The Impacts of Affective Teaching Behaviors and Performance Techniques on Student Engagement by Exemplary Teachers

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The Impacts of Affective Teaching Behaviors and Performance Techniques on Student Engagement by Exemplary Teachers

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The Impacts of Affective Teaching Behaviors and Performance Techniques on Student Engagement by Exemplary Secondary Teachers

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study sought to understand how final round candidates for the honor of “Teacher of the Year” in a Midwestern region of the United States described and exhibited the use of affective behaviors and performance techniques to engage students in learning. Seventeen secondary-level educators who possessed teaching experience in multiple subject areas participated. Data collection included 60-90-minute video interviews as well as observations of the candidates’ display of affective behaviors. Data analysis revealed six major themes involving the use and display of affective behaviors. The six key tenets described by exemplary teachers, were: (1) student expertise, (2) relationship development, (3) teaching valued above content, (4) engagement and energy, (5) teacher humility and transparency, and (6) teacher movement. Affective domain theory (Krathwohl et al., 1964) and Burke’s (1968) Social Communications Theory of Dramatism were used to create analyze the six tenets and create a model called the “Physiology of Exemplary Teachers.” The model served as a metaphor that described how the heart, head, gut, lungs, hands, and feet all work together to produce teachers of the highest engagement and efficacy. Recommendations were provided for each of the six tenets in the areas of policy reform, teacher preparation, and professional development and practices. For example, development of teacher emotional intelligence and observational skills; storytelling and movement; hooks and closure; eliminating tenure; providing choices and authentic audiences for students; lab-based teacher preparation classes to practice responses to unexpected variables; excused time for teachers to observe classrooms/schools and behavioral psychology training.
Keywords: affective, affective domain, teacher efficacy, exemplary teaching, performance techniques, teacher movement, teacher student relationships, emotional intelligence, engagement, secondary, middle school and high school, transparency, energy, COVID-19
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Twenty-six years ago, my life had taken some very drastic turns and I found myself struggling to find a new path and the hope to believe I mattered. Chad, you were then, and will forever be, my handsome hero. The girl who left college thinking she may never return is now earning her doctorate! We did that—together. You saw the battles behind the brave face I showed the world. You have never stopped believing in me and you kept pushing and cheering me on through sleepless nights, tears, debt, and grief. The girl who statistics said would never finish college now has multiple degrees, but you are my most beloved reward. I thrive on words, yet I cannot possibly write something that would even begin to express how much you deserve this first and foremost acknowledgement. You have sacrificed more that I can ever repay but I promise you, I’m back and let’s finally get away and have some fun!

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Finally, to my savior and the greatest teacher of all, I will continue to spread your message of love and compassion for all people and I pray when others look at me they will everyday see more of you. May I never forget that some of the most extraordinary things happen when I stop running and instead fall on my knees. To God be the glory.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all of my unforgettable students, past and present, and to those yet in my future. You have pushed and inspired me from day one to keep getting better so together we could make sure you achieve your dreams. Being a part of your story fills me with the joy and fire to teach with passion, purpose, and perseverance. Without you there would be no Ms. Weinhold, Lady Weinhold, or Professor Weinhold. Because of you, there is now Dr. Weinhold. You are my “so what.”
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I serve as a department chair and teacher educator in a small private college. My study concerned “that” teacher. Everyone can name that teacher. That teacher is the one they never forget. That teacher did more than teach the subject matter, they made a lasting impact on their students beyond learning the content and raised the bar for other teachers following them. When asked to describe that teacher, the words most often used may not be skilled, knowledgeable, well organized, or even hard working. All of these qualities play an important role in exemplary teaching and teacher preparation programs emphasize many of these qualities. However, these qualities leave out some essential attributes of highly effective or exemplary teachers.

That teacher inspires words like passionate, caring, funny, creative, exciting, fun, memorable, and talented. These words showcase the elements of high emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998), personal connection (Maxwell, 2010), and the affective domain (Krathwohl, 1964). In a time of falling test scores and rising expectations, I shifted the focus away from studying teachers as content experts in their subject matter and high-test scores, to the affective characteristics of “great” teachers based on their ability to provide memorable learning experiences to engage students in the love of learning.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Associated Press, 2018) have reportedly spent more than spent two billion dollars on educational research. When Bill Gates was asked what one thing exerted the greatest impact on the quality of education, the most important factor was the teachers themselves (Barret, 2012). Describing the implications of this study, Gates said,

We need to identify effective behaviors [of great teachers] so we can transfer those skills to other teachers… If you want your child to get the best education possible, it is actually
more important to get him assigned to a great teacher than to a great school (as cited in Barret, 2012, p. 2).

It is because I agree that teachers have the greatest impact on education overall, that I have dedicated my career and this study to improving teacher preparation and professional development. This study has worked to identify some of those key effective behaviors of great teachers and provide recommendations for “transfer[ring] those skills to other teachers” (Gates, as cited in Barret, 2012, p. 2).

**Statement of the Problem, Purpose, and Significance**

The use of theory, methods, and subject-based content knowledge dominate teacher preparation programs (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Korthagen, 2008; Shoffner, 2009; Zembylas, 2007). For example, “If teacher education programs suffer from a lack of practical relevance and if the transition to teaching in real-life settings is at the heart of the problem” (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005, p. 158), then more research is required to help bridge that gap and increase teacher efficacy for those entering the profession. The Report of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Panel on Teacher Education concluded there was no convincing evidence that undergraduate teacher education, as it is currently offered, really makes a difference. However, there have been “scores of new reports, surveys, research syntheses, policy reviews, and empirical studies about teacher preparation” and “it is no exaggeration to say that the national focus on these issues rivals that of any previous period” (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). So, the need for improvement in teacher education has not gone unnoticed, but what appears to be at issue is a key area for improvement.

What may be often ignored or devalued is the impact of emotion and performance behaviors in teacher preparation (Shoffner, 2009). “Emotion is not something to be separated
out of the preparation of preservice teachers or ignored once they reach the classroom” (p. 784).

Zembylas (2007) agreed with Schoffner, claiming “one aspect of teacher knowledge that has so far received limited attention is its emotional dimensions” (p. 355). The “acknowledgement of the impact of emotional understanding in teaching entails a re-examination of aspect of teacher knowledge and their implications” (Zembylas, 2007, p. 364). Therefore, this study focused on affective behaviors and teacher performance techniques and the way they impact on student engagement as described by exemplary teachers.

Studies about affective behaviors were largely focused on teacher student relationships (TSRs; Furrer et al., 2014; Hargraves, 2000; Kelly & Zhang, 2016; Klem & Connell, 2004; Mueller, 2001; Roorda et al., 2011; Wilkins, 2014). The purpose of my study was to identify the affective behaviors and performance skills described, observed, and documented by that teacher—the teacher who exemplifies highly engaging, student-centered instruction. The significance of this research to the education field is critical. Because teacher preparation programs largely emphasize the methods to teach content or subject matter, future teachers learn only a portion of the ingredients for becoming an exemplary teacher. Identifying how teachers use and exhibit affective behavior and performance skills offered insights regarding the nature of these behaviors and also the tenets needed to enhance these skills both for current teachers and those enrolled in teacher preparation programs.

**Research Question**

I adopted the following question to guide my research: How do the final round candidates for the honor of “Teacher of the Year” in the Midwest region describe and exhibit the use of affective behaviors and performance techniques to engage students in learning?
Overview of the Chapters

This qualitative case study followed the “five-chapter” dissertation model, which includes the introduction, review of the literature, methodology, data analysis (two chapters) and theoretical analysis, and finally summary, implications, and recommendations. Chapter One introduced the research question and justified the significance of this study with regard to student engagement and the affective behaviors and performance techniques exhibited by exemplary teachers. Because the use of theory, methods, and subject-based content knowledge dominate teacher preparation programs (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Korthagen, 2008; Shoffner, 2009; Zembylas, 2007) a need existed for focused study on how exemplary teachers described and exhibited affective behaviors to improve student engagement. This is especially significant because the majority of literature on the affective domain and research into its application has focused on students and not upon the teacher (Furrer et al., 2014; Hargraves, 2000; Kelly & Zhang, 2016; Klem & Connell, 2004; Mueller, 2001; Roorda et al., 2011; Wilkins, 2014). Chapter One also provides a definition of the terms used throughout the study.

Chapter Two describes the major themes found in a content review of the literature focused on affective teaching and performance. The review was limited to affective behaviors and student engagement at the secondary level because the research question focused on the impact on affective teacher behavior on middle and high school student engagement. The following themes emerged from the content review of the literature: (1) teacher-student relationships; (2) affective versus cognitive practices; (3) performance skills; and (4) student engagement specific to middle and high school students. In Chapter Two, I also introduced two
theories to add to my conceptual framework for this study. The first involved affective domain
theory (Krathwohl et al., 1964) and the second theory adopted was dramatism (Burke, 1968).

Chapter Three outlines the methodology of the qualitative case study approach. The parameters of the study included how exemplary teachers were vetted, recruited, and selected as part of the recruitment of candidates and data collection methods. This chapter also outlines the transcription, coding, and analysis processes used to determine overall themes. Six tenets were identified and analyzed to show how the combination of the tenets contributes to effective teaching. I also provide a reflexive statement to be as transparent as possible regarding any potential bias. Additionally, I explain the steps I took to ensure reliability in the study findings. Finally, the chapter provides information on initial limitations to further focus not only what was studied, but also what was not included and why.

Chapter Four is one of the most extensive chapters. The dominant themes which emerged from the data are described. Using the data derived from interviews, as well as observation, I identified dominant themes, and quotes serve as “evidence” used to support the key content of Chapter Four. The dominant themes were: (1) student expertise, (2) relationship development, (3) teaching valued above content, (4) engagement in secondary classrooms, (5) humility and transparency, and (5) the impact of COVID-19. After each theme is introduced, an exemplar is given, highlighting a specific teacher from the study. Next, findings from all other participants are given. Finally, a story shared by one of the participants highlights that theme in action.

