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Characteristics of highly effective teachers: A perspective from students with disabilities

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CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEACHERS:
A PERSPECTIVE FROM STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

A Dissertation

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Approved:

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This dissertation is dedicated to the most wonderful and supportive parents in the world,
Clem and Judy Smith

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To the educators who read this dissertation, may you hear the voices of a few students in this research as the loud voices of the many children who seek teachers who not only know their content, but teachers who demonstrate care and excellence in the classroom. I hope educators everywhere understand the gift of time given to children and the power of patience in the learning process. You are appreciated!

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CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEACHERS:
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Approved:

Dr. Sandra Alper, Chair

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July 2009

ABSTRACT

Teacher quality is a widely discussed topic in education. States, districts, schools, parents, and other stakeholders want to know how to measure, improve, and reward teacher quality. A major factor in the rise in interest about teacher quality is clear evidence that individual teachers are able to positively affect student achievement, specifically in relationship to students' standardized test scores (No Child Left Behind Legislation). Even a cursory look at statewide student achievement data reveals that students with disabilities are achieving at lower levels in comparison to their peers without disabilities.

While several researchers have asked students to identify characteristics of highly effective teachers, their studies have focused on the perspectives of students without disabilities (Mowrer, Love, & Orem, 2004; Kennedy, 2006 & 2008) or on the perspectives of university teacher preparation programs (Mowrer-Reynolds, 2008). The following two questions guided a study of students with disabilities' perceptions regarding teacher quality: (a) According to students with disabilities, what are the characteristics of a highly effective teacher, and (b) How similar are these perceptions to teacher characteristics cited in the literature on highly effective teachers?

Data were collected from sixteen high school students with mild to moderate disabilities through three focus groups. These data provided insights into the students' perceptions about and experiences with highly effective teachers. Students in each of the three focus groups were asked to respond to the prompt, "Thinking back on all the teachers you've had throughout high school, what characteristics did the best teachers

have?” Data were analyzed inductively to draw conclusions about the perceptions of students with disabilities regarding teacher quality and compared to the results of previous literature.

CHAPTER 1
A FOCUS ON TEACHER QUALITY

Importance of the Topic

Teacher quality is a widely-discussed topic in education. Numerous studies, including those by Wong and Wong (2008) and the National Center for Accreditation of Teacher Education have explored the topic. States, districts, schools, parents, and other stakeholders want to know how to measure, as well as reward and improve, teacher quality. A major factor in the rise in interest around teacher quality is clear evidence that individual teachers are able to affect student achievement, specifically in relationship to students' standardized test scores. Political forces, such as No Child Left Behind legislation and the commitment to ensure that low-income, minority, and students with disabilities are provided the same quality as the mainstream population, have increased interest in teacher quality.

In 2007-2008 there were 61,859 students with disabilities in Iowa out of a total certified enrollment of 480,609. These students accounted for 12.9% of all students who populate Iowa classrooms (Iowa Department of Education, 2008). Even a cursory look at statewide student achievement data reveals that these students are achieving at significantly lower levels in comparison to their peers without disabilities. In 2006-2008, only 28.9% of eleventh graders in Iowa with disabilities were deemed proficient based on the Iowa Tests of Educational Development (ITED) reading comprehension scores. In comparison, 83.3% of their peers without disabilities earned proficient scores on the same exam.

Similarly, 32.5% of 11th grade students with disabilities, as compared with 84.2% of 11th grade students without disabilities, earned proficient scores on the math portion of the ITED (Iowa Department of Education, 2008). This trend is not isolated to Iowa schools; a look at NAEP data shows that similar data points exist all across the nation. Kathy Koch's 2000 article points out many of the controversies surrounding standardized testing and students with disabilities. Some argue that special education achievement statistics reveal a crisis, saying far too many students with disabilities are not having their educational needs met. Others argue that these statistics are an effect of inappropriate test use, that students with disabilities should not be expected to do well on these tests that are normed for students without disabilities. Many researchers and educational philosophers have attempted to discern why this disparity exists, but few solid answers have emerged.

The existing literature base related to students' perceptions about teacher effectiveness is scarce. A search of the ERIC databases resulted in only forty-three records, none of which reported the perceptions of high school students with disabilities regarding teacher effectiveness. However, the current literature on student perceptions of teacher quality is questionable in many ways. A significant number of the existing studies rely on the perceptions of college students, even pre-service teachers, rather than students in the K-12 system. While there are some studies relying on data from K-12 students, no well-known study has sought the perspectives of high school students with disabilities related to teacher quality. Finally, the findings of student perspectives studies in teacher quality often lead to characteristics that are therefore difficult to define and difficult to

measure. These issues with the current knowledge base all leave unanswered questions ripe for further study.

A clearer understanding of the characteristics of teachers who are perceived as highly effective with students with disabilities has implications for administrators who are responsible for evaluating teacher effectiveness, practicing teachers who must continually improve their effectiveness, and for teacher preparation programs who are charged with producing effective teachers. With Iowa's current statewide emphasis on ensuring a "highly effective teacher" in every classroom, this study attempted to ascertain perceptions of students with disabilities in general education settings related to teacher effectiveness.

Considering the fact that students are direct consumers of the education teachers offer and are the group most directly affected by teacher quality, it is important to consider their perspectives when defining teacher quality. Furthermore, mandates to educate children in the least restrictive environment have led to the inclusion of an increasing number of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. This creates a pressing need to define what it is that makes a general education teacher effective with students with disabilities. There is a distinct lack of research asking students with disabilities what they believe makes a teacher effective for them as unique learners.

Students with disabilities, like all people with disabilities and other oppressed minorities in general, are afforded very few opportunities for input regarding their "place" in society (Charlton, 1998). Traditional empiricist research methodology in

particular effectively renders individuals with disabilities voiceless. Ferguson and Ferguson (1995) capture this situation quite clearly when they state that:

“Certain individuals within our society have almost always gotten to tell their stories more often, to more people, with fewer questions than have other individuals. Able-bodied, white males come to mind as one such group of individuals whose stories have had a lot of telling. That imbalance allows an impression of unanimity about things that quickly transforms a social construction into a biological destiny” (p. 119).

This study represents an attempt to provide students with disabilities an opportunity to tell their stories. More to the point, it is an attempt to offer us as educators an opportunity to benefit from their insights about how general educators can enact practices that facilitate authentic inclusive educational experiences for them.

Research Questions

The following two questions guided this study of students with disabilities’ perceptions regarding teacher quality: (a) According to students with disabilities, what are the characteristics of a highly effective teacher, and (b) How similar are these perceptions to teacher characteristics cited in the literature on highly effective teachers? While many studies have asked students to identify what makes a teacher effective, these studies have all focused on the perspectives of students without disabilities, and most have gathered data from college students rather than K-12 students. This study focused on the recalled experiences of sixteen high school students with mild to moderate learning disabilities.

Definition of Terms

A key problem in addressing issues related to teacher quality is the fact that the term has become so ubiquitous that it has lost any clear meaning (Kennedy, 2008).

Depending on their perspective, people using the term teacher quality may be referring to tested ability, test scores, credentials, classroom practices, or values and beliefs. The reality is that there are limitless variables and dimensions to a teacher's quality, and these dimensions are of differing value to different people. What is of interest for the purposes of this study is not the many approaches and frameworks through which teacher effectiveness has been examined in the scholarly literature for the purpose of teacher preparation or evaluation. Rather, the aim of this study is to gain insight and understanding about how students with disabilities characterize effective teachers and the various practices they employ in the inclusive classroom.

In the interest of common understanding, it is necessary to define some of the terms that will be used throughout this study. Any future reference to "special education students" will refer to the definition of a "child with a disability." Iowa's Administrative Rules of Special Education define the term as follows:

281—41.8(256B,34CFR300) Child with a disability. "Child with a disability" refers to a person under 21 years of age, including a child under 5 years of age, who has a disability in obtaining an education. The term includes an individual who is over 6 and under 16 years of age who, pursuant to the statutes of this state, is required to receive a public education; an individual under 6 or over 16 years of age who, pursuant to the statutes of this state, is entitled to receive a public education; and an individual between the ages of 21 and 24 who, pursuant to the statutes of this state, is entitled to receive special education and related services. In federal usage, this refers to infants, toddlers, children and young adults. In these rules, this term is synonymous with "child requiring special education" and "eligible individual" (2008).

Essentially, then, any child of school age who, after evaluation, has been found to have a disability that requires special education or related services is a special education student for the purposes of this study (Bartlett, Etscheidt, & Weisenstein, 2007).

The companion term, general education, must also be defined. Throughout this study, general education will refer to the educational program or instruction offered to students without disabilities. Included in this category are core and non-core area teachers who are not certified special education teachers, as well as the classrooms, courses, and programs designed for and generally delivered to students without disabilities.

In this study, a learning disability is defined using the 2004 IDEA definition:

“a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, write, spell, or do mathematics” (as cited in Kavale, Spaulding, & Beam, 2009, p. 40).

For the purposes of this study, students with mild to moderate disabilities are those who are identified by their school districts as being entitled to special education services and assigned by their Area Education Agency a weighting of Level I or Level II.

For the purposes of this study, pedagogy should be read as the context of instruction, learning, and all operations involved with teaching and instructional methods. It includes both the art and science of teaching and is the fundamental work of a teacher. For the purposes of this paper, content knowledge is defined as the concepts, principles, relationships, processes, and applications a teacher understands within a given academic subject.

Finally, it is imperative to establish a common understanding of the term “effective” as it applies to teachers. For the purposes of this study, an effective teacher is one who, from the perspective of a student with disabilities (a) accomplishes the intended purposes of education and attains positive student outcomes, such as achievement and

personal development, (b) displays specific behaviors, meaning actions by the teacher, as well as (c) dispositions. Dispositions should be viewed as synonymous with nature, character, temperament, and expectations for students.

CHAPTER 2

DEFINING TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS

Dispositions and Behaviors of a Highly Effective Teacher

The purpose of this chapter is to review the current literature on teacher effectiveness. In the controversial world of education, the fact that every student deserves a good teacher is a point of common ground: “Even in the divisive world of education policy, everyone agrees that children deserve competent, properly educated teachers” (Torff, 2005, p. 302). While this position is clear, the path to getting there is not so clear. A major factor in this lack of clarity is the fact that it is so difficult to identify what makes a teacher competent. Many studies have attempted to describe the dispositions and behaviors commonly demonstrated by teachers viewed as “good” teachers. What follows is an overview of several studies that attempt to shed light on the dispositions and behaviors of highly effective teachers.

Dispositions

While the term disposition is often used to discuss teacher qualities, there is a distinct lack of a clear and concise definition for the term. However, for the sake of this chapter, dispositions should be viewed as synonymous with nature, character, temperament, and expectations for students.

In her 2007 article, Carroll Helm identified five indicators of excellent teaching, three of which can be classified as dispositions. They include loving children, seeing potential in all children, and having a sense of humor. She later went on to say that the dispositions of caring and empathy are critical to student success. Kennedy (2006)

pointed to “particular personality traits like creativity, intuition, or tender-heartedness” that enable teachers to “connect to kids, inspire them, and communicate with them” (p. 14). While many would agree that these personality traits are likely present in effective teachers, they are all difficult to define and measure. Furthermore, personality is only one part of the equation of teacher effectiveness. In addition to the qualities already listed, Kennedy pointed out that an effective teacher must be able to influence student learning and development. She clearly connected teacher effectiveness and student outcomes.

Findings from Helterbran’s (2008) study of college students’ perceptions of the ideal professor revealed several more dispositions of a highly effective teacher. Helterbran selected three teacher preparation programs in Pennsylvania for her study. Information on student perceptions of teacher quality were gathered from the website ratemyprofessor.com. Overall, data on 283 professors from the three universities were used to draw conclusions. Instructors who were perceived as highly effective by their students are passionate about what they are teaching, and they teach with personality, charm, and charisma. They are approachable and “human.” Furthermore, “good teachers are never satisfied with their teaching prowess: there remains a hunger to stretch, grow, and refine knowledge and pedagogy” (p. 136). While the conclusions of this study seem reasonable, they again largely focus on personality and traits that are difficult to define and measure.

Noddings (2005) characterizes caring as the foundation for learning in a classroom. While Noddings asserted that nearly all educators care, she offered two perspectives on caring—the virtue sense of the word and the relational sense of the word.

Virtuous caring is the conscientious pursuit of certain goals for students. The relational sense of the term care requires looking at both the teacher and the student. The teacher must act in a caring way, but students must also feel cared for. This mutual sense of care provides the foundation for successful teaching through trust, understanding, and individualization.

Noddings (2005) further asserts that caring relations are effectively carried out in three steps:

“First, as we listen to our students, we gain their trust and, in on-going relations of care and trust, it is more likely that students will accept what we try to teach. ... Second, as we engage our students in dialogue, we learn about their needs, working habits, interests, and talents. We gain important ideas from them about how to build our lessons and plan for their individual progress. Finally, as we acquire knowledge about our students’ needs and realize how much more than the standard curriculum is needed, we are inspired to increase our own competence” (p. 5).

She argued that caring, in both the virtue and relational senses provide the best foundation for both academic and moral education.

Mowrer, Love, and Orem’s 2004 study of undergraduate students at Angelo State University revealed six dispositions of highly effective instructors, as identified by students. The 332 undergraduates who were surveyed grouped 28 teacher characteristics into four categories: very important, important, somewhat important, and not important. According to the results, students valued instructors who are approachable, knowledgeable, enthusiastic, realistic, creative/interesting, and accessible. This study, like the others, failed to deal with student learning—an undeniably essential element in teacher effectiveness.

A similar study by Mowrer-Reynolds (2008) revealed the following dispositions most often associated with effective teaching: caring, compassionate, empathetic; warm, kind, friendly, social, familiar; enthusiastic, excited about subject; patient, tolerant; humorous, funny; easy to talk to, approachable; knows subject matter, has a wealth of information; knows how to motivate students, inspirational; and creative, innovative, inventive, has fresh ideas. The 137 participants from the University of Idaho who shared these ideas were all pre-service teachers in an undergraduate Educational Psychology course. They were asked to recall exemplary educators from their past and present educational experiences and provide five characteristics that best described those educators. The students were asked to review the twenty most common characteristics reported by their peers, select the five of the characteristics that best described their favorite teachers, then rank those five in importance. These data were used to develop Mowrer-Reynolds' list of characteristics of highly effective teachers.

The methodology of this study is questionable in several ways. Because all of the survey respondents were pre-service educators, their perceptions regarding teacher quality are likely different than those of a more diverse group or a group with less knowledge about or interest in the teaching profession. Many who choose the teaching profession do so because they enjoyed or found success in school. With that in mind, their beliefs about teacher effectiveness might be different than a group that struggled in or disliked school. Additionally, the survey prompts seem to place undue emphasis on favorite teachers, rather than most effective teachers. Encouraging students to think about

favorite teachers, rather than those who taught the most, might lead to results more about personality than achievement or learning.

A 2007 publication of the International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE) synthesized information gathered through classroom visits, interviews with teachers, interviews with students, and conversations with principals and superintendents. The dispositions shared by “extraordinary teachers” are a commitment to student success; passion, enthusiasm, and competence; and a relentless commitment to students. Students said, “My teachers cares about me. My teacher treats us like family. My teacher is strict, but not unfair” (pp. 31-33). While the more diverse pool of respondents (students, principals, and superintendents) strengthens the conclusions of this study, the results are again difficult to define and measure.

Kennedy (2008) focused on the importance of a teacher’s “personal resources” as factors in teacher quality. She defined these as qualities that teachers possess before they actually become teachers. These are often believed to enhance their teaching practices. These personal qualities include beliefs, attitudes, and values; personality traits; knowledge, skill, and expertise; and credentials. Things such as the belief that all students can learn, valuing the equitable treatment of students, knowing the content, and others are important factors to consider when discussing teacher quality.

While each of these studies offer some interesting insights, they leave some unanswered questions as well. Many of the teacher characteristics identified are difficult, or perhaps impossible, to measure. Loving children, seeing their potential, and having a sense of humor are all valued traits, but not easily measured or improved. Furthermore,

many of these studies place significant emphasis on personality traits. While it is understandable that students might identify teacher personality traits as important factors in effectiveness, truly beneficial research must look beyond teacher likeability to determine a teacher's ability to help students learn, grow, and achieve.

Behaviors

In addition to dispositions, there are factors of teacher quality that are specifically related to what teachers do. For the purposes of this chapter, these will be classified as behaviors. Typically behaviors are defined as specific, observable, and measurable responses. Behaviors may include specific actions, activities, and performances.

Helm (2007) identified three characteristics of effective teachers: respecting all children and parents in all circumstances, motivating children to reach their highest potential, and being a spontaneous and creative educator who is able to see teachable moments and seize them. Kennedy (2006) identified "a set of beliefs and values that motivates the teacher to treat students fairly, encourage all students to participate, and present the content with intellectual honesty and integrity" (p. 14) as factors that make a teacher effective. While each of these assertions seems logical and reasonable, they are as difficult to define and measure as the others. Furthermore, each is likely a skill set, dependent on many smaller skills, behaviors, and values.

Helterbran's (2008) study also shed light on teacher behaviors. Highly effective instructors demonstrate mastery of the content they are teaching and effective means for communicating that content knowledge to students. They allow students to get to know them and establish a rapport. They consistently treat students respectfully and

compassionately. Highly effective instructors are organized, which allows them to teach in a seamless fashion. They engage students in meaningful work and provide formative feedback to students. While these conclusions appear sound, further explanation is necessary. For instance, what characterizes meaningful work?

The Mowrer, Love, and Orem (2004) study revealed four behaviors of highly effective instructors. Students view instructors who demonstrate encouragement, effective communication, flexibility, and respect as highly effective. Mowrer-Reynolds (2008) adds to this list: fair, treats students equally; organized; flexible, cooperative; makes subject matter clear for students, provides concrete examples; disciplinarian, controls classroom environment; entertaining, can hold the attention of the class; provides help to students outside of class; uses varied methods of instruction; has high expectations, provides challenges; communicates clearly, good speaker; and respectful to students, values their opinions.

