet

Student Code_____ Describing Your Good Teacher in Metaphors

Directions: This is the last bit of information that will be gathered about the good teacher you identified in your essay and wrote a Cinquain about. Think of the teacher you identified as being good and complete each metaphor. Fill in each square and explain your choice. An example is completed for you.

The good teacher I identified in my essay and Cinquain was _____.

Automobile: Ferrari **Explain: She was quick with her wit.**	**Movie:** **Explain:**	**Movie Star:** **Explain:**
Song: **Explain:**	**Singer:** **Explain:**	**Past Time (sport, type of hunting etc…):** **Explain:**
T.V. Show: **Explain:**	**T.V. Personality:** **Explain:**	**Nursery Rhyme:** **Explain:**
Cartoon: **Explain:**	**Cartoon Character:** **Explain:**	**Video Game:** **Explain:**
Famous Person from History: **Explain:**	**Superhero:** **Explain:**	**Food:** **Explain:**

Appendix E

Data Grid

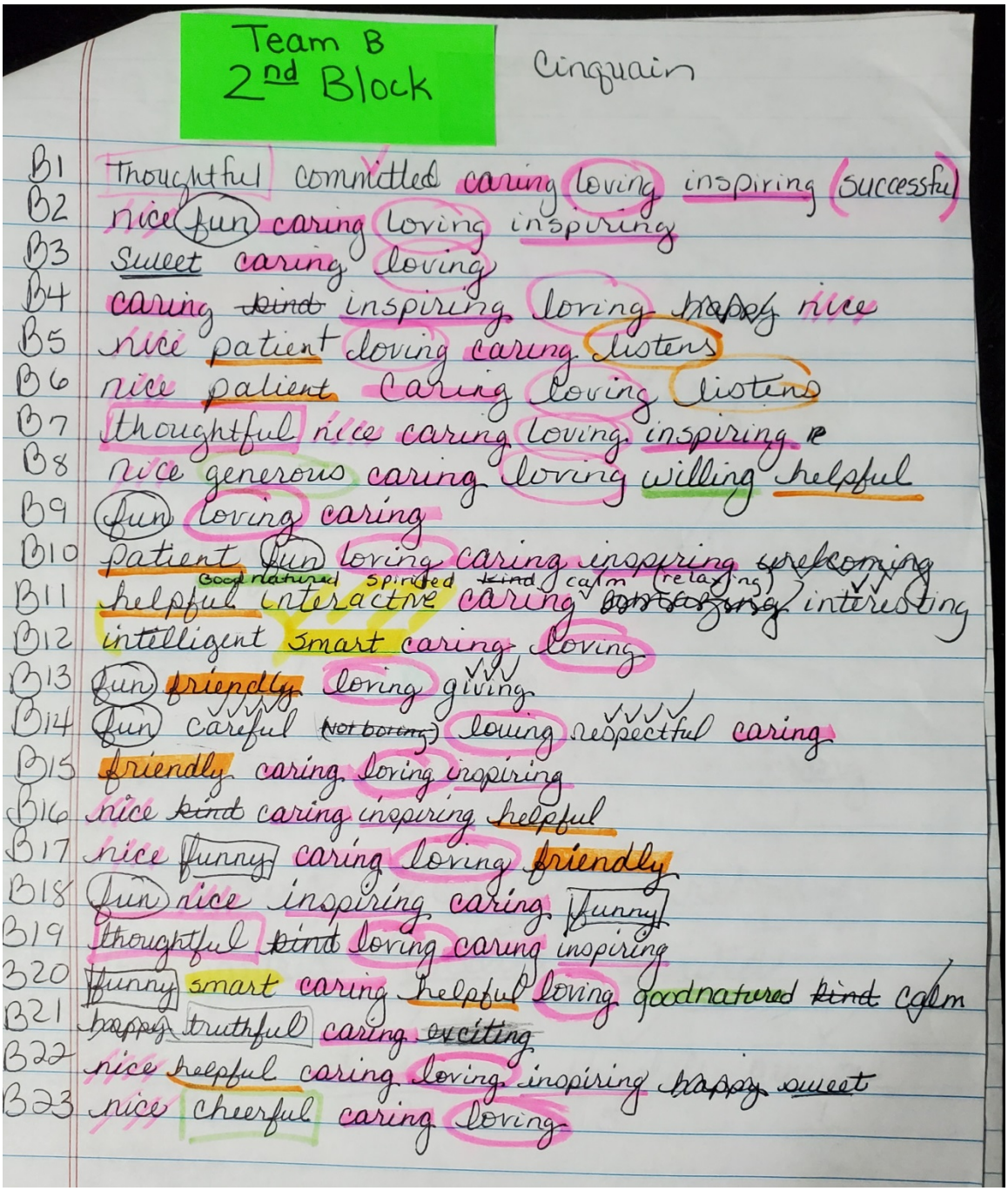
Descriptor Grid

	2nd	3rd	4th
Essays			
Poems			
Metaphors			

Appendix F

Descriptors for Team B 2nd Block Ciquain

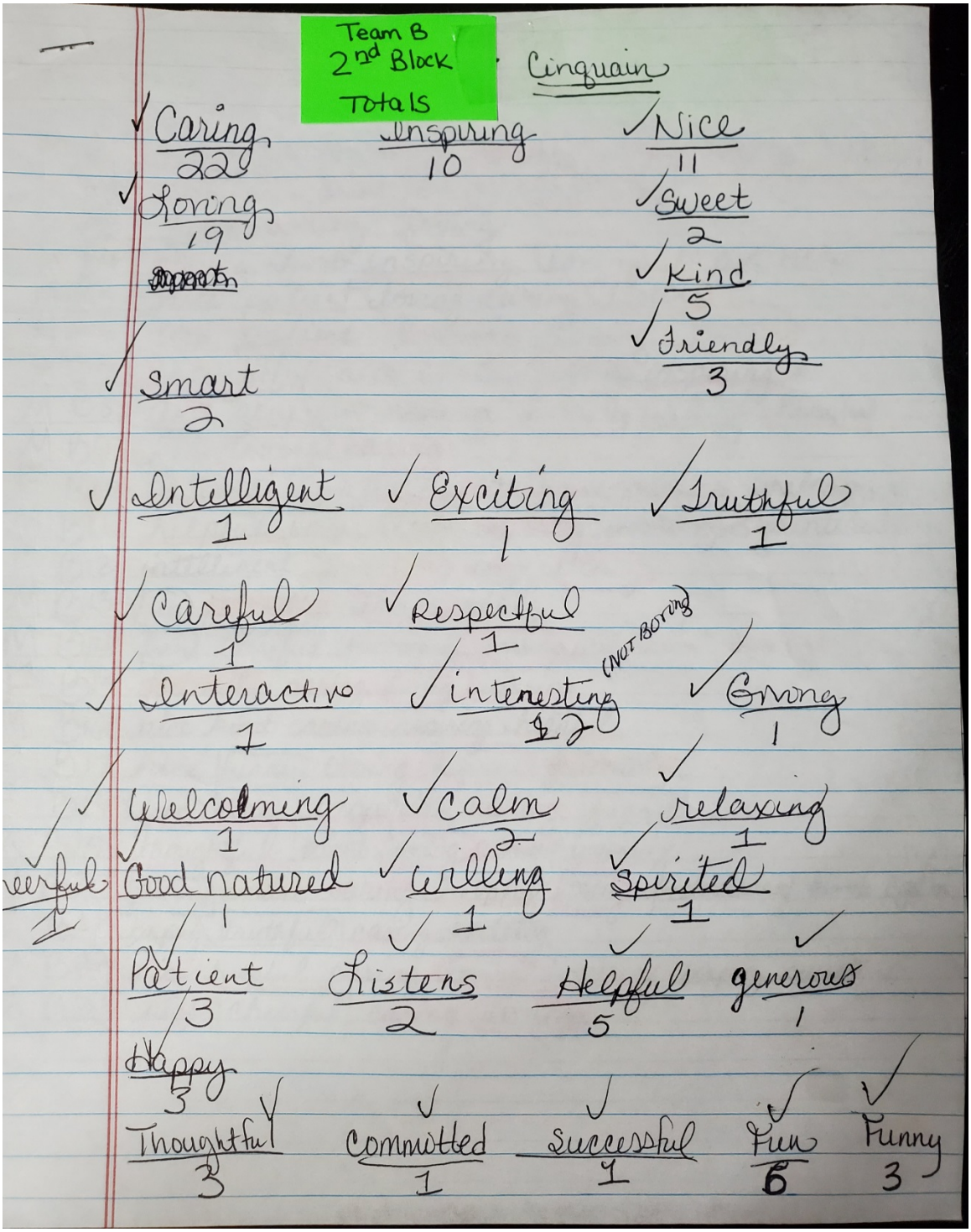
Descriptors for Team B 2nd Block Ciquain