Chapter Five is also a form of deeper data analysis but through the lens of the theoretical framework. Using the affective domain theory (Krathwohl et al., 1964) and the communications theory of dramatism (Burke, 1968), the major findings of the case study are again examined for further application. I adopted a visual to represent the findings which I entitled the Physiology of
the Exemplary Teachers. Using the metaphor of the gut, hands, lungs, heart, head, and feet, the affective domain taxonomy (Krathwohl et al., 1964) is applied along with quotes to show how exemplary teachers strive to achieve the highest levels of the affective domain. The dramatist theory is also exemplified by the feet and use of movement in the classroom (Burke, 1968).

Finally, Chapter Six provides a summary of the six tenets of essential teachers, including (1) student expertise; (2) relationship development; (3) teaching valued above content; (4) engagement and energy; (5) teacher humility and transparency; and (6) movement. After a brief review of the theoretical analysis, recommendations for each of six tenets are given in the key areas of policy, preparation, and professional development and practice. The study is concluded with limitations and suggestions for further research as well as concluding thoughts on how the research will be continued.

**Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following terms must be clearly defined. Because more than one definition is available for each of these terms, the following list defines how these key terms will be understood in the context of this study:

**Affective:** Relating to, arising from, or influencing feelings or emotions (Webster, 2018).

**Affective Domain vs. Cognitive Domain:** “In the affective domain we are more concerned that he [or she] does it when it is appropriate after [they] have learned that [they] can do it” (Krathwohl et al., 1965, p. 60).

**Affective Engagement vs. Behavioral Engagement:** Affective engagement is described by emotions, feelings, and experiencing interest. Behavior engagement is work hard or exerting physical effort (Conner & Pope, 2013, p. 1429).
**Dramatism:** A technique of analysis of language and thought as basically modes of action rather than as a means of conveying information (Burke, 1968, p. 445).

**Dramatist Pentad:** A tool critics can use to discern the motives of a speaker [actor or teacher] or writer by labeling “five key elements of the human drama: act (what), scene (where and when), agent (who), agency (how), and purpose (why)” (Griffin, et al., 2015, p. 294).

**Emotional Intelligence:** The ability to understand and manage one’s emotions and to understand and influence the emotions of others (Goleman, 1995).

**Engagement:** “The quality of a student’s connection or involvement with the endeavor of schooling and hence with the people, activities, goals, values, and place that compose it” (Skinner, et al., 2008, p. 494).

**National Teacher of the Year Program:** “Each year, the National Teacher of the Year Program brings together State Teachers of the Year from all 50 states, DC, the Department of Defense Education Activities, and four US territories to participate in one-of-a-kind professional learning opportunities designed to hone communications skills, expand knowledge of educational policy, and grow teaching and learning practices. The goal of this programming is to elevate the voices of teachers and ensure that teachers are leaders in state and national policy conversations” (CCCSSO, 2018).

**Performance Skills:** For the purpose of this study, performance skills are defined as those skills used in delivery of teaching material including but not limited to oral expression, voice inflections, body language, humor, eye contact, facial expressions, volume, pitch, and pacing.
**Teacher Student Relationships (TSRs):** A positive TSR stimulates learning behavior and helps students deal with the demands of learning and school. Conversely, a negative TSR is believed to “hamper and interfere” with the demands of learning and school (Roorda et al., 2011, p. 495).
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Each study into the aspects of highly effective and engaging teachers adds to the important literature needed to support, train, and develop exemplary teachers. In terms of affective domain, qualitative research is the most likely vehicle used in these studies because the data are largely observed and described. When I began my literature review, I was excited to read what others had found on my topic and what gaps still existed. This chapter highlights not only the dominant themes that emerged in the current literature, but also how the gaps within the literature further defined the focus for my study. From the literature review, two key foundational theories also emerged to form the best conceptual framework for analysis of the research problem.

My study involved affective behaviors and performance skills of highly effective teachers. I conducted a review of the literature and focused my review on affective teaching and performance. I limited my study to affective behaviors and student engagement to teachers of secondary students because more studies on this topic were conducted at the elementary level. I further limited my search to publications from the year 2000 or newer to focus on the most up-to-date research. The following themes emerged from my review of scholarly research: (1) teacher-student relationships; (2) affective versus cognitive practices; (3) performance skills; and (4) student engagement specific to middle and high school students (5) culturally sustaining pedagogy. The review of scholarly literature starts with teacher-student relationships; this factor proved foundational to any research on highly effective teaching.

Teacher-Student Relationships

Teaching is an emotional practice. It was not a surprise that relationships quickly emerged as the key theme addressed in the current literature. According to Hargreaves (2000),
“emotion, cognition, and action, in fact, are integrally connected” (p. 812). Teacher student relationships (TSRs) continue to be reinforced by a “large body of research” (Yu et al., 2018). This factor served as one of the most important predictors of not just academic, but also non-academic (social-emotional) success in PK-12 youth (Hargreaves, 2000). However, that same research documented a decline in the quality and quantity of TSRs as a student progresses through elementary to the middle and upper grades (Hargreaves, 2000). Consequently, the value of the performance elements of teaching and the affective domain has increased in the literature due to more recent findings on student engagement (Conner & Pope, 2013; Cooper, 2014; Hargreaves, 2000; Reyes et al., 2012; Roorda et al., 2011; Shoffner, 2009).

**Decreasing Emotional TSRs at the Upper Levels**

Hargreaves (2000) conducted a study contrasting TSRs amongst elementary and secondary teachers, interviewed 53 teachers from 15 different schools, and found of the 22 secondary teachers interviewed, emotions were largely regarded as a “threat” to classroom order and often difficult to manage (p. 823). Consequently, Hargreaves postulated that although secondary teachers were mostly compassionate towards their students, their classrooms lacked the “emotional intensity” often found at the elementary level. Secondary teachers were more likely to qualify their “positive relationships with students as ones of acknowledgement and respect than loving or liking” (p. 820). While the environmental and scheduling challenges are more prevalent at the secondary level due to physical geography and decreased class time with any one particular teacher, the research asserts the need for connection is even greater with older students (Roorda et al., 2011, p. 520).

A meta-analysis of 810 studies on the influence of affective teacher-student relationships (TSRs) and students’ social engagement and achievement confirmed the positive aspects of
TSRs play a more important role for older students because they face decreasing engagement and increasing complexity as they progress through the school system (Roorda et al., 2011).

“Unfortunately, relationships with teachers tend to become less positive as students grow older” (Roorda et al., 2011, p. 515). Consequently, there is a disconnect between the need for a critical emphasis on affective teaching and a decreasing comfort level amongst secondary teachers to produce the types of positive TSRs required to impact student engagement and learning. The caring, nurturing elements of teaching that appear so widely accepted and produced at the elementary level decrease even though the research proves they are needed more than ever with secondary students (Roorda et. al, 2011).

The 2011 meta-analysis by Roorda et. al had the strongest statistical effects in terms of relationships with those “in the higher grades. Nevertheless, the effects of negative relationships were stronger in primary than secondary school” (p. 493). Furthermore, Hargreaves (2000) argued this gap is precipitated because “secondary teaching is characterized by greater professional and physical distance leading teachers to treat emotions as intrusions in the classroom” (p. 811). Consequently, when the impact of TSR has the highest potential for student engagement, it also confronts the greatest decline in use.

** Relationships and Engagement in Learning **

When it comes to TSRs at the secondary level, trust is an element of the overall classroom environment (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). The five faces of trust described by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) were: willingness to risk, benevolence, reliability, honesty, and openness. Over time, teachers who were perceived as sensitive and highly aware of student’s academic, social, and emotional needs were the most successful in terms of student engagement (Reyes et al., 2012). Furthermore, when engagement extends to emotion, not just cognitive
functioning, learning increases (Reyes et al., 2012). Consequently, as students mature and their emotional intelligence increases, the impact of affective and emotional connections may become more critical.

The critical connection between affective and emotional connections with students may be even more evident with at-risk students (Mueller, 2001). Mueller’s (2001) case study used the extensive data of the National Longitudinal Study of 1988 to analyze the needs for at-risk students related to relationships. The results clearly pinpointed student-teacher relationships as an “especially high” need for at-risk students. At risk students described these teachers as “interested, expected them to succeed, listened to them, praised them, and cared [about them]” (p. 241). These descriptors show the affective domain dominates in student descriptions of TSRs. When teachers were asked about what teacher student behaviors lead to good TSRs, the teachers focused on many affective traits (Wilkins, 2014). Teachers were quick to report affective traits, such as “engagement, respect, positive personality, humor, seeing teachers as individuals” (Wilkins, 2014, p. 65).

Still, the news about the importance of positive TSRs is not new. Furrer et al.’s (2014) research on the most effective relationship building strategies identified “relatedness through warmth, competence through structure, and autonomy through support” (p. 110). How to develop and provide warmth and support to students does not typically appear as an important focus of teacher preparation programs, yet it is part of the final assessment as is evidenced by the Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) currently in the use in much of the country including the Midwest according to The American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE; 2019). The edTPA assesses three key tasks: “Planning, Instruction, and Assessment. These tasks are closely aligned with the concepts of the Danielson’s (2013) Framework for Teacher
Evaluation Instrument as well as the Marzano (2013) Teacher Evaluation Model” (as cited in AACTE, 2019). The Danielson Framework (2013), in particular, addressed teacher performance, engagement, and warmth in domain two: classroom management. Consequently, this study confirmed that teacher preparation programs should be including this relationship training and engagement as not just an element, but rather also a key cornerstone of the curriculum and focus.

**Affective Versus Cognitive Practice**

The study of affective learning developed by Krathwohl et al. (1964) in their foundational work on the Taxonomy of Educational Objectives insisted the link between the affective and cognitive domains is “tightly intertwined” (p. 60). However, because the cognitive domain may be more clearly assessed in terms of learning achievement, the affective domain has been largely brushed off as a “soft skill” (Goleman, 1998, p. 145). “What researchers know from students is affective skills most dramatically impact their impressions of teacher efficacy” (Conner & Pope, 2013, p. 1426). Conner and Pope (2013) determined in their study of 6,294 middle and high school students that more than one-third of the students pointed to a lack of interaction with their teacher as the reason for their boredom. The first reason was the boring material, but it may be that the affective teaching directly impacted the perception of the material as well (p. 1426).