Scheetz and Martin's 2006 study of National Board Certified and Non-National Board Certified teachers of deaf students revealed highly important insights into the behaviors demonstrated by the most effective teachers, National Board Certified or not. The best teachers promoted activities that included real life experiences, incorporated teacher-generated demonstrations and modeling of concepts to enhance instruction, provided students with clear expectations for behavior, and promoted parental involvement. Additionally, high quality teachers utilized accurate assessments, supported individualized instruction, encouraged parental involvement, and expected appropriate behavior from students.

The ICLE (2007) synthesis promoted creating “an atmosphere of mutual respect in which the students and the teacher are involved together in the learning process” (p. 11). It revealed that effective teachers have an awareness of time, exceptional organizational skills, use tools and opportunities seamlessly, explain concepts well, are engaging and hold students’ attention, and are experienced. Both the NBC and ICLE studies leave variables related to content open for negotiation. The findings of these studies lead readers to believe that it makes no difference what content teachers teach, as long as they possess all the necessary skills and demonstrate all the right behaviors. This is a fallacy. Effective teaching has both content and pedagogical elements.

Kennedy (2008) also discussed teacher behaviors in terms of the “work teachers actually do in their daily practice” (para. 14). She called these performance dimensions of teacher quality. They include practices that occur outside the classroom, practices within the classroom, and learning activities provided for the students. Performance includes planning a curriculum that engages students, providing clear goals and standards, and providing students with tasks that require deep knowledge.

Kennedy (2006) characterized teacher effectiveness as how effective teachers are at raising student achievement scores on standardized tests. While this may sound narrow, she further explained that effectiveness has several dimensions. Fostering student learning, motivating students, and fostering personal responsibility and social concern are all aspects of teacher effectiveness. In addition to raising scores on standardized competency tests, effective teachers increase the level of effort students invest in

academic pursuits and increase student participation in community development and public policy.

The Association for Childhood Education International (2008) pointed to job efficiency and classroom management skills as characteristics of well-qualified teachers. Other studies, such as Ofsted's report on exclusions of black students, detailed teacher factors that are effective with specific populations of students. Ofsted claimed that three interrelated teacher features significantly reduce school exclusions of black students: "Respect for the individual in a school and a systematic, caring and consistent approach to behavior and personal development, the courage and willingness to discuss difficult issues, a focus on helping pupils take more control of their lives by providing them with strategies to communicate well and look after each other" (as cited in Gilbert, 2008, p. 30). It is a consistent and relentless caring on the part of teachers that is effective with these students.

Torff (2005) pointed out the importance of in-class teaching skills related to student interactions. Classroom management skills, the ability to establish rapport with students, and lesson implementation skills were those cited as most worthy of attention when seeking to improve teacher effectiveness. Kennedy (2006) identified three common barriers to effective teaching as well: a dependence on lesson props, non-essential classroom disruptions, and unruly student behavior.

As with the literature's insights on teacher dispositions, the conclusions about the behaviors of effective teachers also raise significant questions. Behaviors such as motivating children to reach their highest potential and respecting all children and parents

in all circumstances are heavily reliant on underlying beliefs. Teachers who motivate all children to learn believe that all children can learn. Teachers who respect all students and parents believe all people are worthy of respectful treatment. Again, there is a need to go beyond these identified behaviors to reveal the underlying beliefs of effective teachers.

Summary

Based on the current literature on the topic of teacher quality, it is clear that the best teachers are those who care deeply about children, connecting with and believing in the potential of all of their students. These teachers are approachable, accessible, and supportive. They are passionate and knowledgeable about what they are teaching and promote student learning through creative and engaging tasks. They strive for continual growth and improvement in their own knowledge and pedagogy.

Furthermore, the most effective teachers establish a rapport with students and motivate them all to reach their potential through a classroom atmosphere of mutual respect. These teachers possess strong communication that they use to provide clear expectations and engage in ongoing formative assessment practices. High quality teachers are highly organized but flexible, holding all students accountable for high expectations through individualized instruction. Their lessons incorporate real life experiences, as well as models and demonstrations. Finally, effective teachers have deep content knowledge, pedagogical understanding, and classroom management skills. The best teachers are those who are mentored and immersed in ongoing and meaningful professional development. They produce student achievement results, as well as increases in student motivation and effort.

While the findings in the current literature are helpful in defining teacher quality, the literature must be interpreted with caution because of several methodological problems. Because of this, many unanswered questions remain. The many behaviors and dispositions identified lack clear descriptions, and several do not seem to fit neatly as behaviors or dispositions. The behaviors, dispositions, and other traits are often unclear and unmeasurable. Additionally, the characteristics of highly effective teachers as defined by the current knowledge base are difficult to recognize, measure, or target for improvement. Furthermore, far too many studies relied on students in post-secondary settings or teacher preparation programs as a source for data. These students likely have different views on education than students who struggled in school, and their voices of these students have not been heard. A final point to consider is the wisdom in relying on standardized tests to serve as a valid, reliable, and appropriate measure for all students.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

While many studies have explored students' perceptions related to teacher quality and efficacy, this study looked at teacher effectiveness from a different perspective. Much of the existing literature on teacher quality relied on the perceptions of teacher education students. While this may be an easy population to access, these students may have a narrow view. Many who choose to enter the teaching profession do so after years of success in school and satisfaction with the educational system. Not every student experiences such ease and satisfaction in school. Students with disabilities often find school to be more difficult and less fulfilling. These students have unique perspectives about teacher quality that must be heard as well. The purpose of this study was to provide a means for students with disabilities to have their perceptions about teacher quality heard.

This qualitative inquiry examined the recalled experiences of sixteen students with mild to moderate learning disabilities, as well as their perceptions and beliefs related to teacher effectiveness. The data were collected through three focus groups, eliciting information from students with disabilities who are included in the general education program for the majority of their day. The participants were students in high school who were asked to respond to questions based on their experiences in high school. It was important the students be old enough to participate in a critical discussion of teacher quality and have significant depth of educational experiences. The participants were all

students with mild to moderate learning disabilities who attend general education classes for at least 50% of a typical school day.

The researcher has been an educator in the K-12 system for more than fifteen years. Through his years as a coach and teacher, he worked to embody characteristics of a highly effective teacher. Working in a PK-12 laboratory school on the campus of a midwestern university with a teacher education mission, he worked extensively with pre-service teachers, helping them develop into highly effective teachers. Finally, in various administrative roles—assistant principal, principal, activities director, and superintendent—he has supervised, evaluated, and worked to develop K-12 teachers. The secondary reader has been an educator in the K-12 system for nearly ten years, working as a teacher, curriculum director, and administrator.

Participants

This study included sixteen high school students with mild to moderate learning disabilities, two of whom were in ninth grade, nine of whom were in eleventh grade, and five of whom were in twelfth grade. Ten of the participants were female, and six were male (see appendix A). Using homogeneous sampling (Glesne, 2006), participants for this study were selected based on their age, disability status, and location. Homogeneous sampling selects “similar cases in order to describe some subgroup in depth...” (Glesne, 2006, p. 35). Given the aims and goals of this study, participant selection centered on secondary students identified as having educational disabilities who participated in general education classrooms. The researcher selected three schools from which to identify a sample of student participants. After identifying the potential schools, the

researcher contacted a building-level or central office administrator for permission to conduct the study and help in recruiting study participants. Once receiving permission to conduct the study, the researcher asked each administrator to send a consent letter to the parents/guardians of each student with a mild to moderate learning disability enrolled in the school.

A follow-up contact was made with each administrator after one week. Informed consent materials were collected from all student participants and their parents. Between five and seven students from each of the three schools agreed to participate in the study. They comprised the three focus groups. The researcher worked with administrators from each of the three schools to arrange times and locations for the focus groups that would be convenient for the student participants.

Participating School Districts

All three participating schools consist almost exclusively of white, non-Hispanic students. The first participating school is a district of approximately 650 students, with approximately 240 students in the high school. Twelve percent of the high school students are students with disabilities. The community is a rural community of just over 3,200 people located approximately 30 miles from a metropolitan area.

The second participating district has approximately 700 students, 195 of whom are high school students. Twenty-four of the high school students are students with disabilities. The district serves several rural towns, totaling approximately 2,300 people. The third participating district enrolls approximately 800 students. The high school has

268 students, thirty of whom are students with disabilities. The district serves three small, rural communities with a total population of approximately 1,400 people.

Data Collection

Prior to conducting any of the three focus group sessions, a small pilot study was conducted with five students in grades ten through twelve, all of whom have IEPs and mild to moderate learning disabilities. In this pilot study, the students were provided with two survey instruments—one paper survey and an online survey. Both surveys used the teacher characteristics identified in the Mowrer-Reynolds study. The students were asked to rank the characteristics in importance. The pilot study participants also met with the researcher informally in a focus group session. The purpose of the pilot session was to determine the most effective data collection methods for this study, as well to identify logistical and procedural considerations that would be important for data collection.

The pilot made it clear that surveys, the easiest and most common means of collecting data about teacher effectiveness, would not be appropriate for this study. The students in the pilot group experienced difficulty with both versions of the study. Many found the terms confusing or unclear and demonstrated obvious signs of frustration throughout the process. As a result, the surveys were eliminated as a viable means for collecting data for this study.

Without the surveys as a data collection tool, focus group sessions became the sole means for gathering data on the perceptions of students with mild to moderate learning disabilities. Focus groups are defined by Krueger and Casey (2008) as carefully planned “discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a

permissive, non-threatening environment” (p. 2). It is important to note the strengths and weaknesses of relying on focus groups as the sole means for collecting data. Morgan (1997) describes the main advantage of focus groups as “the opportunity to observe a large amount of interaction on a topic in a limited amount of time” (p. 8). However, Morgan further notes that “focus groups are limited to verbal behavior, consist only of interaction in discussion groups, and are created and managed by the researcher” (p. 8).

Morgan (1997) points out the fact that a focus group setting allows the researcher to assemble and direct sessions around particular topics. This is an advantage over observation, and it particularly important in this study. Because the pilot study revealed a tendency for the students to offer brief and superficial responses to questions, it was critical that the research methods allow the researcher to dig deeper through follow-up questions. Additionally, the climate of safety within a focus group is particularly appropriate for this study, as the population whose opinions are being sought is a traditionally marginalized population.

Focus groups are generally comprised of five to ten people who share certain characteristics. This size makes the groups small enough for the sharing of insights, but large enough for diverse perceptions. The groups are held in locations that will be comfortable for the participants. The researcher is not a person in a position of authority or power who encourages the sharing of all comments and ideas without passing judgment. The researcher’s role is simply to ask questions, keep the discussion focused on the important questions, and ensure every participant has the opportunity to talk (Krueger & Casey 2008).

The methods for collecting data through focus group sessions align with the current literature. The focus groups met in the schools selected for participation at a time convenient for the students. Care was taken to ensure the privacy and comfort of the students. The first focus group was held in a classroom in the high school. Students sat around two tables in an oval. A total of six high school students with mild to moderate learning disabilities participated in the focus group; two of the students were male and four were female. Four of the students were in 11th grade and two were in 12th grade.

The second focus group met in the high school auditorium with participants seated across the front row. Of the five students with mild to moderate learning disabilities who participated in the second group, two were male and three were female; two were in 11th grade and three were in 12th grade. Five students with mild to moderate learning disabilities participated in the third focus group, which was conducted in a classroom in the high school. The two male and three female students sat in desks arranged in a circle. Two of these students were 9th graders, and three were 11th graders; all were students with mild to moderate learning disabilities.

Each session began with the researcher introducing himself, his purpose, the means for recording the session and using data from it, and ground rules for the session. Each focus group was an interactive, group setting where each of the students was free to talk to other students in the group. The sessions were conversational in nature and lasted between one and one and one-half hours. The researcher guided the students through a discussion that probed their attitudes and beliefs about teacher effectiveness. The discussions were loosely structured, with the researcher encouraging the free-flow of

ideas. However, they were based on a few specific questions designed to address the study goals and spark open-ended discussion.

Once each session began, the researcher asked questions of the group. The researcher worked to ensure that each student participated in the discussion as much as possible, yet allowed freedom of discussion. Students in each of the three focus groups were asked to respond to the following questions:

- Describe your best teacher. How does this teacher help you learn? How does this teacher manage or maintain order in the classroom? How is this teacher different than other teachers?
- What was your best learning experience in high school? Describe what the teacher did in this situation.
- Think of a time when a teacher had really high expectations, but you enjoyed the experience and learned from it. Describe what the teacher did in this situation.
- Think of a teacher you've had who was difficult to learn from or a class you struggled in. What was different about that class than your best class? What did you need that you didn't get?
- Think about yourself as a student. How do you learn best? What do you do when you don't "get it?" What do you need that is different than what other students need?

Before moving on to each new question, the researcher provided a summary of what he heard from the group. Follow-up questions were used to encourage participant responses that are specifically about teacher characteristics. Follow-up questioning also served as a means for member checking. At the end of the session, the researcher thanked students for their participation, stated the significance of their contributions, and closed the session.

Each focus group session was videotaped and transcribed verbatim by an independent transcriber in order to allow a thorough review of the data. Appendices B, C, and D contain full transcripts of each focus group. The primary investigator and a

secondary reader analyzed the focus group data, using an inductive process while viewing the videotaped focus group sessions, noting emerging themes on a printed copy of the transcript. A characteristic was considered a theme if more than one student within a particular focus group repeated the characteristic or identified one that is very similar; students from different focus groups repeated the characteristic or identified one that is very similar; or, in response to a behavior or disposition identified by one student, several other students demonstrated verbal or nonverbal agreement. The themes were compiled to make a list of the themes and patterns that emerged during the viewing.

This inductive approach to analyzing qualitative data was used as a way of finding themes related to teacher effectiveness. According to Thomas (2006) a “general inductive approach is not as strong as some other analytic strategies for theory or model development, [but] it does provide a simple, straightforward approach for deriving findings in the context of focused evaluation questions” (p. 1). He further writes,

“The purposes for using an inductive approach are to (a) condense raw textual data into a brief, summary format; (b) establish clear links between the evaluation or research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data; and (c) develop a framework of the underlying structure of experiences or processes that are evident in the raw data” (p. 1).

These purposes align with the purposes of this study; therefore, an inductive approach to data analysis is appropriate in this case.

Each emerging theme was put into a table to use for the coding of student data. Table 1 provides an excerpt from Appendix E, the chart used for the coding of student data:

Table 1

Excerpt from Coding Table

Code	Behavior/Disposition	Definitions	Key Words	Examples
Safe	Provides a safe learning environment	<p>'free from danger or the risk of harm'.</p> <p>We know we are achieving safe learning in our classrooms when learners perceive that they are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • safe from physical & emotional harm • free from intimidation • free to take the risk of answering a question, even if they are unsure of the answer and may get it wrong • free from criticism or ridicule by their peers • free from criticism or ridicule by staff • valued and accepted for who they are • engaged in challenging but achievable tasks • full of potential to succeed at learning 	<p>Stressed</p> <p>Everybody else</p>	<p>“Sometimes because if you ask a certain question and everybody else gets it some people kind of jokes about it and thinks you’re stupid because she got it or something.”</p> <p>“When I see them get done then I try to rush and get done so they don’t get irritated waiting for me to get done.”</p>

The primary investigator and the secondary reader each re-read the transcripts, using this table as a guide for coding student responses.

After completing this process, the primary investigator and secondary reader each individually re-read the transcripts of focus group sessions, attempting to code student statements using a table created by the researcher, based on the Mowrer-Reynolds (2008) study. In this process the Mowrer-Reynolds study served as a check with an established instrument. This particular study was chosen because it used a similar methodology to the current study—asking students to recall their most effective teachers and describe them. Table 2 includes an overview of Appendix F, the chart used to compare focus group data to the Mowrer-Reynolds study:

Table 2:

Overview of Mowrer-Reynolds Study Table

Code	Behavior/Disposition	Definitions	Key Words	Examples
A two or three letter code was provided for each behavior and disposition to be recorded on transcripts during the coding process	Each of the twenty characteristics identified in the Mowrer-Reynolds (2008) study was listed to provide a starting point for coding	Clear definitions were provided for each of the behaviors and dispositions to be used during coding	Key words or phrases that are likely indicators of each behavior or disposition were provided	Clear examples of a student describing each behavior and disposition were provided

The list of perceived teacher behaviors and dispositions were taken from the Mowrer-Reynolds (2008) study:

- Caring, compassionate, empathetic
- Warm, kind, friendly, sociable, familiar
- Fair, treat students equally
- Enthusiastic, excited about subject
- Organized
- Flexible, cooperative
- Makes subject matter clear for students, provide concrete examples
- Patient, tolerant
- Humorous, funny, makes learning fun
- Easy to talk to, approachable
- Disciplinarian, controls classroom environment
- Knows subject matter, has a wealth of information
- Knows how to motivate students, inspirational
- Entertaining, can hold the attention of the class
- Provides help to students outside of class
- Uses varied methods of instruction
- Creative, innovative, inventive, has fresh ideas
- Has high expectation, provides challenges
- Communicates clearly, good speaker
- Respectful of students, values their opinions

After both stages of the coding were completed, the primary investigator made explicit links between the data and the research questions, answering the following questions:

- What information from the literature review was confirmed or contested by the focus group data?
- What new information did the focus group data reveal?

The answers to these questions were synthesized to develop the conclusions of the research.

Triangulation of the Data

While the focus groups were a naturalistic inquiry in many ways—maintaining unobtrusive and non-manipulative conversations—they had some deductive and

inductive characteristics. The questions were driven from the research base, but the conclusions grew out of the inquiry. The study was open to any possible outcomes that could be supported by reliable means of the data analysis. Reliance on a few opening questions with appropriate follow-up questions allowed for the pursuit of new paths and discoveries as they emerged from the discussion within the focus groups. Careful use of follow-up questions offered a completeness of information on the topic.