Appendix G

Descriptor Totals for Team B 2nd Block Ciquain

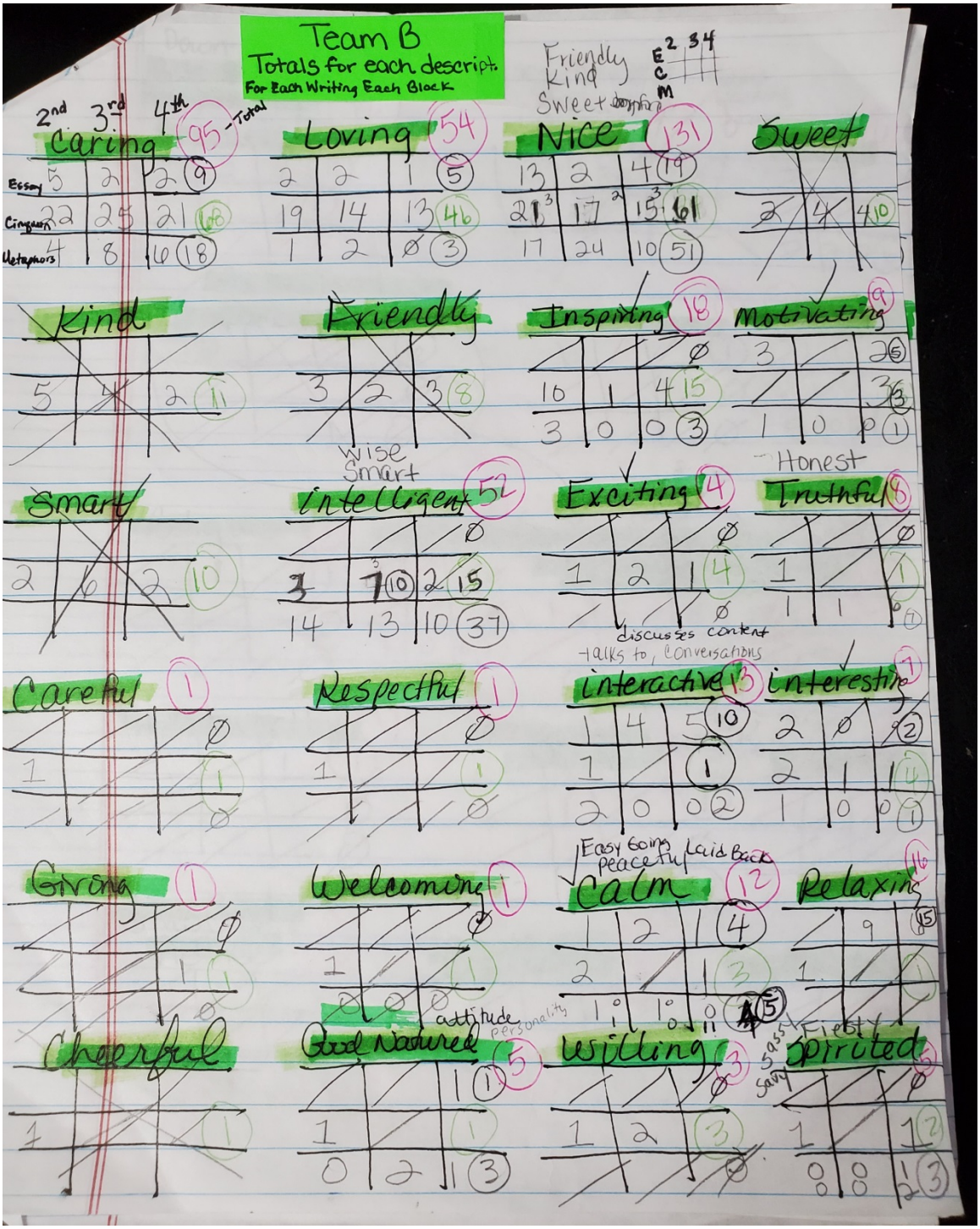
Descriptor Totals for Team B 2nd Block Ciquain