Furthermore, Allen et al. (2006) conducted a meta-analysis of eight different studies to determine the correlation between cognitive and affective learning (p. 21). They discovered “higher level of perceived immediacy generated by particular behaviors that an instructor uses, enhances students’ approach behaviors and increases the level of enthusiasm or commitment to the learning task” (p. 23). What this suggests is even though cognitive objectives are the focus of most education programs and formal teacher evaluations, affective factors served as a critical link to cognitive success.
One goal of education involves success in academic knowledge and skills as well as a love for learning (Tauber & Mester, 2007, p. 5). When students tell researchers what makes them “like” school, they describe feelings of being liked and cared for by teachers. Hallinan (2008) conducted a study with 6th, 8th, and 10th grade students in Chicago and found “those who perceive their teachers care about them, respect them, and praise them are more apt to like school than those who do not” (p. 271). A similar study of 6th and 7th graders in Sweden (Shoffner, 2007) found students described good teachers as “happy, funny, supportive, positive, and encouraging” (p. 8). A Dutch study also concluded in 2004 found students’ associations between teachers and their interpersonal behaviors exerted the greatest impact on student outcomes (Brok et al., 2004). Once again, students consistently self-reported the factors exerting the greatest impact consistently biggest impact on engagement involved affective behaviors. These findings were not affected by location, race, or gender.

Before moving on to engagement in high school specifically, it should be noted that the third domain of Bloom’s research known as the psychomotor or behavior domain appears to be at times confused with affective elements. For clarification, I looked to Skinner et al. (2009) for some refining statements. An example of behavioral engagement is when students say, “I try hard to do well in school.” However, affective engagement considers more, the questions concern their feelings: “When I am in class I feel good … In class, I work as hard as I can” versus “When we work on something in class, I feel interested” (p. 519). When 38 secondary education majors were asked to describe the high school teachers they remember as their favorite and most effective, even those just entering the profession reported the same affective responses (Breault, 2013). Three dominant responses in this study included: passion and enthusiasm for teaching, concern for the students, and knowledge of the subject matter (p. 25).
My study focused on the first three themes—passion and enthusiasm for teaching, and concern for students. This included the way exemplary teachers describe their thoughts and actions as well as the way they exhibit when performing the role “affectively-based teacher.” I added teaching as a performance to this study because affectively based teaching is observable and can be documented in a similar way as observations of cognitive and behavioral teaching and learning methods.

The Role of Movement and Performance Skills in the Classroom

If teacher preparation was viewed as a performing art, more care would be taken to prepare preservice teachers for the performance elements of engaging a classroom of middle and high school students. Not an easy audience! Tauber and Sargent Mester (2007), in the second edition of their textbook, Acting Lessons for Teachers: Using Performance Skills in the Classroom, remarked on what I have witnessed as a supervisor for student teachers. “Prior to entering the classroom for the first time, many of these student teachers had bouts of severe anxiety—they had the actor’s version of stage fright” (p. 13).

I cringed as I read this research because what they did next, I have done myself. We tell preservice teachers to just go in and “be themselves,” which is “terrible advice to give because many of these teachers were in fact very anxious people” (p. 14). Directors do not tell actors to just “be themselves.” Rather, they coach them to step into a role. As preservice teachers most, if not all, are still developing their teacher-self and that is when having the practice and training of performance art can be invaluable.

The roles teachers’ gestures play, especially in improving comprehension, has been largely focused on music instruction (Nafaisi, 2014) and foreign language study (Majlesi, 2015; Orton, 2007). Yet gestures make up the “undercurrent of conversation that takes place alongside
the acknowledged conversation in speech” (Goldin-Meadow, 2004, p. 314). The role of gestures in secondary teaching is vague and usually subject specific, but the logic is undeniable. “Gestures provide the material the ‘glues’ layers of perceptually accessible entities and abstract concepts” (Roth, 2001, p. 377). Gestures provide a backdrop against which teachers enact metaphorical concepts and ideas with the potential to be embodied through gestures.

In terms of affective responses and personal connection, gestures are the visual evidence of the teacher’s enthusiasm and personal engagement in the subject matter (Tauber & Sargent Mester, 2007). These gestures include “jabbing in the air, pointing to students or objects, contrasting on hand motion with another, or sweeping the air like an orchestra conductor” (p. 39). The impact of gesture study was valuable to study in conjunction with emotion and engagement. Goldin-Meadow (2004) argued “gesture used in conjunction with speech may present a more naturally unified picture to the student than a diagram used in conjunction with speech” (p. 319). I identified how teachers use different types or movement to affect student engagement in learning.

Teaching as Performance

It is important to note upfront that a study of teaching from a dramatic perspective does not infer teachers are any less genuine or unauthentic when they step into the role of the teacher. Rather, the literature suggests performance techniques and dramatic elements may provide a valuable connection to student engagement and developing a teacher presence (Courtney, 1982; Eriksen et al., 2014; Griggs, 2001; Hanning, 1984; Tauber & Mester, 2007; Travers, 1979). This study, therefore, considered if the elements of performance techniques could be applied to training teachers. Furthermore it questioned, would that training enhance student engagement as evidenced by the classroom actions of exemplary teachers. Travers (1979) argued that “much of
the so-called competency-based teacher education involves attempts to copy the superficial features of a role” (p. 17). However, the role to which the individual [teacher] aspires is not to be copied, but the individual must create his or her own version of the role” (p. 17). By examining how a teacher performs, one might be able to better understand what performance techniques have the greatest impact on engagement.

The theater metaphor may be off-putting to some in education, but in the literature it holds up to the scrutiny. Griggs (2001) argued

while neither precise nor comprehensive, these metaphors for the importance and vitality of educational interaction are nonetheless valuable ways to conceive instruction, and they have their parallels in theater … and are considered appropriate for teachers and teacher educators to be involved in. (p. 26)

Unlike a one-night show, a teacher comes to the class, their audience, again and again and how they present their role may directly impact engagement. Hanning (1984) described this interplay between the teacher (actor) and students (audience):

The center of the class is a transaction between the teacher and the students, not just a transfer of information. A great teacher isn’t just one who knows a lot, or who has attractive values, or who deals with students humanely. A great teacher qua teacher – as opposed to scholar or ethical exemplar or authority figure—has intensity and communicates it. That intensity is related directly to the confrontatory aspect of the classroom. It’s rooted in our basic adrenal response to entering a classroom—to putting ourselves one the line before other selves as tenuous as our own—to performing. (pp. 33-34)
That is why this study examined how exemplary teachers described class transactions between students. The data confirmed what Griggs (2001) explained as the “teachers who are able to control qualitative qualities intelligently are probably better able to produce the kind of classroom atmosphere that will facilitate the type of leaning they value” (p. 27). As such, it is a type of experimental drama that allows teachers to “try out and experience how different actions work” (Eriksen et al., 2014, p. 74). As experience increases, exemplary teachers confirmed performance and practice does make somewhat perfect, or at least, worthy of an engaged audience.

This leads to a consideration of exemplary teachers and stage presence, or confidence. Eriksen et al. (2014) agreed “the feeling of strength and being powerful. The process of reflection is a vital part of the process of achieving empowerment. Change of action can be seen as a result” (p. 76). That is where the teacher theater has benefits because lessons are often reimagined, rehearsed, revised, and refined. By looking at the performance techniques of teachers, it may be easier to describe and define how one develops their teacher self. Tauber and Sargent Mester (2007) wrote, “the process of making your teacher-self has been neglected by schools of education not because the matter seemed unimportant, but because the difficulties of providing training seemed insuperable” (p. 30). This study, therefore, focused on performance techniques, specifically movement, and how beneficial movement is for not just engagement, but also for the teacher’s development of self-efficacy.

Therefore, the literature is clearly pointing to a need for performance skills and training, but more study is needed on what the focus should be and where educators should begin. As educators, however, one cannot help but get engaged in the study when the results can be so positive. Hanning (1984) put it like this:
Above all, the actor [teacher] succeeds by responding to a role with intensity and by communicating that intensity to the audience [students], so that we cannot remain unaffected, unmoved, uninvolved. The actor’s [teacher’s] job, finally, is to pull the audience [class] into the world created by the performance – by bodily movements, by physical, mental, and emotional exertion. (p. 33)

In summary, the examination of performance skills and techniques in exemplary teachers provided a better understanding of the most successful application of drama-movement—which results in heightened engagement. Nowhere is this engagement needed more than where it tends to wane the most—at the secondary level.

**Affective Teachers and Student Engagement at the Secondary Level**

The final theme that emerged most notably from my research involved the impact of teacher affective behaviors and performance, specifically at the secondary level. I selected the secondary level because student engagement in learning steeply declines with each grade level (Conner & Pope, 2013). The bright smiles of primary students are often replaced by the blank stares of high schoolers. By high school, as many as 40-60% of students are “chronically disengaged” (Klem & Connell, 2004, p. 262). The research showed, however, this may be largely mitigated by a focus on increasing engagement through teacher behavior (Klem & Connell, 2004). The teacher behavior under investigation involves both affective behavior and performance techniques such as movement, vocal pacing, inflections, facial expressions, and thoughtful delivery.

Klem and Connell’s (2004) study of middle school students determined that 68% of the students were more likely to be disengaged when they reported low levels of teacher support. Conversely, students were almost three times as likely to report high engagement if they also
reported supportive teachers. Another middle school study of almost 1400 students found “classroom emotional climate” as the strongest predictor of student engagement over time (Reyes et al., 2012, p. 707). “When their teachers are sensitive and responsive toward both their academic and their social emotional needs students are more successful academically” (p. 707). Patrick et al. (2007) confirmed the importance of teacher affect in their research stating, “student’s perceptions of their environment are a critical link to understanding how the environment influences motivation and engagement” (p. 87). Their study of 602 5th grade students showed that when “students feel a sense of emotional support from their teacher . . . and encouragement to discuss their work, they are more likely to engage” (p. 93). This study also provided strong support that students’ “perceptions of the social environment affect students’ academic and social beliefs about themselves, which, in turn, affect their behavior and cognitive engagement in class” (p. 94). This again suggests a teacher’s affective behavior directly corresponds to engagement as it impacts the classroom environment. Wentzel (2002) even connected good teaching to similar dimensions of good parenting because adolescents often search for another adult for emotional connection as they assert their independence. This critical link between the affective elements of teaching and middle schoolers seems even more logical when one considers the heightened emotional and cognitive development occurring at the onset of puberty.