The researcher attempted to triangulate the data through several methods. The three focus groups provided multiple data sources. The goal of the data analysis was to gather as much information as possible from the student participants, capturing personal perspectives and experiences without judgment or bias in order to discover important categories and relationships. The researcher compared the data collected from the focus groups to the literature review to look for commonalities, differences, and insights. Each focus group session was transcribed verbatim by an independent transcriber to ensure accuracy. Finally, a second reader verified coding of student responses. Percent agreement between readers to assess accuracy of categorization for all three focus groups ranged from 82 percent to 100 percent with an average of 94 percent (see Appendix G).

Confidentiality

Protection and privacy of student participants was ensured several ways. Coercion was avoided by having a tiered contact system that added layers of contact between potential participants and the researcher prior to receiving informed consent. A representative of their school provided all potential participants with informed consent materials. The researcher's first contact with individual students was during each focus

group interview. To ensure the protection and privacy of focus group participants, pseudonyms have been used in the paper, and all recordings of focus group sessions will be destroyed.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH FINDINGS

Focus Group 1

Prominent Themes

Several prominent themes emerged from the first focus group data. These students most highly valued a meaningful and caring relationship with their teachers, as well as a teacher's ability to explain concepts clearly and in multiple ways. Students made twice as many comments about these two characteristics than the next most common themes. They described the best teachers as those who are caring, helpful, and trustworthy.

In describing the best teacher she ever had, Brenda said she, "worries about us. Like if we do something wrong, she worries about us...She doesn't want to see one of us on the news or going to jail or anything like that." She also expressed the importance of teachers caring about her as an individual by saying, "Sometimes you just need someone to listen to." Similarly, students explained caring teachers as those who want them to be successful. Felicity said, "...She cares about us and doesn't want us to do it wrong." She characterized her best teachers by saying, "They want you to succeed, and they want you to understand what they are doing."

The ability to break down complex ideas and explain them to students clearly also emerged as a dominant theme in the discussion. Brenda explained that a particular teacher is effective "because she takes it slower and breaks it down for us and explains. She explains it in an easier way." She expanded on this idea by saying, "She will explain it to the point where you understand what to do." Felicity identified effective teachers

who “try different ways to explain it until you understand” and “keep explaining it and explaining it until you understand.” She expressed the importance of breaking down complex ideas by saying, “We can go back to them and they can break it down and explain it to us maybe a way that we could understand—break it down step-by-step.” In the end, it was clear that these students value teachers who can make ideas clear by describing them in more detail or in alternate ways.

Four themes were the next most common topic of discussion in the first focus group session. The participants valued projects and hands-on learning experiences, as well as engaging and relevant lessons. Brenda, in making recommendations for teachers who want to effectively teach students with disabilities said, “Try being hands-on as much as possible.” Felicity said that her best teachers “gave us projects to do.” Students expressed that relevance and engagement matter in both instructional practices and instructional content. Amy described an effective teacher by saying, “He makes it fun, and I understand better.” DeWitt told of an ineffective teacher who teaches about “something you aren’t interested in, so you don’t pay attention.”

They also valued teachers who make time to engage in one-on-one instruction with them, as well as those who allow for an individualized pace for learning and ensure a safe learning environment. In recalling a great teacher from her past, Brenda explained, “When I had a question, I could just come and ask her and she would help me one-on-one.” She explained the particular importance of one-on-one instructional opportunities for students with disabilities by saying, “It’s kind of nice to ask one-on-one instead of in

front of everybody because people make fun of you. They make fun of you and say, ‘We need to move on from this question.’”

While many students experienced this one-on-one time outside of class, Felicity told of receiving individualized help both during and after class: “He will walk around and make sure we get it, and you can have [a] session after school too.” The importance of learning at an individualized pace came through in comments such as DeWitt’s: “If we have questions they are able to move at your pace,” and Amy’s:

“If you need time to get it done, this teacher will help you get it done and the other teachers will give you like five minutes and then go on to the next student, so you don’t have time to get it.”

These students want personalized learning experiences.

Students in the first focus group also articulated a theme of valuing teachers who know them as individuals. DeWitt described his best teacher by saying, “She knows all about each and every student she has.” Students also valued teachers who demonstrate tolerance for and understanding of their disabilities. In comparing more effective and less effective teachers, Brenda said, “Sometimes the other teachers don’t know the other side of us...like our behaviors.” When prompted to explain this further Amy said, “Like I get really frustrated, and I need the teacher to help me calm down.” These students appreciated the teachers who were sympathetically aware of the sometimes-negative attributes of their disabilities.

Other Themes

Other, less prominent, themes of the discussion included the importance of teachers focusing on student learning; communicating expectations clearly; and

incorporating technology, visual aids, and demonstrations in their lessons. These students viewed highly effective teachers as those who push students to reach their full potential, respect students, offer a quiet learning environment, maintain a clear and consistent focus during instruction, challenge students, and prepare them for life after high school. Finally, some students stated the importance of having consistency across teachers and classrooms, as well as the importance of a teacher's organizational skills and ability to read and respond to student cues.

Focus Group 2

Prominent Themes

Several similarities to the first focus group emerged from the recalled experiences of students in the second focus group. Three themes dominated the discussion: the importance of caring relationships with teachers, the need for a safe learning environment, and the value of one-on-one time with teachers. Ben described a particular caring teacher: "You can just say what you think about anything and you know that they are there to listen to you, and they might help out if they can, and if not, they're still there to listen." Alison added, "You have to be able to feel like you can talk to your teachers and that they are not going to act put out or like they are not going to care." Students' need for understanding and compassionate teachers came through clearly.

Students also revealed another aspect of a caring teacher. David said, "She just like asks questions and makes you study all the time, and she kind of looks at your grades all the time." Alison elaborated on this idea of investment in student success with the following:

“Just like figure a student that normally works on something and normally works pretty hard in class and then you come one day and he doesn’t want to do anything, they’d come and ask you what is wrong and try and help you.”

David summed up the importance of teacher-student relationships by saying, “Yeah.

That’s pretty much all it comes down to—the relationship and how well they know you.

That really means a lot.”

The second major theme from this group was the importance of having a climate of safety in a classroom. Most student examples related to negative experiences in classrooms. For instance, Cindy explained:

“Like if a teacher just asks you a question and they know that you don’t know the answer and they are just trying to embarrass you.... You feel uncomfortable....You aren’t going to want to talk to them or say anything in front of the class.”

Alison provided a similar account:

“If you go to ask something, they seem like just all of a sudden they just get upset and they just blow up because they have taught the other students, and they are getting it, but we don’t get it right away, and they seem like they don’t want to take the extra time to help us learn.”

The unsafe climate in the classroom interfered with the students’ learning.

Students related experiences in which they felt unsafe in their classrooms going as far back as elementary school. David said, “Probably in elementary school when I never got it, and I just, it’s just comes back to that I was too scared to ask questions in front of the whole class, so I just kind of gave up.” He added, “Yeah. I just thought I would be wrong. I was always bad in math, and I didn’t want to be wrong in front of everybody.” Finally, Alison summed up the importance of a safe classroom climate by saying, “If you

need help and you don't feel comfortable telling the teacher that you need to go take a test and have it read to you, then you don't get the help and you don't do as well."

The third overarching theme from the second focus group was the importance of teachers taking time for one-on-one help for students with disabilities. Alison explained why this is important: "The teachers that take the extra time—like say you needed to stay after school—and they're okay with that, and they're going to do their best to help you more if you need it." She explained that one-on-one time is safer than whole class time: "You know, it's just between you and the teacher, and it's not you and the rest of the class and the teacher. And then only that teacher knows what you don't understand." Cindy elaborated, saying "When I am in a group and we are trying to study together, I don't really get it as well as just me and a teacher." The best teachers "take the time to hear and see if you've got your assignments done, and if you didn't then they are on top of it and give you help."

Three other consistent themes from the discussion were the desire for engaging, fun, and relevant lessons; the importance of teachers knowing students as individuals; and a need for clear explanations of complex ideas. Alison offered:

"I don't necessarily have a favorite class, but I like classes where we take the time to relate stuff we are doing to the actual present day or like what's going on in the world, so we can connect to us. So it's not just another piece of material we're learning."

Cindy added:

"Yeah. Like just having fun and not things being too serious. The kids just get bored. Some of the teachers like joking around and kind of being like one of the kids but still like the adult. It's fun, and you learn."

Both instructional practices and content were identified by students.

This familiarity came through in other comments students made relating to the importance of teachers knowing students. David said, “It’s better when the teacher gets to know you and actually takes the time to know you and how you learn.” Students also saw a benefit to teachers making an effort to know students beyond their classrooms. Alison explained:

“Good teachers take time to not only know what is going on with you here at school, but like your outside of school life. Like if you have a family member who is sick or something, she will take the time to actually sit down and talk to you about it.”

She also elaborated, saying, “Yeah. They learn your situation and then learn how to help you adapt to it.”

In addition to the importance of being known by teachers, the students in the focus group expressed a clear need to have teachers who could break down complex ideas. Alison explained why this is helpful by saying, “Because they actually break stuff down for you and put it in smaller terms than they were probably using in front of the class.” David said, “Like there’s one teacher we have. She always really explains everything,” and Earl added, “Cause she actually goes through it and gets in-depth a little more than the other teachers do.” David put it another way: “I’m just [talking about] breaking stuff down to learning it slowly, like in pieces, not altogether.”

Then final cohesive theme from this group was that effective teachers offer an individualized plan and pace for learning. When explaining why this important, Ben said, “Because they know that students learn things different ways and so they just take that into their perspective.” Alison added, “Good teachers have an expectation that fits you. They don’t try to push you, but they push you well enough that you can meet your goals.”

Several students offered statements concerning the need for a slower pace. David said that teachers help him “by going slower. How fast you learn and how long it takes. Like if...you’re going slow on your assignment and everyone else is done, but you’re still going, they understand that it takes you longer.”

Other Themes

Other factors that surfaced during the discussion included students’ desire for hands-on learning experiences, the importance of teachers possessing strong communication skills, and the need for a clear and consistent focus for learning. Students also identified that they value teachers who want students to succeed, are experienced and reliable, and vary their instructional practices.

Focus Group 3

Prominent Themes

The most prominent theme that emerged from the discussion with focus group three was the importance of an individualized plan and pace for learning. Dora articulated the importance of individualized learning experiences by stating that what she values in a teacher is, “Knowing your students. If you think the student can handle it and get their stuff in, the set the goal a little higher, but not set it too high—so they can reach it and not too far for them to reach.” Dora also shared other thoughts on the importance of allowing students to work at a pace that is appropriate for them as individuals:

“I think [because of] some students’ level they need to work fast because they pick it up real fast, but other students, they won’t get it and they will get behind.... They’ll still be working one thing, and the other students will be way ahead, so it’s like you’re always kind of behind and kind of always struggling. For me, it was like I just didn’t get it as fast as other students did, so I would be overwhelmed because there was other things I needed to get done...so I would be

rushing it, and then I would have to go back and redo it, and I never really got caught up.”

Several other students related similar stories or similarly expressed frustration with an instructional pace that was too fast for them.

Three other highly prominent themes from the discussion with group three were the importance of engaging, fun, and relevant lessons; teachers taking time for one-on-one instruction; and effective classroom management. Dora described her best teachers by saying they, “make it fun—make you want to learn it.” However, Evelyn added, “I think the teacher can be fun, but he also needs to know how to manage the classroom—how to keep all the kids in control.” One teacher Evelyn perceived as effective, “interacts with the students—doesn’t just hand you work and say, ‘Here you go.’ She actually works with the students and has fun with them.” According to Dora, the best teachers are “the teachers that give us one-on-one. They help us get it faster.” Chad expanded, “Like if I don’t understand something he will take the time to sit down and explain it to me and show exactly what to do.”

Like the students in the previous focus groups, these students also valued teachers who explain concepts clearly. Evelyn contrasted positive and negative experiences: “He gives you work and he sits there and goes through it with you and goes through it with you. ...Some teachers I have had class with, they just hand you the homework and expect you to know what you’re doing. That is not fun.” Dora explained this by saying, “Maybe [I do] not understand it the first time they go through an assignment, so they need to repeat and go over it again and go step-by-step, and I might pick it up faster. Then I

would know what I'm doing, but if they just explain it one time and just give you the assignment you struggle a lot more than that.”

The students in focus group three identified two new themes related to teacher quality. Students expressed that they valued teachers who provide opportunities for cooperative learning. Dora's explanation of the value of cooperative learning was, “It's like you get more out of it when you get another person to work with. They can help explain the project to you, and you can help them.” Several students expressed a belief that it is easier to ask for help from another student than from a teacher. Evelyn related, “I ask another student first and if they understand it and are willing to help—perfect! But, if they don't really know what they are doing, then I would go to the teacher.”

Additionally, there was significant discussion about the importance of teachers treating students fairly. Evelyn explained,

“Everyone needs to be treated with respect. It doesn't matter that they have an IEP or if they don't play sports. Doesn't matter. If you need extra help, they should get it, or if they are in this [resource] room and everyone else is in general ed. Just treat them the same.”

Dora added,

“Yeah. Like don't pick favorites. If you know and the teachers know that students are getting their work done and they really know what they're doing, and the other student is kind of struggling—Don't favor the student and say, ‘Well, this student got things done. Why aren't you getting things done?’ No, I don't like it when teachers do that.”

Chad agreed, saying, “Every teacher should treat every kid the same,” and, “Just have everyone feel the same...show that everyone is the same.”

Other Themes

The remaining common themes from the group's discussion were knowing students, caring about students, using hands-on approaches to learning, and clearly communicating expectations. Chad explained, "If they know you, they can help you," and later reinforced the statement by saying, "The teacher I'm thinking of, he did that same thing. He actually got to know everybody individually and their personalities, and I think that's what makes a good teacher." The teachers Chad viewed as effective engage students: "It's like you're doing something and you want to learn how to do it, and you can get involved with the project and not just stand back and watch people do it. You kind of get hands-on with it."

Finally, references were made by more than one student to the importance of a safe learning environment, as well as maintaining a clear focus for the learning. Dora explained, "I just don't want to feel like I'm stupid because teachers are more strict and they make you feel pressured [that] if you go ask them they'll be disappointed because you asked them about it because you should already know." Two students referenced the importance of teachers "stay[ing] on the subject" during class time. References to the importance of challenging students, pushing them to reach their full potential, using demonstrations to teach new concepts, wanting students to be successful, and providing additional reminders were all made by individual students during the focus group discussion.

Synthesis of Focus Group Data

Prominent Themes Across Focus Groups

An analysis of common themes across focus groups provides insights into the perceptions of students with disabilities regarding teacher quality. Two themes were highly prominent in all three focus groups: the importance of teachers making time to provide one-on-one instruction and using engaging instructional practices and materials. Three themes were highly prominent in two of the three focus groups: the importance of a caring relationship with teachers, clear explanations of concepts, and learning that is individualized.

Four other themes were highly prominent in one of the focus groups: knowing students as individuals, providing a safe environment for learning, making learning hands-on, and possessing effective management skills. Finally, two themes emerged from all three focus groups: maintaining a clear focus during class time and demonstrating a desire for students to be successful. In all, the students in this study identified eleven characteristics of highly effective teachers for students with disabilities:

- Makes time to provide one-on-one instruction
- Uses engaging instructional practices and materials
- Maintains caring relationships with students
- Explains concepts clearly
- Provides individualized learning
- Knows students as individuals
- Provides a safe environment for learning
- Makes learning hands-on
- Possesses effective management skills
- Maintains a clear focus during class time
- Demonstrates a desire for students to be successful

Focus Group Data in Comparison to Existing Literature

Because it relied on a similar process of asking students to recall exemplary teachers and describe them, the focus group data were compared to the conclusions of the Mowrer-Reynolds (2008) study. In comparison, there are some important similarities, as well as some important differences. The comparison between the two studies was complicated by the fact that several of the Mowrer-Reynolds characteristics of highly effective teachers are difficult to distinguish from one another, as well as the fact that they are difficult to define. It is important to note that the Mowrer-Reynolds study relied gathered data from university students in a teacher preparation program, while this study gathered data from high school students with mild to moderate learning disabilities.

Similarities. The high school students in the three focus groups identified five characteristics that are similar to the characteristics identified by the students in the Mowrer-Reynolds study:

- Caring, compassionate, and empathetic
- Makes subject matter clear
- Controls the classroom environment
- Provides help to students outside of class
- Communicates clearly

Each of these themes was either a consistent theme across focus groups or a major theme within one focus group in this study.

Differences. As a whole, the high school students in the three focus groups did not identify fifteen of the Mowrer-Reynolds characteristics:

- Warm, kind, friendly, sociable, familiar
- Fair, treat students equally
- Enthusiastic, excited about subject
- Organized

- Flexible, cooperative
- Patient, tolerant
- Humorous, funny, makes learning fun
- Easy to talk to, approachable
- Knows subject matter, has a wealth of information
- Knows how to motivate students, inspirational
- Entertaining, can hold the attention of the class
- Uses varied methods of instruction
- Creative, innovative, inventive, has fresh ideas
- Has high expectation, provides challenges
- Respectful of students, values their opinions

Each of these characteristics was identified as a theme throughout the focus group discussions, and elements of these characteristics are likely embedded in the major themes that emerged from the high school students' discussions. However, none of these themes was a common theme across groups or a major theme within one group.

Finally, students in the focus groups identified six themes outside of the Mowrer-Reynolds characteristics:

- Provides individualized learning
- Knows students as individuals
- Provides a safe environment for learning
- Maintains a clear focus during class time
- Makes learning hands-on
- Demonstrates a desire for students to be successful

Each of these characteristics emerged as a common theme across focus groups or as a major theme within one focus group in this study, but did not emerge from the Mowrer-Reynolds study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Teacher quality is a widely discussed topic in education. States, districts, schools, parents, and other stakeholders want to know how to measure, improve, and reward teacher quality. A major factor in the rise in interest about teacher quality is clear evidence that individual teachers are able to positively affect student achievement, specifically in relationship to students' standardized test scores (No Child Left Behind Legislation). Even a cursory look at statewide student achievement data reveals that students with disabilities are achieving at lower levels in comparison to their peers without disabilities.