Appendix H

Descriptor Totals for Team B per Block and Writing

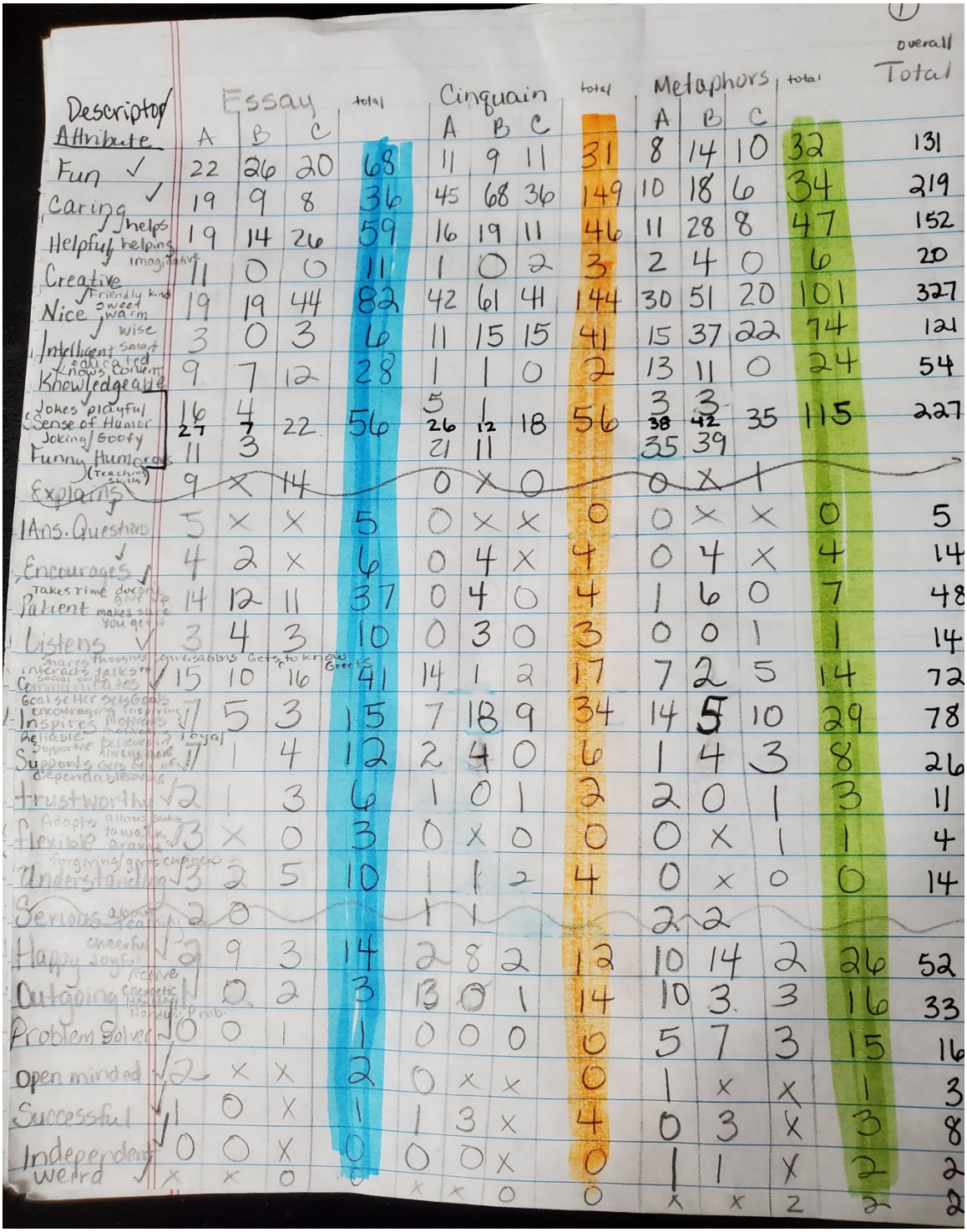
Descriptor Totals for Team B per Block and Writing