The impact of teacher behavior on adolescents continues into high school and even the initial undergraduate years. Among the more than 275,000 secondary students who completed the High School Survey of Student Engagement, 65% said they were bored at least once a day and 16% were bored in every class (Cooper, 2014, p. 363). This is more than just being too cool for school or teenage angst. Repeatedly, students say the best teachers were the ones who cared
about them. Students want to care and be cared for by others, including teachers. A 2004 Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) Education Update described the importance of caring relationships with adults:

[Adolescents] strive for independence, yet they clamor to belong. They fight the connections they have with their parents, but they need to form alliances with peers and bond with understanding teachers. They are finding themselves and, in the process, will challenge authority, experiment with sarcasm, and try on many different personalities. They are adolescents. And, if the recent brain studies are accurate, they can be as young as age 10 or as old as age 25. (Thorton, 2018, p. 52)

Even the studies focusing on rigorous teaching and complex cognitive tasks (Shernoff et al., 2009; Wentzel, 2002) argued students who “felt emotionally supported through a positive relational tone often created by positive affirmation and humor” (Shernoff et al., 2009, p. 173). Students were more engaged in academic pursuits when “motivated both socially and academically” (Wentzel, 2002. p. 298). They were more likely to reach “their full potential” due to their experience of interacting and experiencing positive relationships with adults (p. 298).

It can be argued that an over-emphasis on cognitive objectives versus the affection domain may lead to student disengagement. For example, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) focus on the cognitive complexity of classroom tasks and assignments. The CCSS is not directed to “how teachers should teach” but to what they should teach (Kelly & Zhang, 2009, p. 159). Because schools focus on test scores and use data to make decisions and develop reports to state and national agencies, the emphasis may at times overly focus on the cognitive rather than affective domain. Walker (2014) senior editor and writer for the National Education Association (NEA) which represents more than 3 million American teachers (NEA, 2019) wrote,
Our schools, once vigorous and dynamic centers for learning, have been reduced to mere test prep factories, where teachers and students act out a script written by someone who has never visited their classroom and where ‘achievement’ means nothing more than scoring well on a bubble test. (p. 3)

Affective teacher behavior plays a lesser role in teacher preparation programs and teacher evaluation (Shoffner, 2009). However, students say they respond to caring teachers the most—their interactions and the support received lead to their success (Allan et al., 2006; Conner & Pope, 2013). This is especially significant at the secondary level and with at-risk students (Mueller, 2001; Roorda et al., 2011). A combination of affective behavior and performance skills of highly engaging teachers at the secondary level clearly contributes to increased student engagement in learning and, potentially, improvements in academic performance.

**Exemplary Teaching and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy**

No examination of exemplary teaching in our times can or should ignore the impact of race and equity in education. In 2012, Paris argued that the terminology culturally responsive teaching did not go far enough. She instead introduced the term *culturally sustaining pedagogy* (CPS) as an important update stating that CPS “seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (p. 1). She further argued, “In the face of current policies and practices that have the explicit goal of creating a monocultural and monolingual society, reach and practice need equally explicit resistances that embrace cultural pluralism and cultural equality” (p. 2). Paris developed key benchmarks to identify and implement CPS that I then overlaid on my participants interviews to highlight this necessary focus.
Furthermore, I looked to the work of Jackson (2011) and the science of high operational practices. In Jackson text, she focuses on how student’s strengths should be used to inspire learning and high intellectual performance (p. ). She developed the science of high intellectual practices (p. 106) which included building relationships (p. 107)—a key prong of my study. Jackson affirms that, “building relationships establishes bonds that generate a positive reciprocal culture of value and possibilities” (p. 107). She also confirmed that relationships, from a cultural responsive lens, is key to student engagement. “This is especially important for school-dependent adolescents, who search for these relationships as a magnet for drawing them to and investing them in their school” (p. 108).

Jackson also highlighted the importance of “amplifying student voice” (p. 114) which became something I listened for as I conducted my interviews. Jackson describes the impact of this practice when she said, “The students’ voices also provide windows into their frames of reference, enabling their teachers to identify what they value and what affects how they view the world, facilitating bridges for relationships, lesson planning, and eliciting their strengths and interests” (p. 115). Therefore, I committed to adopting a CPS lens when listening to and analyzing the narratives of the exemplary teachers I interviewed in this study.

**Gaps and Tensions in the Literature Research**

At some level, I think all educators know learning what to teach is not as difficult as how of teach. However, emphasis on the cognitive areas of teaching dominate the literature (Bergmark & Kostenius, 2012; Breault, 2013; Carroll, 1998; Courtney, 1982; Griggs, 2001; Hanning, 1984; O’Conner & Pope, 2013; Pereira et al., 2015; Shoffner, 2007; Tauber & Sargent Mester, 2007; Travers, 1979). Because of this gap, not enough is known about the actual methods or strategies affectively based teachers use to engage students through relationships. A
second area, “performance,” adds another element to raising interest and generating more emotional or affective responses to learning. I found no studies about the specific methods adopted and instead the reports focused on the value of theater parallels (Eriksen et al., 2015; Griggs, 2001; Hanning, 1984). For a summarized table of several studies included in this review see Appendix A.

Because affective behaviors and performance techniques in class may set teachers apart, more description and observation of these methods (and perhaps how exemplary teachers develop them) may contribute to the knowledge on teaching and student engagement. It can be argued that teacher preparation, classroom standards, and achievement tests have dominated the news, the effort, and the focus of the teaching practice to the exclusion of what may makes academic successes more possible for some students.

Much like the cognitive versus the affective domains, the education field has a gap between what research and textbooks have said needs to be done in terms of student engagement—a focus on the affective domain as reported in studies of student engagement (Allan et al., 2006; Roorda et al., 2011; Shoffner, 2009), and teacher knowledge or willingness (O’Connor & Pope, 2013; Kelly & Zhang, 2016) regarding how to meet these needs, particularly in secondary classrooms. Some tension may exist due to the lack of clarity on what key elements and skills make up affective teaching. These vague or “soft” skills appear largely absent in the literature. My study addressed this gap in knowledge and practice concerning the affective domain and aspects of learning and teaching by identifying the key elements of affective behavior and performance skills as observed in some of the Midwest’s top teachers.
Analytical Theory

I selected two theories to support my study. The first theory adopted is Krathwohl et al.’s (1964) Affective Domain Theory which provides a hierarchy of affective levels: receiving, responding, valuing, organization, and characterization by value or value complex. The affective taxonomy emphasizes emotion and tone. It was developed after the more well known, cognitive domain taxonomy (Bloom, 1956). The affective domain “emphasize[s] a feeling tone, an emotion, or a degree of acceptance or rejection” and these objectives help express “interests, attitudes, appreciations, values, and emotional sets or biases (Krathwohl et al., 1964, p. 7).

Bloom’s Cognitive Taxonomy (1956) has been widely adopted in education as a clear evaluation of higher order learning and thinking. This taxonomy was later modified by Anderson and Krathwohl in 2001. However, my study concerns the affective domain. The affective domain provides a crucial element of not just what a student can do (cognitive), but also more so why they choose to do so (affective).

The second foundational theory adopted to explain and interpret my view findings involves the work of Burke (1968) in the communication theory of dramatism and his assessment tool of the dramatist pentad. Burke postulated that life is not like a drama; life is a drama (Griffin et al., 2015, p.293). As such, motivation and engagement by the audience are better understood by analyzing the dramatic elements from scene to purpose that create that sense of identification between the speaker and their audience. This theory is critical to this study because of the focus on performance techniques and how they are described and exhibited by exemplary teachers.

Affective Domain Theory

Bloom’s Cognitive Taxonomy (1956) is foundational in K-12 educational pedagogy. The cognitive taxonomy provides a progression of thinking skills from the basic to the most complex.
These skills progress from knowledge, to comprehension, then to application, analysis, and finally to the highest levels of critical thinking—synthesis and evaluation (p. 18). The development of this taxonomy allows educators to qualify thinking both by their students and in their questioning practices. For example, a comprehension level question may be what was the main character’s name in the story? However, an evaluation level question could ask the student to consider what motivated the main character to take action, and the synthesis question may ask them to imagine an alternative ending.

Several years later in 1964, Bloom along with Krathwohl and Masia developed a second taxonomy specifically for educators regarding the affective domain. The affective domain is defined by Bloom and his counterparts as “objectives which emphasize a feeling, tone, an emotion, or a degree of acceptance or rejection” (Krathwohl et al., 1964, p. 7). The affective taxonomy is made up five levels in hierarchical order and arranged along a continuum of internalization from lowest to highest. These levels are receiving, responding, valuing, organizing, and characterizing (see Figure 1). Each of these levels also have corresponding sublevels or indicators that help further clarify achievement or attainment of that level.

**Figure 1**

*The Affective Domain*
The first level, receiving, is concerned that the learner be aware of a certain phenomenon and will to “receive or to attend to them” (Krathwohl et al., 1964, p. 98). For example, to the unfamiliar reader Shakespeare may seem lofty and difficult to understand. However, if a teacher makes a new reader aware of the patterns of language Shakespeare uses and teaches them to recognize that pattern when it occurs, they have helped that student become aware. This differs from comprehension because there is an emotion of awareness that may change how a student feels about Shakespeare separate from basic understanding. Therefore, this step is further subdivided into “awareness, willingness to receive, and controlled or selected attention” (Krathwohl et al., 1964, p. 95).

Source. Krathwohl et al. (1964).
The next level, responding, goes beyond awareness to actively engaging with the phenomenon (Krathwohl et al., 1964). This can be determined by the subdivisions articulated as markers in responding, willingness to respond (vs. receive in the first level), and then satisfaction in response (p. 118). To return to the Shakespeare example, if a student is not only willing to receive the awareness of Shakespeare’s patterns of language, but also advances to an appreciation or a choice to engage in the search for those patterns, Krathwohl et al. (1964) would postulate they have advanced to the responding level of the affective domain.