In the present study, data were collected from sixteen high school students with mild to moderate learning disabilities through three focus groups. These data provided insights into the students' perceptions about and experiences with highly effective teachers. Students in each of the three focus groups were asked to respond to the prompt, "Thinking back on all the teachers you've had throughout high school, what characteristics did the best teachers have?" Data were analyzed inductively to draw conclusions about the perceptions of students with disabilities regarding teacher quality and compared to the results of the 2008 Mowrer-Reynolds study.

While several researchers have asked students to identify characteristics of highly effective teachers, their studies have focused on the perspectives of students without disabilities (Mowrer, Love, & Orem, 2004; Kennedy 2006 & 2008) or on the perspectives of university teacher preparation programs (Mowrer-Reynolds 2008). The following two

questions guided a study of students with disabilities' perceptions regarding teacher quality: (a) According to students with disabilities, what are the characteristics of a highly effective teacher, and (b) How similar are these perceptions to teacher characteristics cited in the literature on highly effective teachers?

Implications

Implications for Administrators

The insights from this study have clear implications for district and building level administrators. As an instructional leader, each administrator must ensure each teacher in every school is knowledgeable in skills and strategies that facilitate instruction that is personalized for individual students and centers around hands-on learning opportunities that are engaging, fun, and relevant. Teachers must understand the importance of and demonstrate a clear and consistent focus for instruction. This will undoubtedly require targeted, ongoing, and sustained professional development for each and every educator.

Administrators must identify and change systems that discourage or hinder teachers from having adequate time to provide one-on-one assistance for students who need additional support beyond the instructional period. Traditional school structures, such as schedules and adult needs and desires often get in the way of providing students with what they need to master the most critical concepts and skill sets. School administrators must be willing to initiate and follow through with changes that will likely be unpopular among some faculty in order to do what is in the best interest of students.

Additionally, administrators must foster a school climate that values getting to know students as individuals and demonstrating a desire for each and every student's

success within a safe and orderly learning environment. To do this successfully, administrators must possess these dispositions themselves, as well as act in accordance with them. Administrators will need to maintain a realistic perspective on the climate in their buildings, quickly and consistently identifying and removing barriers standing in the way.

Implications for Teachers

Similarly, the results of this study impact teachers. With an increasing focus on including students with disabilities in the general education curriculum, it is critical that every teacher be willing and able to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse body of learners. To meet the needs of each and every student, teachers must focus sharply on learners and their learning.

It is important that all teachers make time to provide one-on-one and individualized instruction for students who need supplemental instruction to master critical learning. They must explain complex ideas clearly and in multiple ways using fun and relevant instructional strategies that incorporate hands-on activities. Teachers must manage their classrooms effectively and efficiently and maintain a clear and consistent focus for learning. Many of these ideas represent significant shifts in instructional practices that have dominated American schools for centuries.

Additionally, effective teachers will need to work to establish and maintain caring relationships with students, getting to know each of them as unique individuals with unique educational needs. Effective teachers must believe that each and every child can and has the right to learn and be successful and ensure a safe and supportive classroom

environment for learning. Again, for many teachers in schools today, these ideas represent a significant paradigm shift.

Implications for Teacher Preparation Programs

Finally, teacher preparation programs must heed and act on the results of this study. As more and more veteran teachers retire and are replaced by novice teachers, institutions that educate the next generation of educators face a significant responsibility to train teachers who possess attitudes and demonstrate behaviors that will be effective for students with disabilities. Developing these skills and dispositions is a complex process that requires a carefully designed program with assessment and monitoring systems. Teacher preparation programs closely monitor and evaluate important behaviors and dispositions of pre-service teachers.

Today's pre-service teachers must possess depth of pedagogical and content knowledge and flexibility of practice that allows them to be all things to all students. They must understand their content in sufficient depth to be able to explain it in detail and in multiple ways. With this, future teachers must develop exceptional communication skills that allow them to explain concepts to students clearly. To accomplish this, teacher preparation programs must highly value content area learning, rather than relying on an often loosely-structured general education sequence to build essential content area expertise, as is the model in many current teacher preparation programs.

Pre-service teachers must design instruction that relies on engaging instructional practices and materials. The next generation of educators must be effective classroom managers who engage students in hands-on learning. To do this, instructors in teacher

education programs must demonstrate effective instructional practices. There must be a significant shift away from lecture courses to reflect pedagogy closely aligned with current promising practices.

It is critical that pre-service teachers believe in the importance of knowing students as individuals and fostering caring relationships with them, as they must provide individualized learning opportunities and support students with one-on-one instruction. They must believe that every child has the ability to learn and succeed. Those entering the teaching profession must believe in the importance of and know how to offer a safe environment for learning that targets a clear focus for learning. This requires undergraduate courses and experiences that shape theoretical understandings and beliefs about teaching and learning. To accomplish these goals pre-service teachers must engage in a combination of classroom and field-based experiences that allow them to interact with diverse groups of K-12 students and highly effective practitioners.

Further Considerations

Because the students in the focus groups only represent sixteen students from three schools, there are clear limitations to the results. All three schools are in close geographic proximity and represent schools with similar district demographics. The study only included students with mild to moderate learning disabilities who are included in the general education curriculum for at least half of a typical school day, therefore their experiences are likely much different than the experiences of students with more severe disabilities or disabilities of a different nature.

The responses of each focus group may have been influenced by the specific culture of the school the students attended and may not be representative of schools with different cultures and climates. For instance, it was clear from student responses that students in one school felt safe and supported, while students in another school were often afraid to ask for needed help. The responses from these two groups were influenced significantly by the culture and climate of the particular school. Finally, there is no way to ensure the perceptions and experiences related by the students are accurate and grounded in an unbiased perspective. Indeed, qualitative inquiry makes no claims to produce value-free knowledge (Glesne, 2006).

Finally, there was often a “group-think” dynamic that occurred in the focus groups. When an idea was introduced by a particular student, the other students tended to follow on the same topic. While this was beneficial for offering multiple perspectives on a one topic, the quantity of different topics may have been limited or directed by the individual students who spoke most often in the groups.

Suggestions for Future Research

A clear and consistent problem in the journey to understand and define teacher quality is a lack of clear definitions for key terms. The current literature on teacher quality widely uses terms such as behaviors, dispositions, pedagogy, personality, effective, and others with nebulous definitions. Studies that would offer distinct definitions, as well as examples and non-examples of these terms would be highly useful.

This study demonstrates that students with disabilities have a unique voice on teacher quality that is worthy of being heard. With that, additional studies including more

and different groups of students would be highly advantageous. For instance, a study that uses focus groups to elicit the perceptions of students with disabilities in large, urban schools would offer a perspective this study did not. It is likely the perceptions and experiences of the student from small, rural districts in this study are different than those of students in large and urban districts. Each of these perspectives is a valuable one that does not currently exist in the literature.

Similarly, studies that might draw from the experiences of different special education subgroups— i.e. physical disabilities, students with more severe disabilities— would offer important insights to the discussion as well. Again, using the same focus group methodology, a study focusing on the perceptions of students with physical disabilities or behavior-related disabilities would offer two more unique perspectives on the issue of teacher effectiveness as they relate to students with disabilities.

A study similar to this one that also elicits perceptions related to teacher effectiveness from non-disabled students would offer another viable means for understanding what makes a teacher effective through the eyes of a student with a disability. In essence, the perceptions of the non-disabled students would serve as a comparison group against which to compare the perceptions of students with disabilities.

Finally, studies that would elicit teachers' perceptions related to what special education student need from them would offer a rich comparison to students' perceptions. The focus group structure would also work for a study of this nature. Groups of general education teachers could be asked what they believe students with disabilities need from them and how those needs are similar to and different from the needs of the general

education population. Their responses could also be compared to student responses about teacher effectiveness.

Conclusion

Every student deserves to be educated by highly effective teachers. A society that values free and appropriate public education for all students must develop school systems that are filled with educators who meet each and every student wherever he or she is and teach that student in a way that allows for appropriate educational progress—both in terms of achievement and personal development. The increasing diversity within public school classrooms makes this a difficult task. To be effective, teachers must understand and value the unique needs of all students and adjust their practice to meet these unique needs.

Achieving this system in which each student has his or her needs met requires a two-tiered approach. Educators in the field must engage in ongoing and sustained professional development that allows them to build on their existing base of knowledge, skills, beliefs, and competencies to grow into teachers who are highly effective. Additionally, a new generation of teachers who possess the right skills sets and dispositions must be developed out of teacher preparation programs throughout the country. These future teachers must be professionals who possess deep content and pedagogical knowledge, as well as a wide array of effective instructional strategies.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Focus Group One

May 2009

Site: School Classroom

Participant Disability: All participants have mild or moderate learning disabilities

Male: Two

Female: Four

Total Participants: Six

Ages: Four 11th Grade Students and Two 12th Grade Students

<u>Code Name</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Ethnicity</u>
Elizabeth	12	female	white
Amy	11	female	white
Cory	11	male	white
Dewitt	12	male	white
Brenda	11	female	white
Felicity	11	female	white

Focus Group Two

May 2009

Site: School Auditorium

Participant Disability: All participants have mild or moderate learning disabilities

Male: Two

Female: Three

Total Participants: Five

Ages: Two 11th Grade Students and Three 12th Grade Students

<u>Code Name</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Ethnicity</u>
Cindy	12	female	white
Alison	12	female	white
David	11	female	white
Ben	11	male	white
Earl	12	male	white

Focus Group Three

May 2009

Site: School Classroom

Participant Disability: All participants have mild or moderate learning disabilities

Male: Two

Female: Three

Total Participants: Five

Ages: Two 9th Grade Students and Three 11th Grade Students

<u>Code Name</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Ethnicity</u>
Evelyn	11	female	white
Betsy	11	female	white
Albert	11	male	white
Chad	9	male	white
Dora	9	female	white

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP 1 TRANSCRIBED

DAVE: My name is Dave Smith. I am working on my Doctorate in Education and working on my dissertation, which is a big research project. The research I am doing is about defining the Characteristics of Highly Effective Teachers for students with IEPs. There is not a lot of research out there that goes directly to students and asks them what is important to them, what motivated them, or what helped, and what teachers they thought were the best. I am not concerned about names or anything like that. I am not trying to give an award to a teacher, but I want to dig down deep and look at the characteristics of what you think is important for you individually as a student, what helped you learn.

DAVE: This recording equipment is for me, but this is all confidential. I sent out all that paperwork and it probably looked pretty intimidating when you received it, but it is really just part of the process. This will be a very informal conversation. Once I get done talking here I will just ask questions and then I'll just ask you follow up questions. I'd like you to be as detailed as possible when you answer your questions. So if you would say one of your teachers is cool, I am probably going to follow up with, "What do you think is cool? What do you mean by cool?"

DAVE: So do you have any questions before we start? No? Ready to go? Ok just really informal and whatever you feel comfortable with answering. There are no right or wrong answers. I will just ask you questions and let you do all the talking.

DAVE: Ok – so just relax and have fun with this. I am going to start out by having you think back to your high school career and a great teacher you've have had. Not necessarily the name, but can you think about what made that person so great? Why that teacher stands out as a great teacher to you? Then we will talk about it a little bit.

BRENDA: This is really hard.

DAVE: Maybe just try and think of the best teacher you had. You don't have to be specific, but just the best teacher you have had. What makes this teacher the best teacher in your life?

FELICITY: Does it have to be in high school or can it be in our past like middle school/high school?

DAVE: Sure. Anytime in your educational career is fine.

BRENDA: Helping me when I am down. When I am down and need someone to talk to.

DAVE: Ok – So somebody who would listen?

AMY: Teacher who took the time to explain things. Made learning fun.

DAVE: Ok – can you give me an example as to how they made learning fun?

DAVE: Anyone can jump in at any time.

FELICITY: Like we weren't like stuck reading out of these books and stuff. They gave us projects to do and keep ourselves busy. So he lets you use computers and not stare at something like a textbook.

DAVE: Why do you think using computers was better?

FELICITY: I think the reason computers work better is that you are actually doing something, you're actually, and it's kind of hard to explain. It keeps your attention and makes you not able to fall asleep.

DAVE: So I heard you say – not just reading, but a computer and it sounded like you were saying that you are engaged because it is interesting to you? Can anybody else expand on that? Is that what the rest of you think?

DAVE: Going back and thinking about that teacher on my initial question. Just think through it a little bit more about a teacher who really connected with you and helped you learn. What is it specifically? Is there one thing that they did that helped you?

DAVE: Thinking back on that person, can you think about how they structured their classroom or the way they had it organized or set up?

FELICITY: Not everything was all messy like they had like they had like a 10 points like when we were supposed to have something done and if you weren't done you just move on. The room wasn't like messy and it was pretty well organized.

DAVE: Were you talking individually? That if you weren't done individually people were allowed to move on at different phases and steps or was it the whole class?

FELICITY: I guess we wouldn't like move on. I guess she would like give us more time, but usually just not done. She will let you finish it but you still do the next project on top of it.

DAVE: Why do you think that teacher did that versus saying, "No, you are done?"

DEWITT: To make sure we were grasping what we were doing.

DEWITT: Make sure we understood it before we moved on to the next step.

DAVE: Ok – so how would a teacher know that you understood?

AMY: Quiz

DAVE: And you think the teacher recognizes that you understood? How does that work? I heard that quiz is one way, but what other ways would the teacher know that you are getting it or that you are not getting it?

BRENDA: By showing frustration and the look on our face. Or if you are asking a lot of questions that shows that you don't really understand it.

DAVE: So you think the teacher picks up on that – your body language and your actions?

DAVE: So can you talk just a little bit more about that? Can you talk about why that is important?

BRENDA: It would be pretty hard to do stuff if they didn't understand, like communicate with them and stuff.

DAVE: Thinking back on that teacher that in your mind is one of the best that you have ever had to help you learn—What is it? If you can think of one thing that separated that teacher from other teachers? Just one thing – what would it be?

BRENDA: When I had a question – I could just come and ask her and she would help me one on one. Other teachers, they sometimes don't have time to do that because they have other students to deal with.

DAVE: OK good. What else?

AMY: If you need time to get it done, this teacher will help you get it done and the other teachers will give you like 5 minutes and then go on to the next student. So you don't have time to get it.

DAVE: So they give you extra time?

BRENDA: Like Mrs. Morgan, like if you, like if a teacher doesn't explain something very well you can come down here and she will help you. She will explain it to the point of where you understand what to do. This helps a lot and she will tell you that.

DAVE: Why does she do that? How does she know how to do that?

BRENDA: Because she will help us where we are.

FELICITY: And it's not like just Ms. Morgan, there is like Ms. Starbeck, Mrs. Evans, and Ms. Christian that help us. They go to our classrooms and if we have problems understanding what the teacher is saying we can go back to them and they can break it down and explain to us maybe a way that we could understand. Break it down step by step.

DAVE: So do these teachers you are talking about know you better than any other teachers?

FELICITY: Yep – they're around us more than probably the other teachers and stuff.

DAVE: I heard you say that they can adjust. Why are they doing that?

FELICITY: I think because it is to help us.

DAVE: How do you think they got to the point where they know your needs?

FELICITY: From being around us and helping us for the past years it kind of helps.

DAVE: But I would assume there are other teachers that you have spent quite a bit of time with that they don't all do that.

FELICITY: Yeah and we like have more time to be with them. Cause like before the other teachers have other students they have to help so they don't have time to do one on one with you. These teachers can do one on one with us.

BRENDA: Sometimes the other teachers don't know the other side of us.

DAVE: So when you say "the other side of you," what are you saying? Your personal side?

BRENDA: No – like our behaviors.

DAVE: Ok let's talk a little bit about behaviors.

AMY: Like I get really frustrated and I need the teacher to help me clam down.

BRENDA: Yeah – I get really frustrated too.

CORY: I actually get kicked out of class

DAVE: So that would be something like tolerance and understanding of what makes you ticked?

DAVE: I am going to keep going back to this question and just asking it in different ways and see if things pop up. What is your best learning experience been in school so far? Think back to a class, a teacher, or your best experience. Maybe a time you were excited about learning for a period of time. Or when you got something you felt really good about out of an experience in your classroom. Think about that and anything that pops into your mind.

FELICITY: Like Ms. Lightly, she had us read books and stuff for her class. I mean I like to read books but I like to read books that I like and these were more difficult books to read. As a freshman I had to read these books and blog on it instead of typical books that I would read so it opened my mind up more and learned that you are not going to be able to read everything you want to read. You are going to have to read what they want you to read.

DAVE: Why do you think they do that?

FELICITY: To help us understand like some words and we get the books to read it and understand the book. Help us to read because once we go to college it won't be books that we want to read. Your going to want be like, oh this is so boring, I don't want to read it.

DAVE: So, are you saying they challenge you a little bit?

AMY: Yeah.

DAVE: Can you think of an experience where the teacher really challenged you and you felt good about it? Or an experience where the teacher challenged you and you didn't feel good about it?

DAVE: Maybe it's high expectations. Can you think of a teacher who had high expectations?

FELICITY: I guess one of my main challenges is like standing up in front of the classroom and present in front of a bunch of people. Because when I get nervous I start to talk faster than what I normally would do. That was one of my biggest fears. I am still working on it, but it has gotten better.

DAVE: OK

DAVE: Anyone else? How do you learn best? What specially helps you learn best?

BRENDA: Hands on, computer, try being hands on as much as possible.

DAVE: Ok. Computer, quiet, hands on. Can you think of a situation where a teacher facilitated that?