Appendix I

Descriptor Totals for Eighth Grade for All Writings

Descriptor Totals for Eighth Grade for All Writings

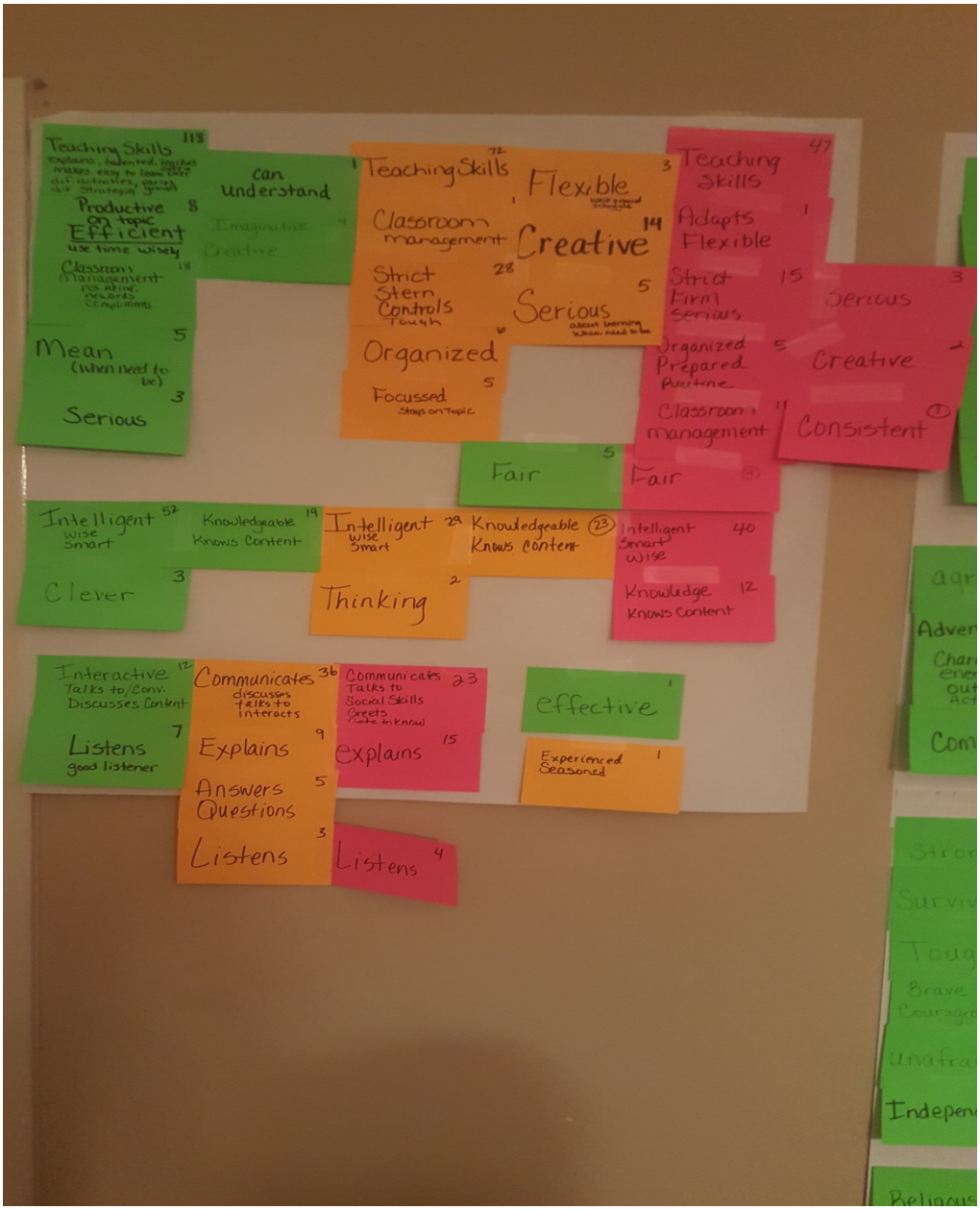


Descriptor Attribute	Essay A	Essay B	Essay C	Essay total	Cinquain A	Cinquain B	Cinquain C	Cinquain total	Metaphors A	Metaphors B	Metaphors C	Metaphors total	Overall Total
Fun ✓	22	26	20	68	11	9	11	31	8	14	10	32	131
Caring ✓	19	9	8	36	45	68	36	149	10	18	6	34	219
Helpful helps helping	19	14	26	59	16	19	11	46	11	28	8	47	152
Creative imaginative	11	0	0	11	1	0	2	3	2	4	0	6	20
Nice friendly kind sweet warm	19	19	44	82	42	61	41	144	30	51	20	101	327
Intelligent wise smart	3	0	3	6	11	15	15	41	15	37	22	74	121
Knowledgeable educated knows content	9	7	12	28	1	1	0	2	13	11	0	24	54
Sense of Humor jokes playful joking goofy funny humorous	16 27 11	4 7 3	22	56	5 26 21	1 12 11	18	56	3 38 35	3 42 39	35	115	227
Explains (Teaching skills)	9	X	14		0	X	0		0	X	1		
Ans. Questions ✓	5	X	X	5	0	X	X	0	0	X	X	0	5
Encourages ✓	4	2	X	6	0	4	X	4	0	4	X	4	14
Patient takes time doesn't give up makes sure you get it	14	12	11	37	0	4	0	4	1	6	0	7	48
Listens ✓	3	4	3	10	0	3	0	3	0	0	1	1	14
Communicates ✓ shares thoughts conversations interacts talks social conflicts	15	10	16	41	14	1	2	17	7	2	5	14	72