The third level, valuing, delineates three levels of describing worth to a phenomenon (Krathwohl et al., 1964). These subdivision labels are: acceptance of a value, preference for a value, and commitment. When I show students Shakespeare’s prologue to *Romeo and Juliet*, they can usually rather quickly receive and respond to his use of iambic pentameter and sonnet style. However, when I help them go deeper into the sounds he uses, their effect on the ear, and the way they provide a double entendre impact on the lines, I start to see the lights go off. When I ask them to say out loud all of the fricative consonants (namely f and th) in the line about the birth of the two lovers and they hear that it sounds like breathing during active labor, there are usually audible gasps and dropped jaws. This is an example of moving from receiving, to responding, and then truly committing to the value of these patterns when they see how they become an art form in the hands of a literary master like Shakespeare.

The fourth level, at times, feels like a step back but it serves more as a necessary emotional organization to move into the highest levels of the domain. The fourth level, organization (Krathwohl et al., 1964), is necessary because as phenomenon become more complex, more than one value can be ascribed. Consequently, in the organizational phase the respondent must consider the following subdivisions: conceptualization of a value and
organization of a value system. If a student has committed to the value of Shakespeare and is
then asked how they feel about that author in relationship to others, they must determine what
elements constitute their value. Another example of this would be in terms of one’s religious
beliefs. One may commit to valuing a certain theology, but many others exist. That requires a
further conceptualization of what elements in a religion can be used to determine its value and
then an organization of that religion in relationship to others. Similar in critical thinking practices
to the evaluation level in the cognitive domain, at this level on the affective domain judgements
must be refined and clear enough to be articulated and tested in one’s beliefs and values.

Which leads to the highest level of the affective domain, characterization by value or
value complex. This level is characterized by Krathwohl with the following explanation:
At this level of internalization the values already have a place in the individual’s value
hierarchy, are organized into some kind of internally consistent system, have controlled
the behavior of the individual for a sufficient time that he [or she] has adapted to
behaving this way; and an evocation of the behavior no longer arouses emotion or affect
except when the individual is threatened or challenged. (p. 165)

Returning once more to the bard, as a student of his writings for many years now, the
patterns of Shakespeare’s language are easily identifiable to me, I value their use and can see
them utilized or not in the works of others, and the only time when I may feel compelled to prove
their worth is when one questions the value of the literature and its continued study. Another
example would be to put this in terms of one’s long-standing faith base. This level of response
becomes clear when an individual’s long-held beliefs are insulted or challenged. The
subdivisions Krathwohl and his colleagues Bloom and Masia (1964) determined for this final
level are a generalized set and characterization. If someone is known as a devout Catholic, for
example, they have internalized the values of this faith so completely that it is a characteristic of their identity. The beliefs and values of their faith create their world view. Consequently, “rarely, if ever, are the sights of educational objectives set to this level of the Affective Taxonomy” (p. 165). This level of integration requires time, experience, and mature emotional reflection. It is attainable and even goal-worthy, but most affective behaviors will build to this level over the years and are not implicit in academic instruction.

The affective domain has not received as much recognition as the cognitive taxonomy, perhaps because of the greater difficulty in measuring and implementing its use. The researchers themselves admitted the cognitive domain is a “more easily solvable problem” (Krathwohl et al., 1964, p. 15) and the evaluation of the domain is much more complex and missing a “systematic effort to collect evidence of growth” (p. 16). Consequently, the affective domain has garnered less attention than its widely known cognitive sibling. However, the affective domain goes much deeper than “what a student can do, to what he or she does do” (Krathwohl et al., 1964, p. 60). The difference is critical. Just because one can do a task of skill does not mean they will choose to do it. If one can study and theorize the elements of what creates that choice or desire, then a much more holistic understanding to student engagement is possible.

The educational research, as seen previously, is also supporting this theory. Hargreaves (2000) argued secondary teachers lack emotional intensity and therefore need to focus on more affective standards. This research could be supported by this study if those teacher with higher affective behaviors and increased emotional intensity emerge and dominate in this select group of exemplary teachers. Furthermore, Roorda et al.’s (2011) extensive meta-analysis showed that the impact is even more significant at the secondary level so a study specific to the affective use at the secondary level would extend and focus this argument by pinpointing teacher elements
through both interview and observation data confirmed in photo elicitation. Finally, Furrer et al. (2009) argued “warmth and engagement” (p. 101) increased with strong teacher-student relationships, but this study showed some of the key behaviors and techniques teachers could employ to create those positive relationships.

The symbiotic relationship between emotion and engagement is why the affective domain is such a powerful foundational base for this case study. Teaching, learning, and engagement are all emotional practices. By examining the actions, descriptions, and skills of expert teachers from an affective domain lens, the ability to address one of the most critical elements of lifelong learning was studied and, in time, may become an essential part of teacher preparation and development. To support the affective domain, I also added the theory of dramatism for its critical focus on performance.

Dramatism

Dramatism (Burke, 1952) conceptualizes life as a drama, much as Shakespeare proclaimed that “All the world’s a stage.” Therefore, any communicative action is considered a drama. Burke insisted “anything freely said for a reason is a rhetorical act—an actor choosing to perform a dramatic action for a purpose” (Griffin et al., 2015). As such, teaching, when viewed through dramatism, is a performance with reasons. Burke developed the pentad as a way to apply his theory in a symbolic way. “Dramatism provided researchers with the flexibility to scrutinize an object of study from a variety of angles” (West & Turner, 2017, p. 18). The pentad is made up of five points: act, agent, agency, scene and purpose (see Figure 3).

Figure 2

*Burke’s Dramatic Pentad*
Note. Burke’s Dramatic Pentad (1945) is used as a method for apply dramatism theory.

Burke (1945) described the act as what is being done. In this study, the act would be classroom instruction. The agent is the person performing the act. In this study, the performer is the teacher. Agency refers to means used by the performer to accomplish the act. In other words, this is how the teacher performs the act of teaching such as techniques and movement. This is the setting or background for the action. In this study, the where is defined as the classroom or space in which the teacher (agent) is teaching (act). This is the why behind the act or the goal the agent hopes to achieve. In this study, the purpose examined was student engagement. In Burke’s (1952) seminal work *A Grammar of Motives*, he defined dramatism as:

A method of analysis and a corresponding critique of terminology designed to show that the most direct route to the study of human relations and human motives is via a methodical inquiry into cycles or clusters of term and their functions. (p. 445)

He went on to summarize this “in a wider sense [as] a study of human relations in terms of action” (p. 445).

I had to dig deeper into this theory myself to truly understand its applications to education and, in particular, humans in action. Burke’s (1945) Pentad is a heuristic that can be overlaid on a human interaction or drama to show relationship and function between the act,
agent, agency, scene, and purpose. It functions in some ways similar to the journalistic five of who, where/when, why, what, and how. For example, look at the following sentence and corresponding photo in Figure 3:

**Figure 3**

*Photo Study: The teacher spreads his arms wide across the room to visually and kinesthetically represent the mathematical action.*

In this case, the agent (who) is “the teacher” up front. The agency (how) is “spread his arms” as is seen in the photo, “across the room,” which is the scene (where). The purpose (why) is “to visually and kinesthetically represent” to his students the act (why) of “the mathematical action.” That is the value of having a clear heuristic that can be applied to a photo or action to show the relationship between the five elements of agent, agency, scene, purpose, and act. Rather than just look at the action and actor, the pentad provides a theory for describing the interplay between several factors and their ratios to better examine the impact on student engagement.

The literature in the field of teacher performance, as stated previously, has been somewhat limited but what has been done points to a high need for clarification and confirmation. Griggs (2001) claimed looking at teaching as a type of performance “has a virtually unlimited applicability to wide range of issues/problems in the classroom, and … it
gives us chance to stop, rewrite, reconsider, and otherwise reflect on these dramatic conflicts” (p. 33). I submit, however, it can be even more powerful when looking at what is going well instead of focusing on problems. Although these may be connected, a consideration of what causes these problems without a toolbox of alternatives that address the need, is critical.

Interestingly, in 1968 Burke added a sixth point which does not really exist on the pentad (or hexad) but which he argued was critical (p. 252). The final point he added is attitude. Attitude is how the actor positions themselves relative to others. In this respect, Burke’s Dramatism creates a natural overlap with Bloom’s Affective Domain. By using both of these theories as foundations for this study, all elements of the research question are supported because it looks at what is internal and what is external in the process.

**Summary**

In summary, the examination of what truly separates exemplary teachers in terms of affective behavior and dramatic performance in front of students appears to be largely relegated in the literature to individual descriptions and broad narratives. This study addressed that gap by using the foundational theories of the affective domain and dramatism to examine what elements and descriptors of exemplary teachers dominate and present themselves repeatedly with the most impact on student engagement. In the following chapter, I share the three-pronged approach to methodology I created for this study and explain why this qualitative case-study provided meaning and clarity in the field of teacher behaviors and student engagement.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I further clarify the context behind qualitative research and why it was the best choice to answer my research question because it gets to the heart of teaching in a way that quantitative research cannot describe. Following that, I describe the research design of my study including participant selection, data collection, and methods for data analysis. Finally, the last sections of this chapter address researcher experience and bias, reflexivity, and the limitations of this study.

My study examined the impact of affective behaviors and performance techniques on student engagement by investigating the way those behaviors were described and displayed by finalists for Teacher of the Year in secondary education (grades 7-12). I limited my participant pools to only those who had made it to the final round or were top winners for the Teacher of the Year (TOY) award in their state. I was intentional in this limitation to address the reliability of having a pool of exemplary teachers as vetted by the award selection process. As I designed this qualitative study, I focused on methods to describe, display, illuminate, and learn from the work of some of the top teachers in the Midwest region. After carefully considering what scholarly approaches and methodology would best fit the research question, I conducted a qualitative case study.

Research Design

This study lends itself best to qualitative research because this approach involves personal examination of people’s lives and actions under real-world conditions. “Qualitative inquiry is personal” (Patton, 2015, p. 3). Because the elements of being that teacher have been difficult to define, one must first observe, question, discuss, and discover patterns based upon
qualitative inquiry. The purpose of this study clearly lined up with the five features of qualitative research postulated by Yin (2016) which are:

1) Studying the meaning of people’s lives, in their real-world roles [teachers];
2) Representing the view and perspectives of the people in a study [in this study that would be the perspectives of the teachers];
3) Explicitly attending to and accounting for real-world contextual conditions academic setting;
4) Contributing insights from existing or new concepts that. May help to explain social behavior and thinking; and
5) Acknowledging the potential relevance of multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source alone [multiple teachers involved in study. (p. 9)

Each of these features were clearly applied in my research. First, my study sought to examine teachers in a real-world setting, which is their classrooms. By entering the natural “habitat” of the teaching life, this study went beyond a numerical survey or quantitative chart to examine with a researcher’s eyes the phenomenon is real time. Second, in as much descriptive detail as possible, I accurately represented the views and perspectives of highly skilled teachers. In my teaching experience, I have discovered many teachers have to focus their limited time on all of the demands of their craft. That may leave little time to provide data and attention to the field of research in education. That is why I chose to be the conduit to share some of their perspectives through this research.