BRENDA: We can usually come down here instead of going to class so we get the ability to have help here where it is quiet. Not like we get stressed out, like someone else is getting done before you. The teacher is here to help.

DAVE: Ok.

BRENDA: Testing we can come down here and sit where it is quiet.

DAVE: Why do you think that is so helpful?

DEWITT: If you have questions they are able to move at your pace. Instead of being in a big group where a teacher is talking to everybody.

DAVE: Ok.

DAVE: As far as when you are in a normal classroom vs. having one on one situation, do you feel differently about that?

BRENDA: UMMM Sometimes because sometimes if you ask a certain question and everybody else gets some people kind of jokes about it and thinks your stupid because she got it or something. It's kind of nice to ask one on one instead of in front of everybody because people make fun of you. They make fun of you and say we need to move on from this question. Or like people that don't care and understand.

DAVE: So in a larger group if you ask a question it may be intimidating?

AMY: Yeah

DAVE: You feel uncomfortable or bullied?

AMY: Yeah

DAVE: Ok so the opposite of that is when you're in a smaller group, I am assuming that you feel safe.

BRENDA: Yeah – not as afraid and more comfortable. You can get more in detail and not be as embarrassed when you ask a question like you would in a large group.

DAVE: Ok

FELICITY: Like maybe one on one maybe the teacher could explain how they got it instead of being in a large group and stuff.

DAVE: I want to go back to the high expectations. Just want you to think a little bit more. Why do teachers have high expectations?

BRENDA: They want to prepare you for life and college and getting jobs.

DAVE: Ok so you have teachers with high expectations here at this school?

BRENDA: Definitely.

DAVE: Can you talk a little bit about that? Can you help me as an outsider understand what that looks like in this school?

BRENDA: They just keep pushing; give you a nudge to get it done.

DAVE: Is that a good thing?

DEWITT: Yeah – definitely

DAVE: What else is a high expectation?

FELICITY: When they give us a project, they give us rubrics and stuff and they expect you to follow it and not do poorly on it. They expect you to do what they ask you to do. If you don't know you can't redo it.

DAVE: How about a teacher with low expectations?

FELICITY: I think it is kind of a bad thing because it is not showing you what it is like in college and stuff. Cause like in college they will expect you to do. In college they are going to press you to do and not give you that extra time to do.

BRENDA: We will have to do it and that is the way it's going to be. We have to show up for class.

DAVE: So I am hearing you say that it is helping you prepare.

BRENDA: Yes it is helping us prepare.

DAVE: Do you feel better about being in a classroom where teachers have high expectations?

FELICITY: Yes

DAVE: What do you do when you are in a classroom and you are discussing a subject you just don't get? Individually what do you do?

BRENDA: If they can't explain it to me then I will go and see my other teacher.

DAVE: And if the teacher in the classroom can't explain it to you and Ms. Morgan can, why do you think Ms. Morgan can?

BRENDA: Because she takes it slower and breaks it down for us and explains. She explains it in an easier way.

DAVE: Why do you think she does that?

FELICITY: Because she cares about us and doesn't want us to do it wrong.

DAVE: Does she do it the same exact way for all of you?

FELICITY: No

DAVE: Ok

DEWITT: So she knows a different way and she knows all about each and every student she has.

FELICITY: She won't let you move on until you know what your learning and stuff.

DAVE: This is a very specific question. All of you are on IEP so what I want to know is, in your opinion, what do you need that is different than a student that does not have an IEP? Your opinion.

FELICITY: For me – I need to be in a quiet place and not be around a lot of people because when I see them get done then I try to rush and get done so they don't get irritated waiting for you to get done. I just move at a different pace. We are on a different level.

DAVE: What do you mean by that?

BRENDA: Learning – they move faster than we do. They can comprehend faster than we can.

DAVE: So you need extra time, individual time, quiet time?

DAVE: Think of a teacher that was really hard to learn from and that you got very frustrated from. You don't have to say the name necessarily, but I am just wondering why it was so hard to learn from this teacher.

BRENDA: The teacher would teach a little and then jump and talk about his life and then teach some more. He never really stayed on the same subject.

DEWITT: He would help the big group and if you said you didn't understand he would joke and ask why we didn't understand it – everybody else got it. He went so fast that it didn't matter if anyone fell behind he was still going to go on to what he wanted to.

DAVE: Did that make you feel uncomfortable at times?

DEWITT: Yeah – I was stuck in the back and everybody else was understanding it, but I didn't want to stop and ask questions.

DAVE: Can you give me some other examples? Is there a teacher that was good to learn from in a class? Is there something that really bothers you about teachers in general that when you get in a classroom that just absolutely turns you off?

AMY: Different teaching styles of teachers. You go to one class and they teach you a lot differently than the last teacher. It throws you off.

DEWITT: Like when a math teacher teaches you something and then another teacher comes in and teaches you totally different. Frustrating.

DAVE: Are there classes that you have really struggled with?

CORY: Science

DAVE: Why did you specifically struggle in that class?

CORY: I didn't like Science. It's hard to understand.

DAVE: Can you explain what hard to understand is?

DEWITT: They go too fast, they don't take it step by step. Something you aren't interested in so you don't pay attention.

DAVE: Is there something that could change that in your mind?

DEWITT: Hands on.

DAVE: Hands on? What else?

DEWITT: Apply it to a broad majority that people like.

DAVE: So you think it is, maybe I am just reading between the lines here, but you would like them to apply it to what is happening in your life today?

DEWITT: Yeah

DAVE: Can anybody think of an example of how they could do this? That's kind of a tough question isn't it?

DAVE: Can you think of any other classes that you struggled in?

BRENDA: Math

DAVE: Specifically?

FELICITY: Algebra.

Unclear

DAVE: Ok what kind of games?

DEWITT: Math games. It makes you think. You can't use any calculator to like add problems up. You have to do it in your head.

DAVE: Good

FELICITY: Writing would be one too. For me it's really bad. My writing is not good. It used to be better but it is not now. I guess that would be a big problem for me.

DAVE: Think back to your favorite class, not necessarily teacher, but favorite class. What made it your favorite class?

BRENDA: Because I understand it better.

DAVE: What makes you understand it better?

BRENDA: Teacher doesn't teach. She let's you catch on. They teach you the directions.

DAVE: What else does the teacher do to help you?

FELICITY: Mr. Lubby gives us time to do it in class. He will walk around and make sure we get. And you can have session after school.

DAVE: With the teacher?

BRENDA: Yes one on one with the teacher.

DAVE: And that's helpful because?

BRENDA: If you don't get it they will explain it to you somewhere else or later. Otherwise you have no idea of what you are doing.

DAVE: What class is the best class you have?

CORY: Skills,

DAVE: Why?

CORY: Because you get to cook.

DAVE: So you like to cook. How about everybody else?

AMY: History because I like to learn what's in the past.

DAVE: What is it – the teacher that helps you or what?

Amy: He tells us stories and things. He relates it to his life. One time he when he went to college. He makes it fun and I understand it better.

DAVE: So he makes it more fun and interesting?

DAVE: Any other examples? I am really interested to hear about these classes.

FELICITY: English –

DAVE: English?

FELICITY: Yes

DAVE: Why is that?

FELICITY: They push me more. They push me to have a more open mind than the other classes do.

BRENDA: More organized and stuff.

DAVE: What did the teacher do to help you?

FELICITY: Made of blog on stories and stuff.

DAVE: Why is blogging important?

FELICITY: It helps with your writing skills. It helps you like, it lets the teacher know you are actually reading the book and finished it.

DAVE: Is blogging something new? Is that interesting to students?

BRENDA: No not really. I mean no, but it opens your mind more.

DAVE: What else did the teacher do in that class?

FELICITY: Visual aids. She would like us have our own notebooks and actually like write our own poems and stuff.

DAVE: You said movies about the books. What was helpful to you?

CORY: It was easier to understand.

DAVE: Why do you think that teacher choose to do that?

CORY: To understand it better. Make it more interesting.

DAVE: So I am trying to think what the teacher was thinking when they decided to use the movie. There is only so much class room time, but they were going to have you read the book and have you watch the movie. What do you think was their reasoning?

FELICITY: Like you picture how it would be and it was like totally different in the movie.

DAVE: If you had to craft a model teacher. What would that model teacher look like? Start from scratch and just for you individually. I would really like to go around and just have everybody design their own model teacher. Design a model teacher to help you individually. What would that look like?

AMY: Ms. Morgan.

DAVE: I know we have talked about Ms. Morgan quite a bit, but I would like you to go back and talk about why Ms. Morgan or that kind of teacher would be your model.

CORY: She helps us understand.

DAVE: Can you explain? How does she help you learn better?

CORY: Takes her time with us

CORY: She slows down

BRENDA: Helps us to graduate

DAVE: Why do you think she wants to help you graduate?

BRENDA: So we can be successful. So we can get on with our lives.

DAVE: Why do you think that is important?

FELICITY: Because she wants us to be successful.

BRENDA: She doesn't want to see us on the news or going to jail or anything like that.

DAVE: So, are you saying she cares about you?

CORY: Yeah

DAVE: So talking about teachers, is that important that the teacher cares about you?

AMY: Yep.

DAVE: Can you give me 4 or 5 characteristics of a model teacher?

BRENDA: Caring

DEWITT: Understands us

DEWITT: Personalization

DAVE: What else would be important? If you had one thing you wanted a teacher to be, what would it be?

BRENDA: Listening to what we have to say.

DAVE: Why is listening so helpful?

BRENDA: Sometimes you just need someone to listen to you.

BRENDA: Worries about us. Like if we do something wrong she worries about us.

DAVE: What else will help you. Sounds like that is kind of a personal thing. What else?

FELICITY: Like my journaling and stuff. Like if that person is hands on, like say if you have like a class and try to work with everybody with their skills, try to do some hands on or like project basis things or like, I can't think of what the other things are. Fieldtrips.

DAVE: Fieldtrips?

FELICITY: Yeah

DAVE: What are field trips important?

FELICITY: Like history, like go a place, like show us how everything has changed from back then to now and stuff.

DAVE: Excellent. What other ways.

AMY: Like – *unclear*

DAVE: Ok. Great. Great.

DAVE: What would the expectations of a model teacher be?

CORY: Time

FELICITY: Standard level

FELICITY: Like I expect you to do this and don't be too late.

BRENDA: Understanding and stuff

FELICITY: Helping me understand it the first time

DAVE: Let's go back to the worst teacher. What is it that made them the worst teacher you had?

CORY: Not sure

FELICITY: They never stick to the subject – they are always shuffling back and forth

One page to another

DAVE: So a good teacher would...

FELICITY: Stay on task, yeah.

FELICITY: If they were going to give a test, be sure to let us know what we are going to be tested on.

BRENDA: Give us a heads up.

DAVE: Why would they know to give you a heads up?

BRENDA: So to help you so you could maybe like actually pass the test instead of failing it.

AMY: It's like they don't want us to know what is going to be on the test. They are like "hey let's have a test next week" and don't tell us what it is about.

DAVE: Do you think they do that with some students? Or do you think they do that with all students?

BRENDA: Most of the students.

DAVE: How do they know how to do that?

FELICITY: Maybe give three tests or something to see how we are doing and what we are learning instead of one test and then move on.

DAVE: Last question:

DAVE: Best teacher – what does the best teacher mean to you?

DAVE: If someone gave you a piece of paper and asked what the best teacher means to you, what would you put on that paper?

FELICITY: I would say they would have to have respect for you

FELICITY: If they show you respect they will show respect back to them

FELICITY: Responsible

BRENDA: Wiling to help and trustworthy?

AMY: Trustworthy

BRENDA: If you told them something really important they would like not forget.

DAVE: When your sitting at a desk in a classroom and you are working on a subject that is really tough, what does that best teacher do to help you deal with it?

AMY: Shows us how to do it

BRENDA: Helps us

Amy: Gives us visuals

FELICITY: They want you to succeed and they want you to understand what they are doing.

DAVE: Anyone else? If you are frustrated, what is it that the best teacher does to help you?

DAVE: How do they know how to help, for you as an individual?

DEWITT: They know you

FELICITY: Try different ways to explain it until you understand. Keep explaining it and explaining it until you understand.

BRENDA: They explain it to me and then I would explain it back to them to be sure I get it.

DAVE: So they make sure you understand it?

DAVE: Ok so is there anything else that you want to talk about? Is there anything you think I should know when I go to write about a highly effective teacher? Is there anything else you want to talk about? Is there anything else you would like me to talk about?

DAVE: All right – well thank you so much. This is very, very helpful and I have a lot of work to do. I have to meet with two other schools. Please remember that all this information is very confidential, and I will not use your names at all. Once I have the notes I need, I will destroy the video and audio recordings too.

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP 2 TRANSCRIBED

DAVE: Thanks for agreeing to be here. I'm doing some research with students who are on IEP's. I'm trying to find out what students with IEP's think of their teachers, what the best teachers do—the characteristics of highly effective teachers from a perspective of students on IEP's. Then I am going to compare that to students that are not on IEP's. So all I am going to do is ask some questions, and I just ask you to just answer them as best you can from your perspective. There are no right or wrong answers. All this information will be held highly confidential. I am recording it a couple of different ways here but all I am going to do is take this information, work with my advisor, and crunch it into a big paper. This will be helpful information that I can share with other people and hopefully then we can improve education.

DAVE: I'd like you to start out by thinking a little bit about the best teacher you have ever had. I don't have to necessarily know the name of that teacher, but what I am trying to figure out is what it is that made that teacher so good? If you had to describe your best teacher, how would you describe the best teacher you've ever had?

BEN: I would say the best teacher does a little bit of everything: hands on, paper work

DAVE: Ok

ALISON: He takes the time to hear and see if you've got your assignments done and like if you didn't, then they are on top of it and gives you help, or to help if you don't understand them.

DAVE: You said they help you? And you said they take time for you?

ALISON: Yep

ALISON: They don't just throw it at you and not explain it to you.

DAVE: Ok. Good. What else?

BEN: Some students learn different ways, like paper work, ya know. And studying, studying, studying, so some of the students learn by actually doing it. Like a good teacher does all of them. All the different ways that students learn.

DAVE: So am I hearing you say that they provide it to you in different ways?

BEN: Yeah

DAVE: And why is that effective?

BEN: I stay more focused

DAVE: Ok

BEN: Because when it comes to reading and stuff like that—I don't like reading. I am not good at it.

DAVE: Ok

BEN: But when it comes like hands on, I catch it so much faster. And when they write it on the board and we take notes, I get it so fast.

DAVE: So it's like you have a unique learning style, and are you saying that the teacher...

BEN: The teacher would do both or do more than just one way.

DAVE: Ok. Why do you think a good teacher would do that? Anybody can jump in at anytime. Why do you think a good teacher would do that? In your mind, why do the best teachers do that?

BEN: Cause they know that students, you know, learn things different ways and so they just take that into their perspective.

DAVE: As far as knowing—teachers knowing that students learn in different ways—I hear you saying they know how you learn. What are your thoughts on that? Why do you think teachers know that? Why do you think they do that?

BEN: Just so you can have everybody learning it.

DAVE: How do they get to know that information?

BEN: I don't know. The teacher I have now I have had for 3 years so she's been here for a long time and she probably just over so many years – toward the beginning she might not have done that, but I don't know.

DAVE: So that has grown over time?

ALISON: They become more understanding.

DAVE: Ok – more understanding of you?

ALISON: Yeah

DAVE: Ok so they know you better?

ALISON: Yeah they learn your situation and then learn how to help you adapt to it.

DAVE: Can you talk a little bit more about that? I am seeing lot of heads shake.

DAVID: It's better when the teacher gets to know you and actually like takes the time to know you and know what how you learn.

DAVE: Because if they get to know you, then they can figure out what makes you motivated to learn better? It sounds like you're saying you have a relationship with your best teachers. Is that what you are saying?

BEN: Yeah. You can just say what you think about anything and you know that they are there to listen to you and they might help out if they can, and if not they are still there to listen. As long as you talk about it makes yourself feel better.

DAVE: So am I hearing you say that the best teachers are good listeners as well?

BEN: Yeah

DAVE: Let's say you are struggling with a subject. How does a great teacher help you through that? What do they do help to you when you are struggle?

BEN: Well they got to know that you are comfortable with them, otherwise you'll just sit there and not ask them because you think they'll say something, and you know they might yell at you or something. They got make you feel comfortable around you.

DAVE: Ok. Explain comfortable. Anybody can jump in.

ALISON: You have to like know that they can talk to you, and it's not going to be a problem and it's not really ... *unclear* ... like you don't trust them and know that you can go talk to them.

DAVE: So you feel like you can basically talk to them about anything and say anything?

ALISON: Right

ALISON: Yeah

DAVE: But yet you don't feel you feel like they are going to listen but think of you differently?

ALISON: Yeah

DAVE: Or think you are, you know, asking a bad question?

ALISON: Yeah, you're willing to learn.

DAVE: Do you feel like teachers who are not your greatest teachers or people who would think are not that great do they, do you feel the opposite to that? Where you might hesitate to ask a question?

ALISON: Yeah

ALISON: They like, if you go to ask or something, they seem like just all of sudden they just get upset, and they just blow up because they have taught the other students and they are getting it, but we don't get it right away, and they seem like they don't want to take the extra time to help us learn.

DAVE: Ok and how does that make you feel, do you hesitate to ask questions in class because of that?

ALISON: Yeah

BEN: Yeah and some

CINDY: With some teachers.

DAVE: We have talked about that fact that you all have IEP's. Do you think some teachers, because you have an IEP, treat you any differently?

ALISON: I think there are teachers that know and understand our IEP's, and they know why we have them and then they conform to them.

DAVE: So they know everything about your IEP?

ALISON: Right

DAVE: And they know what is supposed to happen with the IEP?

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DAVE: And so then they help you follow through with it?

ALISON: Yeah

DAVE: Ok – How do your best teachers manage their classrooms as far as control manage students, behaviors and different things like that or expectations or things like that?