Inspires ✓ goal set her self goals encouraging inspiring mentors motivation	7	5	3	15	7	18	9	34	14	5	10	29	78
Supports ✓ reliable loyal supportive believes always there gets better	11	1	4	12	2	4	0	6	1	4	3	8	26
Trustworthy ✓2 dependable	2	1	3	6	1	0	1	2	2	0	1	3	11
Flexible ✓3 adapts allows going to with the flow	3	X	0	3	0	X	0	0	0	X	1	1	4
Understanding ✓3 forgiving gives chances	3	2	5	10	1	1	2	4	0	X	0	0	14
Serious about school ✓	2	0			1	1			2	2			
Happy ✓2 joyful cheerful	2	9	3	14	2	8	2	12	10	14	2	26	52
Outgoing ✓1 active	1	0	2	3	13	0	1	14	10	3	3	16	33
Problem Solver ✓0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	5	7	3	15	16
Open minded ✓2	X	X		2	0	X	X	0	1	X	X	1	3
Successful ✓1	1	0	X	1	1	3	X	4	0	3	X	3	8
Independent ✓0	0	0	X	0	0	0	X	0	1	1	X	2	2
weird ✓	X	X	0	0	X	X	0	0	X	X	2	2	2

Appendix J

Visual of Colored Index Cards with Descriptors

Visual of Colored Index Cards with Descriptors



Appendix K

Internal Review Board Exemption

Please note, during the time this research was completed in 2013, if a student was simply working with data from classes and not the students themselves, he or she was not under the IRB purview, even if they were doing a dissertation.