Third, my study accounted for real-world conditions specific to an academic study. As I describe in data collection, special attention was paid toward how exemplary teachers described not only classroom conditions, but also the changing variables the pandemic introduced with
virtual and hybrid learning. How teachers adapt and grow during times of change and challenge is a necessary and insightful element explored in the findings of my study.

Fourth, “qualitative research is driven by a desire to explain social behavior and thinking, thorough existing or emerging concepts” (Yin, 2016, p. 10). I found six key emerging concepts of teacher behavior and performance that are carefully examined and described by the participants in the data findings. Fifth, and possibly foremost, Yin (2016) emphasized qualitative research acknowledges the potential relevance of multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source alone. These “converging lines of inquiry” (p. 11) became evident through document review, interviews, and transcript coding for patterns.

In a 2003 Norwegian film by Hamer entitled *Kitchen Stories*, a group of Swedish researchers attempt to observe Norwegian men in their kitchen practices. They sit atop a tall chair in the corner of the room and take notes silently. It is humorous, awkward, and, in the end, heartbreaking. What this film showed is not only the power of story, but also the need to incorporate multiple voices into the research. Isak, the Norwegian participant, squints at his aloft observer and says, “How can we understand each other without communicating?” Although this film is a bit tongue-in-cheek regarding the practices of observational research, the point is clear. If researchers want the whole story in a real-world environment, they must examine with a wide lens because the research participants are human, and they have insight to share. The richness of the findings often lies between lines and outside of the neat columns of traditional quantitative study.

**Why Case Study?**

To interview and document the affective behaviors and performance skills applied by top teachers, I adopted a multiple-case study approach. Yin (2018), the foremost authority in case
study research, defined this methodology in a “twofold” approach.” First, a “case study is an empirical method investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 15). The phenomenon my case study explored is what sets exemplary teachers apart from the average. The context was clearly not evident because it involved affective skills and emotional intelligence currently not addressed in most teacher preparation programs. However, this case study provided the context for that phenomenon, within the first-hand accounts of the educators, so that exemplary teaching can be more specifically defined and understood.

Secondly, Yin postulated a case study:

copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide design, data collection, and analysis, and as another result relies of multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion. (p. 15)

In my case study, the “technically distinctive situation” is classroom teaching performance and techniques by finalists for a top teacher award.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

I completed the training and carefully reviewed the guidelines concerning human participant research. I understood the importance of designing an ethical study where I carefully recruited, selected, and interviewed volunteer participants. I obtained human subject research approval the Institutional Review Board and this approval can be reviewed in Appendix B. My CITI certificate showing that I successfully completed the requirements for human subjects’ research is available as Appendix C.
I carefully followed IRB protocols regarding informed consent and the emotional well-being of my participants as informants to this study. I also carefully guarded the privacy of their students by assuring their students’ names were changed whenever used in quoted material by the participants. I used the automated transcription option provided by Zoom (video conferencing platform) that is computer generated and then used the audio to check the transcription quality and correct any errors.

The participants included in the study data were all adults in professional positions as classroom teachers. None of them were in any way subordinate to me and did not receive compensation for the participation. All Teacher of the Year participants agreed to have their name and school information included and none chose to remain anonymous. All data collected were stored in a secured area and I was the only one with access to any identifying information during the collection and write-up of this study. All data were stored on password-protected devices that are my personal property and used by no other co-workers or family. I also used a dual-factor authentication for my cloud-based document storage. No incentives or remuneration were offered to participants to maintain ethical standards.

**Recruitment and Selection of Participants**

To provide a statistically significant number of participants to address reliability, I selected 17 participants for my case study. Yin (2016) cautioned developing workable field relationships may be the “greatest personal challenge in doing qualitative research” (p.117). I aimed to minimize the impact of this challenge by establishing my credibility with these teachers as a former secondary classroom teacher myself and now as a passionate professor of teacher education. My desire to improve the education profession and the quality of teacher candidates spoke to their own professional responsibility and desire to improve the teaching field.
To narrow the participants to those who exemplify quality teaching performance, I focused my recruitment to Teacher of the Year candidates in the upper Midwest Region of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and North Dakota. I also limited the participants to those who have received this honor within the past 17 years (all but one was 2010 or later) and all were still actively teaching in a secondary school. As such, even if they originally were honored as far back as 2004, they are still teaching every day and currently engaged in the education field. I maintained mostly 2010 and newer not only to make sure the data were timely, but also because the 2010 Teacher of the Year in Iowa also went on to win the National Teacher of the Year award, so she provided an additional layer of credibility even beyond the Upper Midwest.

Although the names of finalists for Teacher of the Year in each state are readily available online, gaining access to their contact information and a response to my solicitation for participation was a significant challenge. The timeline for this study occurred right as a global pandemic was closing schools and teachers were making an almost overnight transition to online learning. However, I was impressed and incredibly grateful to find these educators wanted to participate because they found the topic of the study important and hoped to contribute to the advancement of the research. I improved my odds of getting a response by reaching out to each candidate in a three-prong approach: initial recruitment letter (see Appendix D), follow up email (if needed), and personal phone call (if needed). However, all of my participants responded after no more than two emails even when the interview timing was delayed to the summer due to pandemic restrictions. I was also very fortunate to gain the support and assistance of Teacher of the Year administrators in each state who helped provide the most up to date contact information.

Of the 78 teachers contacted for inclusion in this study, 17 completed the consent forms and full interview process (see Table 1). Of those 17, 11 were women, and six were men. Eleven
of the teachers are high school level, four are middle school, and two teach a mix of both.

Finally, the subject areas taught include math (four), English (six), science (three), social studies (two), and foreign language (two). Once I established contact and received signed consent documents, I worked with the participant to set up an initial interview. For virus protection, all of the interviews were conducted over Zoom in the summer of 2020.

**Table 1**

*Study Participants by Gender, Subject, and Grade Level Taught*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison Field Groups</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>11 (100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6 (100%)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject Area</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
<td>1 (50%)</td>
<td>1 (50%)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>2 (33.3%)</td>
<td>4 (66.7%)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>2 (66.7%)</td>
<td>1 (33.3%)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>2 (100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>7 (63.6%)</td>
<td>4 (36.4%)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>3 (75%)</td>
<td>1 (25%)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mix</td>
<td>1 (50%)</td>
<td>1 (50%)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection**

To determine the best practices of addressing the research problem, I asked participants to describe the effect of behaviors and performance skills displayed by exemplary teachers. I observed participant expression and communication about their teaching as well. My data collection involved document review, such as prior press interviews, LinkedIn profiles, and Teacher of the Year publications to provide some initial background and then I conducted interviews lasting between 45 to 90 minutes with each participant. This regional interpretivist case study describes the affective and performance factors of exemplary teachers. My goal in this
research was to raise awareness regarding how affective and performance techniques impact student engagement based on visual observations, documents, and interviews with exemplary teachers. My original plan included in-person classroom observations, but this is now identified as an area for further study since pandemic conditions made this prong of my data collection inaccessible. The case study approach within qualitative research allows me to conduct an in-depth study of talented teachers and the way they address the affective and performance aspects of effective teaching.

Case Study Approach and Data Collection Methods

To interview and document the affective behaviors and performance skills applied by top teachers, I adopted a multiple-case study approach where each teacher provided their own data for study. Before each interview, I did initial background research online. This served to give me a few talking points unique to the participant and gain an initial sense of their school community and interests in education. Each interview was video recorded so I was able to confirm the details they shared with verbal and non-verbal markers such as a laugh, smile, tears, gestures, nods, and other visual data that would not be captured without video. Because the interview was recorded, I was able to focus my notes as field notes on their affective behavior and performance techniques captured during the interview and compare that with the interview transcript. Field notes, as defined by Patton (2015), are “rich, detailed descriptions, including the context within which the observations were made” (p. 14).

I also used audio versions of the interviews to listen at least three times per participant to make sure I knew what data came from their interview and start to recognize patterns with other participants even before transcript coding. As advised by Yin’s (2018) case study approach, these provided many more variables of interest for data points and also multiple sources of
evidence which I then used in a triangulating fashion to determine what were the key data points, or markers, of exemplary teaching. Included in Appendix E are the interview questions used with all participants. For further clarity on my methodology, I interviewed each Teacher of the Year finalist using questions specifically worded to elicit descriptions of their teaching behaviors without specifically mentioning the term affective.

**Data Analysis**

As soon as the first interview was completed with each participant, I began the initial steps of the data analysis process. I listened to each recording adding to my field notes and confirming transcription accuracy. Over the next several weeks, I also listened to all of the interviews via audio recording. This often happened in my car to and from school and gave me the opportunity to not only understand to the content of each interview well, but also inspired me daily as a teacher. This also allowed me to have the interviews fresh in my mind as I went into the first cycle of coding. “First cycle coding methods are codes [were] initially assigned to data chunks” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 73). So, for example, words such as engagement, relationships, and instruction may emerge as descriptive codes, whereas emotion coding such a care, excitement, and love provided another coding approach.

The interview data were initially coded manually in first cycle coding (Miles et al., 2014) to determine possible patterns and codes to utilize for an initial application of the qualitative data software, Dedoose. I uploaded each transcript in text format to Dedoose. I then coded for the following second level codes: engagement, childhood, COVID, caring, humility, impact, humor, professional development, relationships, student expertise, teaching over content, why teach, ambition, creativity, demands of the job, high expectations, movement, optimism, organization,
outliers, and story. Readers may refer to Figure 4 for a graphic representation of each code’s frequency by participant.

**Figure 4**

![Code Frequency Chart](Image)

Next, I used the code frequency totals and determined the dominant themes for analysis. Analysis of those themes, using quoted material as evidence, is the key content of this chapter. They are student expertise, relationship development, teaching valued above content, engagement in secondary classrooms, humility and transparency, and the impact of COVID-19.