DAVE: And again there is no right or wrong answer, so it is whatever comes to your mind.

ALISON: Structure – they have it planned out. They start right away; you don't let kids and get rowdy and stuff.

CINDY: You have to know all the kids and know which ones are the loud ones and which ones cause trouble. Know which ones are going to get loud and kind of goof ball.

DAVE: What does a good teacher do to handle that situation to help you?

CINDY: I think at first just talk to them and then they go to their ... *unclear* ... or get extra homework.

ALISON: Or if it gets to the point, like separating and assigning seats.

DAVE: What is your best learning experience been in high school? What is your best learning experience that you can think of? Think of a classroom or situation when you just felt really good about what and how you learned. Just try to think back. Does somebody have an example of something?

DAVE: Doesn't have to be maybe your best one, but a good learning experience. After that class you felt really good about what you learned. Can anybody think of an experience?

DAVE: How about a bad experience? Can you think of a bad experience? A terrible class where you didn't learn anything? You were frustrated after the class?

ALISON: Yeah – like we've gone to classes where we just get thrown a worksheet and then get put in a movie and we are supposed to sit and watch this movie and answer the questions on this worksheet, and it ends up having nothing to do with the chapter, or it kind of does but it barely relates to it at all. And then the next day take the test.

DAVID: Yeah

ALISON: And then like the chapter test would be the next day, so instead of spending the day, where we should have probably been studying over our chapter, we are watching a movie.

DAVE: Ok – I am hearing you say that maybe you're doing stuff that's not relevant to what you're being tested on and that frustrates you. What would a good teacher do in that situation?

ALISON: They'd like go over the material that we learned in the chapter the day before our test to get us prepared for the test and to let us know what is on it, so we can do better.

DAVE: And you think that is what would help you the most?

ALISON: Yeah

DAVE: Ok – Can you think of any other experiences that you have in high school that we're just not so good?

CINDY: When they make us talk in public and in front of the class. We have no idea what to say.

DAVE: So they give you an assignment and tell you to go up and talk in front of the class?

CINDY: Yeah – they give you a couple of days and you have no idea what you are doing.

DAVE: Why do you think it is you don't have an idea of what you are doing? What does the teacher do or not do to?

CINDY: She just doesn't explain enough or like doesn't give you enough time to prepare.

DAVE: So what would the best teacher, a model teacher, do in that situation?

CINDY: I guess just give you like some time and kind give examples or explain better.

CINDY: Talk to you individually and make sure that you are progressing in your speech or whatever you have to do.

DAVE: Ok- individually? Do other people feel that way too?

CINDY: Yeah

DAVE: Can you talk about an experience or can you think of a time where you have had a teacher who has helped you and done things individually or one on one? Does anybody have any experience like that?

ALISON: I know it happens a lot in math class, a teacher will come over and actually help work through the problem. Sometimes in science kids like get smart and need explanation.

DAVE: And that is helpful?

ALISON: Yeah

DAVE: And why is it helpful?

ALISON: Because they like actually break stuff down for you and put it like in smaller terms than they were probably using up in front of the class.

DAVE: Why do you think they break it down for you?

ALISON: Just so like I could have a better understanding of it.

DAVE: Do you think it's just for you?

ALISON: Maybe, but I see a lot of them do it for everybody else.

DAVE: For lots of students?

ALISON: Yeah

DAVE: Ok. How about the rest of you? Have you had experiences like that?

DAVID: Probably like when I am mostly like in English or stuff. Like there's one teacher we have she always like really explains everything. Like she writes it.

DAVE: And that's helpful when she breaks it down and explains things to you?

DAVID: Yeah

DAVE: How do you learn best? Just in learning in general. If you had a dream teacher, what is it that they would do to help you learn the best? What is going to help you learn the best?

CINDY: I know when like I have a test or something writing it down helps me do it or.

It's just me and a teacher talking about it helps more than ...

DAVE: When you have one on one time with the teacher?

CINDY: Yeah or like by myself. When I am in a group and we are trying to study together. I don't really get it as well as just me and a teacher.

DAVE: So is there anybody else that would agree that just doing one on one time with a teacher is beneficial?

DAVID: Yeah

DAVE: Why do you think that? Again we have kind of touched base on that, but why do you think that is so beneficial?

DAVID: Cause some people don't like to ask questions. Yeah, in front of a large group.

DAVE: So you, some people might feel intimidated?

DAVID: Yeah.

DAVE: I'm seeing your body language and thinking that maybe you ask a question and somebody just might laugh or something?

DAVE: What do you do if you are in a class and you just are not getting it? We've kind of touched based on that and I have asked that question, but I wanted to go back to that. What do you do if you're just not getting it in a class and you need help? What is the first thing you do?

ALISON: I normally just like try and try and follow the rest of the class and then like if I need help later on I go to the resource teacher and ask for help and then if they can't explain it go back to classroom teacher like after class.

DAVE: You picked out the resource teacher. Why do you pick out the resource teacher?

ALISON: Cause then it's a lot of one on one. You're not in the whole group setting.

DAVE: So do you feel more comfortable with the resource teacher than you do with the other teachers?

DAVID: I think it is just because it's not in front of everybody else. But Mrs. Bengston does actually take the time like she makes sure you like know it. She will sit there and see that you get it.

DAVE: She wants you to do well? Why does she want you to do well?

DAVID: Cause she actually like cares. A lot of the other teachers don't.

DAVE: How do you know she cares?

DAVID: Cause you can just tell. She acts different. She just likes actually asks questions, and she makes you study all the time and she kind of looks at your grades all the time.

DAVE: So it seems like she knows you pretty well.

DAVID: Yeah she actually gets to know you. She knows all of us probably like really good.

DAVE: You said that she cares about you.

DAVID: Yeah

DAVE: How do you know that?

DAVID: You can just tell when a teacher cares and when they don't care.

DAVE: What does a teacher that doesn't care do?

DAVID: Like if you fail a test they just don't really care for the next time you take a test. They don't work with you more or anything.

DAVE: And the best teachers do work with you more? And they do care?

DAVID: Yeah especially if they know if you're like failing in that subject.

DAVE: So am I hearing you say they might follow up or talk with you or do something?

ALISON: Yeah. Good teachers take time to not only know what is going on with you here at school, but like your outside of school life. Like if your family member is sick or something she will take the time to actually sit down and talk to you about it. She has a lot of experience herself with helping and being sick and stuff.

DAVE: Good. How about high expectations? Somebody earlier talked a little bit about expectations but are high expectations good?

ALISON: To a certain point like you don't want a teacher to give you expectations so high that don't think their meetable at all.

ALISON: Maybe. I don't know like writing papers and stuff. Take a bit longer, so like if the classes are due in like—sometimes like they are due in a week, and some of us need extra time to write to like their expectations need to be a little bit lower, and maybe like give us more time or something.

DAVE: Good. What else is there?

ALISON: Good teachers have an expectation that like fits you. Like you don't try to push you, but they push you well enough that you can meet your goals.

DAVE: So they push you individually? How do they know how to push you?

ALISON: They just do by knowing us and seeing how we have done our work.

DAVE: When we are talking about pushing you, does that mean they are encouraging you?

ALISON: Yeah

DAVE: And we were talking levels—Levels meaning like your learning pace, your speed, what it takes to motivate you?

ALISON: Yeah, like the speed at which we can do certain things. Like we could probably all write great papers, it's just the amount of time that we get to write them.

DAVE: Sure, yeah. We talked earlier about different techniques that teachers use to help you individually. Does anybody have any examples of that?

DAVID: Well, my favorite is like we have in English. We get a lot of essays and sometimes it's like hard to understand like what we're writing about—like the topics and stuff. So like if you know your topic, you're writing about then it's easier, but if you don't then it's kind of hard to do.

DAVE: Ok.

DAVID: I'm just like breaking stuff down to like learning it like slowly like in pieces, not like altogether.

DAVE: So you think the best teachers can break things down into smaller pieces?

DAVID: Yeah, they take enough time to just actually teach you.

DAVE: And why do you think they take the time to teach you individually?

DAVID: Well because they just care.

DAVE: Yeah, they care. With some of these questions we keep coming back to the same thing, but I am just trying to make sure I am on the same page.

DAVE: Now think of a class that you really struggled in. Think of that class that is the toughest class for you and think of the teacher. Why do you think you struggled in that class so much?

ALISON: They just explain like as a whole instead of maybe a one-on-one work, or they explain and expect you to do a worksheet on it, and then it just ... or they don't even take the time to look over the chapter with you at all; they expect you to read it.

DAVE: So you're saying that they don't really connect with you?

CINDY: Yeah you don't want to just sit there and read a book and then take a test. It's going to be boring and you're just probably going to fall asleep. Most kids probably would fall asleep.

DAVID: Lose interest – it keeps your attention better if we have stuff to relate it to.

ALISON: Stuff related to and have more fun.

DAVE: What kinds of things could help you have more fun in class?

CINDY: Like in history, teacher would like have us have like games like bingo and stuff. Actually try and memorize it. Like vocabulary words and have fun different ways.

DAVE: So you're saying something different than just your traditional reading it and then memorize it?

CINDY: Yeah

DAVE: Are there other activities that teachers have done that are interesting?

ALISON: Like some teachers find like different quizzes on the internet or almost like a game where you have to do certain things to get to the next level.

DAVE: Ok

ALISON: Sometimes that's ok. I don't know if understood like that, but it's something different.

DAVE: What is it that you would like? Not to put you on the spot. How about anybody? Is there something that you just think – this is how I learned the best? If you had to answer that what would it be?

ALISON: Like not having to read it like myself. Like maybe take the extra time to read it to me.

DAVE: So somebody who would read it to you. Jacob, he was saying something about doing it in different ways versus just reading it or seeing it. Is that anybody else? Is it better to see something?

ALISON: Yeah it's a lot easier to understand if you see it and you if you do something like hands-on, like Jacob was saying. You something hands on normally it helps.

DAVE: So hands-on experience is important versus just sitting and book work?

ALISON: Yeah.

DAVE: What is one thing that you say that you are just not getting? Getting this from a teacher that would really help me. Can you think of something? Something that if you were to receive or if a teacher did just a little bit different that would really help you a lot?

ALISON: Like actually take the time to look over tractors and explain them. Pick out the important parts and maybe go over those a little more in-depth than the rest of the chapter. Instead of like just worksheets.

DAVE: Anything else?

DAVE: If we had to craft a model teacher, what would that teacher be like? What words would you use to describe that teacher? Start throwing out some words that you think would describe a model teacher. Just think of the best teacher in the world or hopefully one you have had and how would we describe a model teacher?

ALISON: Caring

CINDY: Understanding

DAVID: Patient

DAVE: I'm going to back to this one. What does understanding mean to you?

DAVID: By going slower. How fast you learn stuff and how long it takes. Like if you take and you're going slow on your assignment and everyone else done but you're still going, and they understand that it takes you longer.

DAVE: So the teacher understands your learning and what you need individually? Is that what I am hearing you say?

DAVID: Yeah.

DAVE: And will adjust accordingly?

DAVID: Yeah.

DAVE: And caring you said?

ALISON: Yeah like they know if someone or something is bothering you.

DAVE: So bothering you personally possibly?

ALISON: Yeah it may not have anything with school.

DAVE: But they, a caring teacher, would pick it out?

DAVE: Ok. How do you think they would pick it out?

ALISON: Just like figure a student that normally works on something and normally works pretty hard in class, and then you come one day, and he doesn't want to do anything. They'd like come and ask you what is wrong, and try and help you.

CINDY: They try to help you get through it.

DAVE: Whatever it might be, so they know you somewhat personally and take the time to communicate with you and try to help?

ALISON: Yeah.

DAVE: Ok you said patience.

DAVID: Kind of like it goes along with understanding, like if it takes longer on an assignment or a test and your like patience, and they don't get mad because it is taking so long, and if it takes you longer for you to learn.

DAVE: Ok what other characteristics would the best teacher have?

ALISON: Experience. Like they've dealt with more than one student like maybe with an IEP or maybe different situations. They've done it more often.

ALISON: Maybe they have taught longer and understand more.

DAVE: How about some more? The best teachers.

CINDY: Like funny, and they like to joke around with the kids and make it fun and not too serious, so we can just, so it can be just relaxed.

DAVE: Joke around with the kids? What do you mean by fun?

CINDY: Yeah, like just having fun and not just things being too serious. The kids just get bored. Some of the teachers like joking around and kind of be like one of the kids, and but still like the adult, and it's fun and you learn.

DAVE: When teachers joke around do you think they joke around with students because they just joke around, or do you think it's because they know them better?

CINDY: Yeah like they know the kids they joke around and stuff.

DAVID: They know it's not going to bother like them.

DAVE: How would they know that?

DAVID: I guess like they know you and they have joked around with you before, and they know your reaction and stuff. They have seen the way you react in class or around your friends.

ALISON: Like they see your characteristics and stuff and like how you react to things and react to others.

DAVE: Ok, so they know you personally.

DAVID: Yeah that's pretty much all it comes down to—like the relationship and like how well they know you. That really means a lot.

DAVE: How about the best teachers related to organization? Somebody said it earlier and I didn't come back to it, but just talking about characteristics, is organization an important characteristic or not so important?

DAVID: Yeah I would say so.

DAVE: It is?

DAVID: Yeah.

DAVE: Why do you think that?

DAVID: Because like if they forget that you have a test that day, and like you know some of that stuff like that.

DAVE: Ok. How about communication? I wrote down communication earlier too.

ALISON: You have to be able to feel like you can talk to your teachers and that they are not going to be put out, or like they are not going to care, and you have to be able to have that feeling.

DAVE: Why do you think that is so important?

CINDY: Because like if you don't have a relationship with them you are not going to want to talk to them about anything. Or like if you have a question and you don't understand something and you are getting frustrated, you can't just be yourself if you don't have a relationship and be open with the person.

ALISON: If you need help and you don't feel comfortable with telling teacher that you need to go take a test and have it read to you and then you don't get the help and you do as well.

DAVE: Excellent that was good. Are there any other characteristics you can think of? I mean just think of that person who really helped you and made you feel good and helped you get through a difficult subject in class. Is there anything else that somebody would do?

DAVID: I'd say reliable.

DAVE: What do you mean by that?

DAVID: You know – they're going to be there and help you when you need it.

DAVE: And you mean the other teachers aren't? Because not all of them help you?

DAVID: Well yeah, not all of them care enough.

DAVE: Do you think they don't care enough? Is that connected to them not knowing you? Or is there just not the interest?

DAVID: Probably a little bit of both.

ALISON: The teachers that take the extra time—like say you needed to stay after school—and they are ok with that, and they're going to do their best to help you more if you need it.

DAVE: Ok. Good. How about the environment you are in? We talked earlier about—I think the word stupid came up—when you're afraid to ask a question. What do the best teachers do to help so you don't have to worry about that? So you feel better about asking questions?

ALISON: They let you answer when you feel comfortable. They don't just like pick on you, and say like "You need to answer this." They don't push you.

DAVE: Going back to the comfortable thing, the opposite of that would be to make you feel uncomfortable, I would assume?

ALISON: Yeah.

DAVE: So is that something that's important to you? How you feel in a classroom?

ALISON: Yeah.

DAVE: Can you explain that?

CINDY: Like if a teacher just asks you a question, and they know that you don't know the answer, and they are just trying to embarrass you because you know. You feel uncomfortable, and the teacher is just going to say something like, "Pay attention." Not just embarrass you or make you feel uncomfortable. You aren't going to want to talk to them or say anything in front of the class.

ALISON: Like teachers force you to read out loud in class and a lot of us don't like to do that. Like they actually like have you raise your hand, and then they call on you to read. You have to feel comfortable to read.

DAVE: So they must know you to know that aren't going to call on you because you might feel uncomfortable about that.

CINDY: I have to leave to go to work.

DAVE: That's ok, that's ok. Thank you very much.

DAVE: So just a couple more questions, but thinking back on your favorite class, what is your favorite class?

DAVID: I don't really have a favorite class I'd say but probably resource room. It's not like a class, but like she helps me the most out of everybody.

DAVE: What does she do to help you the most?

DAVID: Well she just actually like takes the time to make sure you know everything. Like she makes sure that you know before you take the test or move on so.

DAVE: So how does she know how to do that is?

ALISON: Yeah she I mean she does, she has that relationship with us.

DAVE: And she knows you?

ALISON: Yeah she does.

DAVE: What's your favorite class?

EARL: English.

DAVE: Why is that your favorite class?

EARL: She makes it kind of fun for us.

DAVE: Can you think of something specific that she does to make it fun?

EARL: She explains it really good.

DAVE: Why do you think she does that?

EARL: Cause she actually goes through it and gets in-depth a little bit more than other teachers do.

DAVE: Does she do the same thing for all students or doe she do anything different for students?

EARL: Sometimes different for all the students?

DAVE: Why do you think that is?

EARL: Not sure.

ALISON: I don't necessarily have a favorite class, but like classes where we take time to like relate stuff we are doing to the actual present day or like what's going on in the world, so we can connect to us so it's not just another piece of material were learning.

DAVE: Last question. Think of a class that you just really don't like. Why is it you don't like that class? You don't have to say any name of the teacher or the class, but just why is it you don't like the class?

ALISON: We just get stuff thrown at us and like movies or I don't know, just stuff that has nothing to with what we're actually learning.

DAVE: So it's not relevant?

ALISON: It's not on topic; it's not relevant.

DAVE: It doesn't necessarily engage you because it's not something that's really important or exciting to you?

ALISON: Yeah, and it's not interesting or it doesn't catch our attention.

DAVE: Ok. How about you guys?

DAVID: I'd probably say math because it kind of like I have never liked math, and it's just from day one I have never liked it, so I just kind of gave up on it so or English. I don't like English either.

DAVE: Ok, is there anything specific teaching-wise that could have been different to help you?

DAVID: Probably in elementary school when I never got it, and I just—it just comes back to that I was too scared to ask questions in front of the whole class, so I just kind of gave up.