**Reflexive Statement**

My passion is teaching teachers. That is why I made the move to higher education. Moreover, in the 14 years I was in the secondary classroom, I learned good teaching will get you by, but exemplary teaching will keep you alive and inspired for the long haul. Similar to the
highest level of the affective domain, when teaching becomes more than just something one values and is instead the core of who they are, it becomes a kind of mission and reaches a professional apex. Especially at the secondary level, students can tell if their teachers truly love what they do. When a teacher works with students, day after day, month after month, they see that teacher at their best and their worst. Good teachers may fake it for an administrator observation or peer evaluation, but a true teacher knows their students are the real judge of their skills because they see the much bigger picture of what a teacher can do day in and day out in the classroom.

My knowledge and beliefs helped me appreciate the talents of the participants. However, there is also a potential for bias. I clearly have very strong ideas about what makes an exemplary example for a teacher. Consequently, I managed the potential for bias by limiting my findings to only those examples clearly described and supported by the quotes of multiple participants in the interviews. In this way, I focused on what they described and defined as exemplary teaching rather than selecting only those quotes or examples I personally supported.

Consequently, I must admit, I am biased when it comes to “exemplary teaching” because I struggle with a current system where often too much weight is given to twice-a-year observations or short-visit performance reviews. I listen more to what the students have to say. I think exemplary teaching is in the art of motivation and persuasion. It is because of this passion, that I conducted this study to elucidate the terms and markers needed to define this very esoteric phenomenon.

Most teachers are hesitant to boast because they do not want to appear egotistical or conceited. Furthermore, my study showed that even the most exemplary teachers struggle with bad days and have a deep desire to be better. However, if exemplary teachers do not share how
they do what they do so well, then the elusive nature of their gift continues. My role in this study was not to get them to say what I hoped to hear, but rather give them a voice to share what they know to be true. Consequently, I recognized that I could not guide my participants during the interview or over-read actions shown because I must maintain the reliability of my research. What they said was the truth for them, whether I agreed with it or not. I could assume, or even hope, that a participant would display the markers of dramatism and the affective domain I hypothesized will be there. I could only report what occurred at the time of the interview. Consequently, though I had some suppositions about what the case study would reveal, I was also very open to the possibility that data points I had not considered, or even did not personally agree with, could emerge. I was first and foremost there to learn, so I could then teach with confidence what truly makes that teacher so remarkable.

**Validity and Reliability**

Within case study research, four tests have been “commonly used to establish the quality of most empirical social research” (Yin, 2018, p. 42). To establish a clear plan for reliability, each of these four tests should not only be addressed but satisfied so that the study can proceed with confidence. These four tests are: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability.

**Construct Validity**

Case study research may not lend itself as easily to construct validity as is more clearly established in quantitative studies. However, there are three key tactics suggested by Yin (2018) that this case study will fulfill. The first is to use multiple sources of evidence. In a similar manner to have a significant $n$ in a quantitative study, a case study can meet this checkpoint in its own way. In this particular study, the goal of no less than 15 participants was exceeded to reach
and all participants contributed through personal interviews. After the interview the transcripts were coded for repeated terms and description. That way the findings of the interviews were combined to look for patterns and highest forms of repetition. These converging lines though still a qualitative method, allowed for some numerical evidence and confirmation of the findings to occur.

Next, Yin (2018) recommended researchers establish a clear “chain of evidence” (p. 44). The majority of this phase was completed in data analysis through tactics such as pattern matching, addressing rival explanations, and using Dedoose data analysis tools such as code frequency and word repetition. This triangulated the data into a much clearer picture of what initially appeared as findings unique to that participant (teacher). It also confirmed and explained why event \( x \) led to event \( y \) and if that connection was purely correlated or a causal link. This was determined through internal validity.

**Internal Validity**

Second, my study addressed threats to internal validity. One way that internal validity can be harmed is when inferences are made without the event being directly observed. That is why the descriptors teachers gave in the interview portion was compared to the observational data from the video and notes on non-verbal markers. Another consideration that occurred during data analysis was examining plausible rival explanations such as The Null Hypothesis (observation by chance) and or the Hawthorne Effect (people behave differently because they are being watched). This study sought to mitigate these rival explanations by triangulating data and attempting to be minimally intrusive in observational techniques. This is in part addressed by the use of Zoom video conferencing. Participants were in the location of their choosing, often their home, and able to feel more relaxed and natural in a familiar environment.
**External Validity**

A case study must also establish external validity (Yin, 2018) by showing “whether and how a case study’s findings can be generalized” (p. 42). This is key to the heart of my research because my goal is to use this study to improve teacher preparation and practice. One way that this study established external validity was the quality of the participants as exemplary teachers was pre-determine by the vetting and selection process required to go from Teacher of the Year nominee, to candidacy, to finalist, and finally to winner. Only Teacher of the Year finalists or winners were included in this research so one may generalize that the observations documented are that of exemplary teachers at the secondary level.

Furthermore, the external validity was further supported by the ability to analyze the data collected using established theory (Yin, 2016, p. 43). In this study, those analytical theories are the affective domain (Krathwohl et al., 1964) and dramatism (Burke, 1969) as described in Chapter Two. These heuristic theories provided a recognizable and field-researched method of examining the evidence through a lens that has already gained validity in the field. Both of these theories are foundational with the affective domain theory going back to 1964 (Krathwohl et al.) and the dramatist pentad shortly after in 1969 (Burke). This established more than five decades of research applications to firmly address external validity when the data is examined through this theoretical framework.

**Reliability**

According to Yin (2016), in case study research the objective of reliability “is to be sure that if a later researcher follows the same procedures” over again, they “will arrive at the same findings and conclusions” (p. 46). In reality, however, opportunities to replicate a case study exactly rarely occur. However, the principle is still valid and should be considered. In this case
study, reliability is addressed through the careful explanation of methodology and procedures for data analysis. For example, the selection of participants is specifically limited to finalists or winners of Teacher of the Year (TOY) and the interview process is done with a documented set of questions over recorded video conferencing. Replication of these procedures is very feasible.

Another way reliability was established in this case study was the coding method for interview transcripts. The interview transcripts were coded for repeated words or patterns of words. Therefore, an auditor could review the transcripts and check for the same number of coded words and patterns to verify the findings. Ideally, this case study would have a larger number of teachers but due to the time-consuming nature of the data collection and analysis, the patterns in the 17 teachers completed provided enough reliable data to establish that a pattern did indeed occur and could be replicated with further study even though the participant responses may vary. The size of the participant pool will be again addressed in the next section on limitations.

Limitations

In an ideal world, this case study would include teachers from all 50 states and have a level representation of ethnicity, gender, age, and school environment (i.e., urban and suburban, public and private, and classical and alternative). However, to complete my case study in a timely manner while also continuing my full-time work as a faculty member in teacher education, I limited my study to what the initial research in teachers’ affective behaviors and performance techniques at the secondary level will provide to the field. My limitation decisions were based not only on time required, but also location, the current global pandemic, and the amount of data collected for analysis. As such, I have limited this study to the upper Midwest—specifically Minnesota, eastern Wisconsin, Iowa, and North Dakota.
Finally, this study was limited in its ability to establish a new theory. I had originally considered creating a grounded theory study to establish a new theory that would address the elements of affective behavior and performance techniques in teacher preparation programs. That is still a goal of mine, but this study serves as an initial springboard for this effort. This study found and described what key tenets of exemplary teachers are. From that, further study will be needed on what theory could support this development and if those skills and techniques can be directly taught. However, this case study was an important step to examining this “it factor” in teaching and providing a launching point for further study that will support teacher preparation programs and current classroom teachers in their work to be highly effective and engaging educators.
CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

Exemplary teachers impact thousands of students’ lives and are remembered as that teacher. Most, if not all, of those entering teacher preparation have a former teacher who inspired them. However, higher education is focused predominately on content, theory, and methodology. This study’s findings show that a deeper analysis of the specific behaviors and skills of exemplary teachers is invaluable to preservice teachers, current teachers, administration, and teacher licensure programs. It is with sincere enthusiasm and appreciation that I share these findings and the most engaging results lie in the words and insights of the teachers in the upcoming themes. However, before the culmination, I share the steps taken to analyze the data and extrapolate the most valuable findings.

The findings in this chapter are the result of 17 interviews conducted over the summer of 2020. All of the participants are top finalists or winners of the Teacher of the Year (TOY) award between 2004 and 2020 (all but one since 2010) in the states of Minnesota, North Dakota, Iowa, or Wisconsin. Minnesota participants included finalists, but all participants from other states were winners only. One participant, Sarah Brown-Wessling, was also selected as the National Teacher of the Year. All Teacher of the Year candidates must be nominated for the award and then go through several rounds of elimination, interviews, document review, and finally, selection. The rigorous vetting process these participants completed ensures those included in this study are identified as exemplary teachers. Participants were also limited to secondary (middle and high school) teachers since engagement practices and concerns are often impacted by student age. Therefore, this study sought to answer the research question: How do the final round candidates for the honor of “Teacher of the Year” in the Midwest region describe and exhibit the use of affective behaviors and performance techniques to engage students in learning?
Each interview lasted between 60-90 minutes. Transcriptions of the interview were initially produced via Zoom. The interviews were then replayed, and each transcription was checked for accuracy and any errors were corrected. I used the code frequency totals provided by my qualitative software tool, Dedoose, and determined the dominant themes for analysis. Analysis of those themes, using quoted material as evidence, is the key content of this chapter. They are student expertise, relationship development, teaching valued above content, engagement in secondary classrooms, humility and transparency, and the impact of COVID-19. After each theme is introduced, an exemplar is given, highlighting a specific teacher from the study. Next, findings from all other participants are given. Finally, a story shared by one of the participants highlights that theme in action. In the final theme, the impact of COVID-19, the organization is revised to the needs of the students, the need to adapt, and the need to go back to school.