DAVE: You were scared back then because you were afraid that you didn't...

DAVID: Yeah I just thought I would be wrong. I was always bad in Math, and I didn't want to be wrong in front of everybody.

DAVE: Why didn't you want to be wrong?

DAVID: I didn't just didn't want people to think I was stupid.

DAVE: Yeah, that's understandable.

DAVE: How about you?

EARL: Science – same reason she said. Didn't get it.

DAVE: Didn't get it?

DAVE: Now you said the same as her, does that mean at some point were you uncomfortable to ask questions?

EARL: Yeah.

DAVE: Were you worried about what would happen if you did ask a question and it was wrong?

EARL: Yeah.

DAVE: Well is there anything else? I am trying to craft this model teacher and this is your chance to help me, so is there anything else that you can think of? If you could just shake a magic wand and have the best teacher in the world of you individually, what would that person be like?

DAVID: Well another thing that I think would be a good idea, it's really with the teachers, but have smaller classrooms. Cause if you have big classrooms the teacher isn't going to take time to help you, because they have so many other students, so if you have like a little class they would probably pay a little more attention to you and maybe like the kids wouldn't feel so stupid asking questions. Building relationships would be easier then too.

DAVE: If you had a smaller classroom it would be easier to build a relationship?

DAVID: That would be a lot better, yeah.

DAVE: And am I hearing you say, or reading between the lines here, but am I hearing you say that if there's a smaller classroom then the teachers would get to spend more time with you?

DAVID: Yeah and actually take time to answer your questions, and if you don't get it they would just work with you.

DAVE: And if it was working with you directly it would be one-on-one and it might eliminate some of the fear?

DAVID: Yeah

DAVE: Ok.

DAVID: And just even asking questions in front of everybody. There's not that many people in there; they might not get so nervous.

DAVE: So, when you're in a one-on-one situation, what is it about that one-on-one situation that makes you feel more comfortable or better?

ALISON: You know that it's just between you and the teacher, and it's not you and the rest of the class and the teacher. And then only that teacher knows like what you don't understand.

DAVE: So then you don't feel hesitant to ask questions?

DAVE: Thank you for your time. I know you're busy, and I know you're winding down with the school year. This is some very important information for me, so I am glad you chose to do it.

APPENDIX D:

FOCUS GROUP 3 TRANSCRIBED

DAVE: My name is Dave Smith. I am working on my Doctorate at UNI and the last thing I have to do is a dissertation. I have to write a long paper and I have to do some research. I am writing about the characteristics of highly effective teachers. I am trying to find out from students that are on IEPs what their perceptions of highly effective teachers are. There is some research out there that talks to adults and talks to students that are out of school, but I want to actually to talk to students that are in school so I'm going around to different schools in the area and asking a bunch of questions and getting some really good information. You're going to contribute to improving education in Iowa and to making better teachers. This recording system here is just to record this session so we can go back and type it up. Everything that I record in our conversation is confidential. It will go in the paper that I write, but I won't use any of your names. After this is all done, I will destroy the video and audio recordings.

DAVE: Really, what I need from you is for you to talk and be open and honest. Tell me what your true feelings and thoughts are about teachers. We going to talk about good teachers and bad teachers, and I am going to ask you a lot of follow up questions to make sure I clearly understand what you have said.

DAVE: Whatever comes to your mind, feel free to say it. There are no right or wrong answers here, so just have fun.

DAVE: The first thing I am going to ask you to do is to think of the best teacher you have ever had. Take a second and think about the best teacher you have ever had. What is it about that teacher that made that person the best teacher?

BETSY: Made the class fun and not boring. Did a lot of activities. Don't just sit in the class and learn about it.

DAVE: What kind of activities?

BETSY: Health. We'll do flyers or pamphlets or papers that we would like to get creative with it and get credit for class.

DAVE: So that would be different than ...

BETSY: Just sitting at a desk taking notes.

DAVE: Ok. So he made it fun and interesting?

DAVE: Ok what else?

EVELYN: Interacts with students. Doesn't just hand you work and say, "Here you go." She actually works with the students and has fun with them.

DAVE: What do you mean by "works"?

EVELYN: I mean he gives you work, and he just sits there and goes through it with you, and he goes through it with you.

DAVE: Are you talking one on one or with the whole group?

EVELYN: Like the whole group. Some teachers I have had class with they just hand you the homework and expect you to know what you're doing. That is not fun.

DAVE: So this teacher you're talking about explains things very well. The teacher is constantly working with you?

EVELYN: Yes.

DAVE: Ok – good. What else?

DAVE: Think of a great teacher you have had that really helped you. Don't think about what helps everyone else. Just think about what helps you. What helps you?

ALBERT: Projects.

BETSY: Not like thousands of worksheets. Watch videos, like not boring videos, but good videos that we actually learn from.

DAVE: Give me an example of like a project that is good.

ALBERT: Not sure.

DAVE: Why do you think projects are better?

ALBERT: Mostly because it can be done with another person, and we get to talk to each other and help each other.

DAVE: Versus the other thing you were saying? The worksheets where you do it by yourself?

DORA: Like it's like you get more out of it when you get another person to work with. They can help explain the project to you, and you can help them.

DAVE: Ok.

DORA: All of them like just read a book and do worksheets constantly, and it's boring, and its fun when you get to do your stuff that is kind of different, like projects and stuff like that.

DAVE: So working with others students, small group work, and collaboration rather than just sitting at your desk doing it yourself? Your saying the teacher allows you multiple opportunities to do other things other than just sit and read or write?

DORA: Yeah.

DAVE: Think about how you learn the best. What does a teacher do to help you learn the best?

DORA: Makes it fun. Makes you want to learn it.

DAVE: Give me an example of what you mean by "makes you want to learn."

BETSY: He makes interesting. Like in Health, like he will give percentage, and you're like shocked by it. He makes it like fun to learn it and want to learn it. Some classes you are like, you just don't want to listen.

EVELYN: He jokes around with it and makes it fun.

DAVE: Is there anything else?

DAVE: How about how the teacher runs the classroom? Is there anything related to classroom management that is important for the best teachers?

EVELYN: I think that the teacher can be fun, but he also needs to know how to manage the classroom. How to keep all the kids in control. Say, like yesterday, we had a teacher next door that could not keep control of the students at all, and it was really annoying.

DAVE: What does that kind of classroom look like to you?

Chad: It's out of control.

DAVE: So a good teacher is going to keep control. What does keeping control mean?

EVELYN: Joke around to an extent, but not going so far that it's really, really loud and other students in other classrooms can hear, and they can't concentrate because you are being loud. Keep fun, but keep it quiet too. Have fun, but don't have too much fun.

DAVE: How do they know how to cut it off or when to change?

ALBERT: When it gets too loud and people are messing around. When you get off task, and it gets on other things than what we are working on.

DAVE: So that's just a natural sense that teachers have, you think?

DORA: Yeah, because some teachers do, but others can get off task. You can't even talk about the subject, or a teacher that has fun with it can stay on the subject and doesn't get completely out of control.

DAVE: I heard you say some teachers do it and some teachers don't have that good of control.

DORA: Yeah.

DAVE: And I heard you say it's very important that teachers have that control.

DAVE: Thinking of that model teacher we are talking about, how does that teacher differ from other teachers you can think of? How does that teacher, in your mind, that model teacher, that best teacher, differ from other teachers?

BETSY: He's just so like nice and helpful. I've known him since I was in 7th grade, but like I just know him, and I guess that maybe helped. Cause he deals with you after school too, so you get to know him, and he's just like super nice and fun to be in class with.

DAVE: You said he gets to know you better than any other teacher, is that correct?

BETSY: Yeah.

DAVE: Can you guys talk about that? Does anybody else have that same idea of a teacher?

BETSY: Yeah.

DAVE: Can you explain that? What that means to you? What that looks like to you? Or an example?

EVELYN: The teacher I am thinking of, he did that same thing. He actually got to know everybody individually and their personalities, and I think that is what makes a good

teacher instead of a teacher that goes, “Oh they are all just going to act the same.” This teacher knew everybody by their own personalities, and just it worked out that way and he was way cool to everybody and never picked favorites.

DAVE: You said some teachers pick favorites?

BETSY: Like if there is a coach that is a teacher, then obviously they like have one of their athletes in there, they are going to be like, “You’re my favorite student cause your like really good in my sport,” and they like you because you’re athletic.

DAVE: So the teacher your thinking about doesn’t pick favorites?

BETSY: No. Even though he is the coach, he loves like everybody in the class, and he is so nice, and he doesn’t have favorites.

DAVE: And you were saying that he gets to know everybody? Can you expand on that a little bit?

EVELYN: It’s just, I don’t know why I think it’s important. I just think all the teachers should think of everybody as their own individual person not just as the whole group as one person. I mean it just should be that way.

BETSY: Then you leave people out if you don’t think that that teacher is not going to like you if you’re not his favorite. I am going to get a bad grade because I am not his favorite, and he doesn’t do that like.

DAVE: How do you learn best? Think about when you’re in a classroom or certain subject. What helps you learn the best?

ALBERT: See someone do it first.

BETSY: When they show us how to do and we have examples of what to look off of.

DAVE: Ok. Example. Someone shows you. What else?

DORA: Hands-on. Yeah, hands-on.

DAVE: What does hands on look like to you guys?

CHAD: Like, it’s like you’re doing something, and you want to learn how to do, and you can get involved with the project, and not just standing back and watching people do it, and you kind of get hands on with it and learn how to do different things.

DAVE: So participate yourself instead of sit and watch or sit and listen?

CHAD: Yeah.

DAVE: Anything else, any other ways that you learn the best?

DORA: Like projects. Like building stuff and like putting hanging pictures on posters instead of taking notes off the projector and stuff and doing book work.

DAVE: What do you do if you are in a classroom and your struggling and you just don't get it? What do you do next?

ALBERT: Ask for help.

DORA: Sometimes it's easier to ask other students. It's easier for me personally to go ask another student. From the student's point of view I can get that easier, and if I just don't get it, then I will go to the teacher about it, but ...

DAVE: Other ideas? What do you do if you're frustrated and you just don't get it? What do you do?

EVELYN: Most of the time I do like Dora does. I ask another student first and if they understand it and they are willing to help that is perfect! But, you know if they don't really know what they are doing then I would go to the teacher.

BETSY: Or if I am struggling I just put it down and look at something else, and then I look at it again, and if I don't I will just go to the teacher.

DAVE: Do you go to the teacher individually?

EVELYN: If we both are working on something, say Betsy and me are working on math and we don't understand, we both go up there at the same time.

DAVE: Good. Any other ideas?

DAVE: How about high expectations? Are high expectations important in quality teachers and the best teachers? Should they have high expectation or is that not important?

EVELYN: I don't really know what that means.

DAVE: Can anybody explain what high expectations mean to you?

CHAD: What they expect out of you kind of. What they hope to get out of you pretty much. Like let's say if they want you to do all your homework. That's like one of their high expectations because they want to see you do all your homework.

DAVE: So does that fit in anywhere?

DORA: I think like yeah, they should have some high expectations, but like others they shouldn't set them too high because we don't reach them, like you don't want to upset yourself, and set the expectations so high. Set them high enough, but not too high.

DAVE: How do you teachers know that?

DORA: Knowing your students. If you think the student can handle it and get their stuff in and stuff like that then set the goal a little higher, but not set it too high. So they can reach it and it not too far for them to reach.

DAVE: So what would a bad teacher do with high expectations?

CHAD: Like basically look at them like they are not the best person and make them feel bad for themselves. If they have high expectations they keep the expectations that high and they expect the student to reach that.

DAVE: Are there any teachers—don't name names—but are there any situations where you have felt a teacher has made you feel that way or they have made you feel bad?

EVELYN: Some of the times.

DAVE: Do you feel comfortable explaining that? Or can you think of a situation where a teacher had high expectations and you felt good about it?

BETSY: Like one teacher wanted me to make the honor roll super, super bad, and so did I, and I tried so hard, and I got it we like I don't know she was just trying to get me on the honor roll. She was like pushing me really hard to get on the honor roll.

DAVE: Why was she pushing you?

BETSY: Because my dad wanted me to be on the honor roll, and I was close about making it, but then she pushed me about a week before I was on, so she like helped me get on it.

DAVE: How did the teacher know you wanted to get on it?

BETSY: I told her that I wanted to get on the honor roll, and she said I could make it if I pushed really hard, so I did all my work and I got on it.

DAVE: Ok good. Compare yourself to other students. What do you need that other students don't need? Just you specifically. What do you need to help you learn that other students don't need?

ALBERT: Extra help. Be reminded of assignments.

DORA: Maybe not understand the first time they go through an assignment, so they need to repeat and go over it again and go step by step, and I might pick it up faster and then I would know what I am doing, but if they just explain it one time and just give you the assignment you struggle a lot more than.

DAVE: So you need repetition?

DORA: Yes.

DAVE: Ok good. What else do you need that other students may not need?

DAVE: Think of a teacher who was hard to learn from and tell me about why that teacher was so hard to learn from.

EVELYN: She would do things fast. She would just explain and be like, "There, now do it," and like we had no clue what we were doing.

ALBERT: One day we had computers, and she gave us a bunch of assignment at one time, and it was like 5 pages long and we were to type them.

BETSY: We could just copy out of the book and then the next day we would get another assignment, so constantly, like every day, you would get like 12 more chapters you would have to type. She would expect us to have them done the next day or the next day and if you don't get them done she will have like CBDA and if you have them done you lose credit on everything.

DAVE: Why was that hard?

BETSY: Because you had so many assignments to get done, and if you don't get one done you don't get credit for any of the other ones that you did get done.

ALBERT: Some don't have computers at home so they can't work on it then.

DAVE: Why did that teacher decide to give you that assignment?

BETSY: Because she acts real fast, and there was a whole bunch of things we had to get done.

DAVE: So what would the best teacher do in that situation?

BETSY: Slow stuff down and help us out more.

DAVE: How would they know how to do that?

ALBERT: Like this teacher she barely explains it.

BETSY: She would like show us how to do it in 5 seconds and expect us to know how to do it.

DAVE: So what does the best teacher do?

BETSY: Takes more time on teaching us it. Like take a class period and teach us it. Review it a little bit and then give us work.

DORA: So it would be like teach us and then give us work. But if you take a day to learn it and then the next day to review and then give work, then probably be able to do it faster.

DAVE: So it sounds like there is one teacher might do it that way and one teacher might do it really fast. How do teachers know how to do that? How do they know how to meet the needs of students?

BETSY: Students say they don't get it, so the teachers feel like they need to slow down.

DAVE: So they listen to what your needs are?

BETSY: Or if there are a lot of us that are not done, then she should get the hint to slow down or somebody should ask her to slow down.

DAVE: So I am hearing you say a good teacher would slow down?

BETSY: Yeah.

DAVE: Ok. And another teacher might not slow down?

DAVE: Think of an actual class that you struggled the most in. Don't say the name yet. Just think of the class that you just absolutely struggled in. Just give me an example of why you struggled in that class.

BETSY: I just don't understand it. Like I don't know like how hard she will teach, and I just don't get it.

DAVE: What do you mean by “how hard she will teach?”

BETSY: Like she will go over it a thousand times, and I just don’t get it.

DAVE: Ok.

DORA: Like for me, like I think some student’s level they need to work fast because they pick it up real fast, but other students like they won’t get it, and they will get behind, and they will still be working one thing and the other students will be way ahead, so it’s like you’re always kind of behind and kind of always struggling. For me it was like I just didn’t get it as fast as other students did, so I would be overwhelmed because there was other things I needed to get done, so I would be rushing it and then I would get it wrong and then I would have to go back and redo it, and I never really get caught up.

DAVE: And that frustrated you?

DORA: Yeah.

DAVE: Did the teacher do anything to help?

DORA: Well eventually I had to get pulled out of that class and get to one that is more my level but ...

DAVE: What could have a teacher done to help you in that situation?

DORA: UMMM probably talked one-on-one more. Because I understand that teacher had big class, but the teacher knew other people were struggling, so maybe the ones that were struggling go see why they are struggling and section out and like tell them like, “You work with this and if you still have problems with this you need to come and talk to me about it,” unlike just you know “They’re having problems,” and moving on even though you know other students are having problems, and there are more advanced students that can get it done and think of it faster then um just moving along with them.

DAVE: You said one on one. Can you talk a little bit about that?

DORA: Like if, like a teacher can really tell if they are struggling and if they are not getting in their work or the work is getting turned in, but it is poorly done, then maybe talk to them and see if they really understand and if they say they do then give them like a worksheet and watch them do it. If they don’t understand it exactly, then help them figure it out so they make you understand how to do it.

DAVE: Do you have any teachers that talk to you one on one?

DORA: Definitely.

DAVE: Do you have teachers who don't?

DORA: Yeah.

DAVE: Which ones connect with you better?

DORA: The teachers that give us one on one. They help us get it faster.

DAVE: Anybody else have teachers that work with you one on one? Is it positive or negative?

CHAD: I do – It's positive. He helps me quite a bit.

DAVE: When a teacher goes one-on-one how is that positive?

CHAD: Like if I don't understand something he will take the time and sit down and explain it to me and show exactly what to do because I was once having problems in class and I was doing something wrong and he took me aside and told me what I am doing wrong and told me what I was doing wrong and he explained it to me one-on-one.

DAVE: So he took the time and then explained it to you one-on-one?

CHAD: Yeah.

DAVE: I am winding down here. We are about 2/3 of the way done.

DAVE: What didn't you get in the classroom when you struggled? What is it that you wished you had that you didn't have? Or something that would have really helped you?

CHAD: Depends on if you know them. It's like you can then go to them and explain it to them, but I have had some teachers that don't know who I am, and like they will just expect that person, like me, to get picked on right away and some teachers know like how slow I am with understanding stuff, so they will kind of back track and they will say, "Ok this is kind of a little bit more for you to understand," and to just take the time then if they don't know they expect you to know it right away.

DAVE: So the good teacher is the one that helps you the most? Is one that will talk with you and know how you learn what you needs are? Is that accurate?

CHAD: Yeah and then not knowing you and thinking you are one of these kids that can move on really fast and catch on say, "Ok let's go on to this, this, and this," when the one that would know me and pull me aside and ask me if I know what is going on. "Do you

want me to help you a little bit more?” and then that person needs a little more help. If they know you then they can help you.

DAVE: Ok. Anybody else?

DAVE: How about thinking of a class versus a teacher? Think of the best class you were ever in. Was it the best because of the teacher or was it because of the class?

DORA: I think it is both. If you are really interested in the subject they're teaching and the teacher, like they explain while they are teaching it and not just giving you work. If you really like the subject your more likely to pick up. Like, I don't know, really like if the teacher just kind of like gives you and assignment and you like the class but you don't like how they are teaching it then you are not going to be or your not going to go as far, but if they explain it and you really like the subject then, for me, I am more willing to comprehend that subject or I know what I am doing.

DAVE: Can you talk a little bit about that?

DORA: Yeah, like if they make like difficult things. Like maybe challenge us a little bit. I like to be challenged a little bit, but not all the time. Know how to do stuff and then how. If I really like the subject, then yes, but if it is a poor subject then I know I am not really good at or I don't really like that subject, then I probably won't go as far.

DAVE: Ok. Good. How about a model teacher's organization in the classroom? Or how they run the classroom? What would a model teacher do?

CHAD: Maybe like let us know, like a week in advance of a test, then instead of just like “Oh were having a test tomorrow,” and then maybe during that week maybe see if it was one section out of the whole chapter and you did not understand at all maybe go to him that week before the test and say you did not understand, and maybe go through it again and maybe assign a little homework and then have them correct and see if he still doesn't understand. Not just in two days say, “A test is going to be on Friday. Be ready for it,” and it's like we need a little bit like a weeks time to be prepared and just say that that week maybe have that week open for any questions that anyone may have on a section or something and talk about different things about that chapter.

BETSY: Or like I have a teacher and he is like he will tell us when we start the chapter when the test will be, and then the day before the test we will be playing games. It's not like just a game, but it's a game that has things that will be on the test and then he'll hand out a packet for you to study and it has every single answer that will be on the test. So that kind of helps and then like a teacher just tells you that we are going to have a test next week, but you don't know what to study.

DAVE: So am I hearing you say timely communication?

BETSY: Explain like what is on the test, so you know what is there.

DORA: Explain and go over what is going to be on the test, so you know like you're not studying useless stuff that you're not going to need on the test and then you spend all the time studying something and you don't use it and you pretty much didn't take time to look at what you needed, and it comes test time and you don't know like what's going on because you didn't study it so they need to explain more of what is going to be on the test.

DAVE: OK. What is it that you need to learn? What are things that you need to help you learn?

ALBERT: I can't explain it. Like coaching.

DAVE: Someone who can explain the work?

ALBERT: Yeah.

DAVE: Ok. Anything else?

EVELYN: My IEP is for Math and it seems that like any way that anyone tries to explain numbers it just gets really confusing, so really I don't know if there is a way that I can be helped with learning math.

DAVE: Can you think of anything that a teacher could try or do that could help you?

EVELYN: I think we have tried almost everything, and I'm still not totally understanding like number that I should be at the age I am.

DAVE: If we had to craft a model teacher. Imagine you have a magic wand and you shake it and you're going to have a model teacher. That means that you are going to have the perfect teacher. A teacher that is absolutely perfect. What does that teacher look like? What are the characteristics of that teacher?

BETSY: Nice

EVELYN: People Person

DAVE: That means he has to be good with people? And be able to talk to them and interact with them?

ALBERT: Person who likes sports.

DAVE: What else? A model teacher for you?

BETSY: Bring food to class

DORA: Works with you one-on-one, like one that is not like too easy going but not really, really strict and that students feel comfortable coming to and asking questions. Too lack like giving us all the answers. Be strict but not too lax.

DAVE: You were saying earlier that you might be hesitant to ask a question ...

DORA: Yeah, if the teacher is too strict I am definitely more hesitant to ask them, because I don't want them to be upset with me or yell at me and say, "How do you not know this?" Because I just don't want to feel like I am like I'm stupid because teachers are more strict and they make you feel pressured like if you go ask them they will be disappointed because you asked them about it cause you should already know it.

DAVE: And what would a model teacher do in that situation?

DORA: A model teacher would be more, like you could go and talk to them and like they are more understanding. If you're scared they don't yell at you and think you are stupid, and if you're scared they will yell at you.

DAVE: So you can talk to them one on one? They know you and they know how you learn? And I heard you say earlier and a little bit now that they now you personally?

DORA: Yeah.

DAVE: And you're not afraid to approach them and you feel comfortable. Is that what you are saying?

DORA: Yes.

DAVE: What other examples of model teachers? This is really good, you're doing a great job. Other examples?

CHAD: Taking the time. One of my teacher, she teaches other classes but sometimes he doesn't want to maybe do something and this teacher teaches business and he has other classes combined in with us and we are learning other class work as well as what we are suppose to learn.

DAVE: Excellent – good, good. Anything else? I don't want to miss anything. It's an important question.

BETSY: He has easier work. Not too easy, but not too hard. If it's too hard we are not going to get it.

DAVE: How does the teacher know?

BETSY: Nobody ever gives us an assignment or ...

DORA: Ok like for me from my point of view, if a teacher hands out work and there's like little less than half the class that gets it right, then I go back and review if those students if there are more than half the class that did not get it right then you would know that you are going a little too fast or your not like just pretty much like testing them, not really testing them, but see what their level is how fast they pick up stuff to know what your limit is to see how fast you can do stuff and how slow you can do stuff. Unlike just giving easy work all the time and getting really, really fast. It's just the class is too easy and everyone is like yeah...

DAVE: So that kind of relates back to when we talked about expectations.

DAVE: Good, well is there anything else that you would want me to know? Is there anything else you would want me to know about teachers that can help you in the future? Is there something you would want me to know before I leave that we haven't talk about, or is there something that you want to emphasize that you think is important?

CHAD: Every teacher should treat every kid that same. Not like when you have his little favorites sit over here and letting them do whatever and then have like this person over here be excluded and ...

DAVE: Kind of like not pick favorites, everybody treated the same.

CHAD: Yeah, just have everyone feel the same and make them like work with different kids and work with them. Look at everyone the same. You're the same person as this person. I know this person goes out for sports and this one doesn't, but who cares. Show that everyone is the same.

EVELYN: Everyone needs to be treated with respect. It doesn't matter that they have and IEP or if they don't play sports or not. Doesn't matter. If you need extra help, they should get it, or if they are in this room and everyone else is in general ed.

BETSY: Just treat them the same. Respect.

ANNOUNCEMENT

BETSY: Like if like they say like no seating arrangement, and they sit by people that don't get along and then have seating arrangement.

ALBERT: Seating arrangement should be like I don't think they should make them because if they make you sit by someone that they like they say they don't talk to someone or they don't get along, they are just going to be grumpy in that class. They talk too much then just separate them.

DAVE: Ok I would like to clarify I heard a number of you that you want teachers to treat you the same no matter who you are what your activity you're involved in. Whether you're in this classroom or any other classroom, you want teachers to treat you the same. Is that what I heard?

DORA: Yeah like don't pick favorites. Like if you know and the teacher knows that students are getting their work done and they're really, they know what they know what they are doing and the other student is kind of struggling. Don't favor the student and say stuff, "Well this student got things done. Why aren't you getting these things done?" No I don't like it when teachers do that.

DAVE: That's important. How do teachers know that one person is getting it done and the other person is not? That one person needs time?

DORA: Well, they need to ask, because people that are out for sports, basketball, track practices and they don't get it done, and other people have time to get it done.

DAVE: Ok. Is there anything else you want me to know? You guys have been terrific. I really appreciate your time and thanks so much for spending time with me. This will be all confidential. You were very open and honest. I really appreciate your feedback. Thank you very much.

APPENDIX E

CODE CHART

Code	Behavior/ Disposition	Definitions	Key Words
Know	Knows students as individuals	(with clause) be aware of through observation, inquiry, or information	Knows Understands
Care	Caring/helpful Relationship	the way in which two or more concepts, objects, or people are connected, or the state of being connected the provision of what is necessary for the health, welfare, maintenance, and protection of someone or something serious attention or consideration applied to doing something correctly or to avoid damage or risk	Helps Cares Understanding Listens
Expl	Explain concepts clearly and in multiple ways Breaks complex ideas down	make (an idea, situation, or problem) clear to someone by describing it in more detail or revealing relevant facts or ideas : account for (an action or event) by giving a reason as excuse or justification	Explain Helping Break-down
Hands	Projects Hands-on learning	an individual or collaborative enterprise that is carefully planned and designed to achieve a particular a school assignment undertaken by a student or group of students, typically as a long-term task that requires independent research involving or offering active participation rather than theory :	Projects Hands-on

		hands-on practice to gain experience	
Tech	Technology	the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes, esp. in industry developed from such scientific knowledge. the branch of knowledge dealing with engineering or applied sciences.	Computers Technology
Eng	Engaging, fun, and relevant lessons	occupy, attract, or involve enjoyment, amusement, or lighthearted pleasure behavior or an activity that is intended purely for amusement and should not be interpreted as having serious or malicious purposes closely connected or appropriate to the matter at hand	Attention Interest Like Fun
Lrng	Focused on the students' learning	gain or acquire knowledge of or skill in (something) by study, experience, or being taught	Understand Learning
Ind	Individual plan and pace for learning	tailor (something) to suit the individual	Help Your pace Need time
Org	Organized	arrange into a structured whole; order coordinate the activities of (a person or group of people) make arrangements or preparations for (an event or activity); coordinate	Organized Arrange Structure
Time	Make time for one-on-one help for students	make it easier for (someone) to do something by offering one's services or financial or material aid	Takes time One on one Help

		<p>improve (a situation or problem); be of benefit</p> <p>assist (someone) to move in a specified direction</p>	
Cues	Attuned to student cues	make receptive or accustom or become receptive to or aware of	Cues Directions
Comm	<p>Communication skills</p> <p>Clear expectations</p>	<p>the successful conveying or sharing of ideas and feelings</p> <p>the imparting or exchanging of information or news</p>	Expect Let us clear Know
Und	Tolerance for and understanding of the disability	<p>the ability or willingness to tolerate something, in particular the existence of opinions or behavior that one does not necessarily agree with</p> <p>the capacity to endure continued subjection to something</p> <p>be sympathetically or knowledgeably aware of the character or nature of</p>	Tolerant Understanding
Chall	<p>Offer challenges</p> <p>High expectations</p>	a belief that someone will or should achieve something	Expectations Achieve
Prep	Prepare students for life after high school—college, work, life	<p>make (something) ready for use or consideration</p> <p>make (food or a meal) ready for cooking or eating</p> <p>make (someone) ready or able to do or deal with something</p> <p>make oneself ready to do or deal with something</p> <p>be willing to do something</p>	College Jobs Life
Safe	Safe learning environment	free from danger or the risk of	Stressed Safe

	Lack of competitive feeling	<p>harm</p> <p>we know we are achieving safe learning in our classrooms when learners perceive that they are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • safe from physical & emotional harm • free from intimidation • free to take the risk of answering a question, even if they are unsure of the answer and may get it wrong • free from criticism or ridicule by their peers • free from criticism or ridicule by staff • valued and accepted for who they are • engaged in challenging but achievable tasks • full of potential to succeed at learning 	Harm
Push	Push students to reach their potential	having or showing the capacity to become or develop into something in the future	Push
Quiet	Offers a quiet learning environment	<p>(of a place, period of time, or situation) without much activity, disturbance, or</p> <p>without being disturbed or interrupted</p>	<p>Quiet</p> <p>Peaceful</p> <p>Disturbed</p> <p>Interrupted</p>
Focus	Maintains a clear consistent focus during instruction	<p>the center of interest or activity</p> <p>an act of concentrating interest or activity on</p>	<p>Jump around</p> <p>Back and forth</p>
Cons	Consistency across teachers and classrooms	<p>conformity in the application of something, typically that which is necessary for the sake of logic, accuracy, or fairness</p> <p>the achievement of a level of performance that does not vary</p>	<p>Different</p> <p>Typical</p> <p>Consistent</p>

		greatly in quality over time	
Pace	Provide a slower pace	the speed or rate at which something happens, changes, or develops	Pace Faster Slower
Vis	Use visual aids and demonstrations	an item of illustrative matter, such as a film, slide, or model, designed to supplement written or spoken information so that it can be understood more easily	Visuals Shows us
Succ	Wants students to succeed	the accomplishment of an aim or purpose the attainment of popularity or profit a person or thing that achieves desired aims or attains prosperity	Success Accomplish Achieves
Resp	Respects students	a feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements the state of being admired in such a way	Respects Admires
Man	Effective management skills	the process of dealing with or controlling things or people the responsibility for and control of a company or similar organization	Management Control
Exper	Experienced	practical contact with and observation of facts or events the knowledge or skill acquired by such means over a period of time, esp. that gained in a particular profession by someone at work an event or occurrence that leaves an impression on someone	Experienced Experience Good at
Rlbl	Reliable	consistently good in quality or performance; able to be trusted	Reliable Count on

Coop	Provides opportunities for cooperative learning	involving mutual assistance in working toward a common goal willing to be of assistance	Together Cooperate Work with
Fair	Treats students fairly	in accordance with the rules or standards; legitimate just or appropriate in the circumstances	Fair Same
Rem	Giving additional reminders	a thing that causes someone to remember something a message or communication designed to ensure that someone remembers something.	Reminder

APPENDIX F

MOWRER-REYNOLDS STUDY TABLE

Code	Behavior/ Disposition	Definitions	Key Words
Car	Caring, compassionate, empathetic	the way in which two or more concepts, objects, or people are connected, or the state of being connected the provision of what is necessary for the health, welfare, maintenance, and protection of someone or something serious attention or consideration applied to doing something correctly or to avoid damage or risk	Helps Cares Understandi ng Listens
Warm	Warm, kind, friendly, sociable, familiar	having, showing, or expressive of enthusiasm, affection, or kindness	Warm Kind Friendly
Fair	Fair, treat students equally	in accordance with the rules or standards just or appropriate in the circumstances	Fair Equally
Enth	Enthusiastic, excited about subject	having or showing intense and eager enjoyment, interest, or approval	Excited Enthusiastic
Org	Organized	arrange into a structured whole; order coordinate the activities of (a person or group of people) make arrangements or preparations for (an event or activity); coordinate	Organized Arrange Structure
Flex	Flexible, cooperative	capable of bending easily without breaking able to be easily modified to	Flexible Cooperative

		<p>respond to altered circumstances or conditions</p> <p>(of a person) ready and able to change so as to adapt to different circumstances</p>	
Clear	Makes subject matter clear for students, provide concrete examples	<p>easy to perceive, understand, or interpret</p> <p>leaving no doubt; obvious or unambiguous</p> <p>having or feeling no doubt or confusion</p>	Clear
Pat	Patient, tolerant	<p>able to wait without becoming annoyed or anxious</p> <p>slow to lose one's temper with irritating people or situations</p>	Tolerant
Hum	Humorous, funny, makes learning fun	<p>causing lighthearted laughter and amusement; comic</p> <p>having or showing a sense of humor</p>	Funny Makes Fun
Talk	Easy to talk to, approachable	<p>speak in order to give information or express ideas or feelings; converse or communicate by spoken • have the power of speech</p> <p>discuss personal or intimate feelings</p> <p>have formal dealings or discussions; negotiate</p> <p>a period of conversation or discussion, esp. a relatively serious one</p>	Communica te
Disc	Disciplinarian, controls classroom environment	a person who believes in or practices firm discipline	Discipline

Know	Knows subject matter, has a wealth of information	<p>[with clause] be aware of through observation, inquiry, or [trans.] have knowledge or information</p> <p>be absolutely certain or sure about something</p> <p>have developed a relationship with (someone) through meeting and spending time with them; be familiar or friendly with</p> <p>have a good command of (a subject or language). recognize (someone or something)be familiar or acquainted with (something)</p> <p>have personal experience of (an emotion or situation)</p> <p>regard or perceive as having a specified characteristic</p> <p>give (someone or something) a particular name or title</p> <p>be able to distinguish one person or thing from (another)</p>	Understand
Mot	Knows how to motivate students, inspirational	<p>the reason or reasons one has for acting or behaving in a particular</p> <p>the general desire or willingness of someone to do something</p>	Drive
Ent	Entertaining, can hold the attention of the class	<p>provide (someone) with amusement or enjoyment</p> <p>give attention or consideration to (an idea, suggestion, or feeling</p>	Amusement
Help	Provides help to students outside of class	make it easier for (someone) to do something by offering one's services or financial or material	Assist

		assist (someone) to move in a specified	
Var	Uses varied methods of instruction	differ in size, amount, degree, or nature from something else of the same general class change from one condition, form, or state to another introduce modifications or changes into (something) so as to make it different or less	Diverse
Cre	Creative, innovative, inventive, has fresh ideas	relating to or involving the imagination or original ideas, esp. in the production of an artistic (of a person) having good imagination or original ideas	Creative Innovative
Exp	Has high expectation, provides challenges	a belief that someone will or should achieve something	Expectations Achieve
Comm	Communicates clearly, good speaker	the successful conveying or sharing of ideas and feelings the imparting or exchanging of information or news	Expect Let us clear Know
Resp	Respectful of students, values their opinions	a feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements the state of being admired in such a way	Respects Admires
	Other		
	Focused on the students' learning		
	Attuned to student cues		

APPENDIX G

PERCENT AGREEMENT BETWEEN READERS

Focus Group One

Low	82%
High	100%
Average	94%

Focus Group Two

Low	82%
High	100%
Average	93%

Focus Group Three

Low	83%
High	100%
Average	95%