**Student Expertise**

When coding for themes within the 17 transcripts of these exemplary teachers, it was not surprising to hear them repeatedly talk with immense pride about their students. However, it was more than that. At first, the dominant code that emerged in the transcripts was initially entitled “student-focused,” but that is an often-quoted educational buzzword (along with student-centered) that did not articulate the level of intensity and perception these teachers described. However, that code had emerged as a dominant code in the transcripts with more than 98 quoted excerpts specifically tied to this element and it included all 17 interview participants. In re-reading the excerpts, the word “student” remained dominant, but the term “focused” was insufficient. Instead, this code is more of a trait than a focus, and as such, I updated the code to “student expertise.” In this manner, these teachers do not merely focus on students; they
understand them at a level that requires constant practice, empathy, keen observational skills, and serious dedication. To their core, these teachers are student specialists.

**Student Expertise Exemplar**

Corey Bulman is a high school English teacher at Mount Westonka High School in Minnetrista, Minnesota an outer suburb on the Twin Cities. In 2017, he was honored as the Minnesota Teacher of the Year (TOY) and has spent his entire 20-year teaching career at the same school. Bulman and two of his close colleagues started their careers at Westonka and have never left, yet he is still adjusting to his role as a senior staff member.

Yeah, it’s funny. When you close your eyes, you become that teacher. We’re sitting there, and a couple of young teachers were like “this happened today” and Aaron said, “Oh that’s nothing.” I started laughing because we’ve become those guys. We’re like the men in The Muppet Show where you’re always armed with a story.

Bulman exemplifies a teacher with enviable student expertise. “I teach because I had adults in my life who let me know that my ideas were important. I teach because I want to add that validation to young people’s lives.” This focus on the students and their thoughts and desires is the hallmark of a teacher who goes beyond student focus to student expertise. “Troy,” one of his high school students, was able to articulate this difference best. “He not only has a passion for what he is teaching us; he has a passion for us.” “Jason” said he can talk to Mr. Bulman about anything. “His classroom is an open and a safe place for anyone to talk about, or just express what they are feeling.” Bulman clearly demonstrates how exemplary teachers do not just focus on students when it comes to content and activities, but they focus on students at a very personal and meaningful level where the content is more of a vehicle for creating safe spaces for growth and exploration.
Another way Bulman builds this expertise is by remembering the feelings and mindset of a teenager.

I think I bring an understanding that I’ve thankfully never lost about what it’s like to be a teenager; what it’s like to have that [thing] be the most important thing that’s ever happened in your life. They’re always going to bring that wonder. And then the part of your job as a teacher is to help battle the cynicism. Don’t let them give in to the cynicism that pervades so much of society.

This desire to protect a student’s sense of wonder is rarely articulated at the secondary level. A love of exploration and the freedom to enjoy the journey seems to often wane in the drama of middle school and the achievement focus of high school. Bulman combats this disillusionment in the learning process by offering students choice and a powerful voice in the process.

I think you have to be willing to explain exactly why you’re doing something, and you have to be able to say here’s the choice that’s going to be involved and this is how I’m going to honor your ideas.

Bulman’s word choice with terms like “wonder,” “validation,” and “honor” change the tenor and emotion of his classroom. He is no longer taking the tone of the one in charge, but rather the one in collaboration. “You get out of the way and just create the conditions that let them explore; you can capture kids’ attention in different ways. If you want to keep engagement, you have to make it worth their while.”

This level of student expertise does not mean Bulman is impervious to blunders. In fact, it is rather his transparency in those moments that he uses to build his connection. This is yet another example of student expertise because if you want to be successful with teenagers, you also need to know what will turn them off. Any high school teacher will attest that teenagers
abhor egotistical cover-ups or the inability to be genuine in the moment. Bulman understands how these moments can have a serious impact on his connections with students.

When I make mistakes, I always own it. I always apologize for it. And I always say, “okay what can we do to make this better?” And if you can’t do that, you lose credibility with kids. You’ve got to meet them where they are. One thing I’ve always loved about teaching is I never really did grow up. You know? Because when you work with kids, they just keep you on your toes. They keep you honest.

During the course of this hour-long interview on teaching, Bulman rarely brought up anything related to his content. Instead, his word choice, his examples, all of his responses consistently focused on the students he has learned to teach and understand at a meritorious level. Great teachers in his mind are “people who just like to be with people and they always want to be better. You know? I mean, every day I want it. I always want to be better.” Notably, this drive and focus on the students rather than the subject matter will be another key theme later in this analysis.

**Student Expertise Amongst All Participants**

All 16 of the other teachers of the year participants highlighted at one point or another the theme of student expertise. At times, they even articulated how much expertise the students have about them as teachers. Rachel Steil has taught English and journalism at Stillwater High School since 1999 and has been a top ten finalist for Minnesota Teacher of the Year in both 2015 and 2020. Steil said,

Kids know what to expect of me. They know what to expect in terms of what a class is going to look and feel like every day. They know what coming up tomorrow. They know what’s coming up a couple weeks from now so there’s no surprises. It kind of takes the
anxiety out of the experience for them and I try to be really prepared and create an environment where kids feel safe and comfortable taking risks in my classroom. This level of familiarity and routine in another way some teachers have used their expertise of students to create an optimal environment for connection and engagement. The data revealed that while some teachers thrive on showmanship and emotion, others build on their ability to create a predictable pattern that allows their students to relax and let go of some of the ingrained trauma of getting right answers or performing well on an exam.

Sarah Brown Wessling won the honor of Teacher of the Year in Iowa and went on to become the National Teacher of the Year in 2010. As a highly gifted teacher, Wessling now splits her time between teaching students at Johnston High School in the fall and her many professional development requests, training videos, and speaking events during the spring semester. For her, student expertise involves “radical listening.” She described a type of student expertise that is really all about making each student’s story the focus.

I tell people all the time. It's like we have to read two stories of every learner. We know the story of who they are and what they love what they're passionate about and how many siblings they have. And then we have to read the story of how they learn and that is acquired through very careful observation.

This careful observation is not something she described as easy or passive but rather, “I think I've worked really, really hard to get good at paying attention to people. I have worked really, really hard at seeing what's underneath people's questions—at seeing what's underneath people's hesitation.” In many ways, this level of behavioral analysis is akin to that of a master profiler. It requires hard work to study, watch, examine, and then diagnose student behavior. It goes beyond what is said to what is shown and recognizes the conflict that may arise between the two. For
example, when I asked Wessling about what impacts student engagement, she articulated the danger in assumptions based on classroom behavior alone. She argued that some think teens are, “just lazy, you know? I mean it's human maybe to think those things. But you gotta push the pause button, you know, and see what's underneath it.”

Leah Luke, a Spanish teacher from Wisconsin and 2010 Teacher of the Year, commented that it goes beyond just knowing learning styles to a deeper emotional aptitude. Even as she targets different learning styles, she is “also being cognizant of student anxiety levels.” Fellow foreign language teacher, David Volk from Fargo, North Dakota is in his 37th year of teaching and was named Teaching of the Year in 2004. He described those organic moments when students just come up, lean on his desk and they “just talk.” It is a level of expertise that comes from a commitment beyond the standard bell-to-bell. In Volk’s description, this level of expertise requires a “wiliness to be there for the students all the time.”

All of the science and math teachers interviewed were just as adamant about the level of student expertise required of exemplary teachers. Julie Beaver, a Minnesota finalist for Teacher of the year in 2016 has taught both Spanish and math in all secondary grades over her teaching career. Beaver asserted if you want students to learn, you have to know what they really need in that moment. For example, she described a class that struggled with the afternoon slump. So, they “went for a walk every day—because it was sixth hour. It was eighth grade. It was two-thirds boys. I was like, ‘Yep. Let's walk around the building.’” Diana Callope also teaches math to middle schoolers in Wisconsin, where she earned the 2015 middle school honor. She described her expertise as a balance of high expectations with the support that lets students know they are cared for and supported. Naci Jo Dauwen, the 2017 North Dakota Teacher of the Year and a middle school math teacher, said her students see her as “interactive” with them. “I’m
always calling on them. I’m always knowing their name and what’s happening with them. I’m standing by them.” The common thread with all of these teachers is that their work takes them beyond student focus to a level of expertise that allows them to make changes in the moment based on what they have learned about each student and what they need as a class both collectively, and individually.

Maggie McHugh teaches at the LaCrosse Design Institute in both science and math to six through eighth grades. She was the Wisconsin Middle School Teacher of the Year in 2019. Her experience has taught her that if a student does not feel safe, no amount of content or lesson planning will matter. “I believe a lot of students don't come to school because they don't feel safe—and I'm not talking just physical safety. I'm talking the emotional safety more.” She described a day where she was a halfway through a lesson and a student kept raising his hand and in that moment, she did not want to stop, she wanted him to wait, but she sensed he needed to say something. He blurted, “I just want you to know that my cat is sick with leukemia and I’m really worried.” She took that moment to let the class focus on “Levi” and his cat and make sure he was okay. She recalled similar moments with local flooding, parents getting divorced, and family displacement, and in those moments the exemplary teacher knows the lesson has to change and emotional safety must be established before learning can really happen.

Mary Eldredge-Sandbo teaches high school science in rural North Dakota (2010 Teacher of the Year) and Renee Swanson teaches high school science at an alternative school in St. Paul, Minnesota (2018 finalist). Although their students come from vastly different environments, both of these exemplary teachers have found that student expertise requires flexibility. Eldredge-Sandbo recalled, “One of the things that just struck me so much on the day I was named Teacher of the Year was that I had had a big conflict with a student the day before.” She went on to
explain that she has learned each student is on their own journey and that every day, just like every teacher, is different. “It just really struck me that different students have different needs from the relationships they have with adults.” Swanson echoed this in her interview noting the students who are enrolled at her alternative school often have complex histories with schooling that require a keen level of student expertise and sensitivity. She recognized some of these students will not be in school every day. She has students who are homeless, young parents, navigating the justice system, in foster care, or supporting their families by working and the traditional school set up has failed them or they have failed in it. That is where she provides the flexibility for them to believe they can still have success and finish their diploma. “It reduces that anxiety. It reduces that level of educational trauma so they can come into my room and just be able to pick up where they left off.” Swanson stated for these students, the ability to work at their own pace while often dealing with the emotions and responsibilities of adulthood at a very young age gives them an environment where they can feel supported. For students with this level of trauma, that connection with a teacher is often rare but as Swanson puts it “we know each other” and she has worked to become an expert in what her students need.

For social studies teachers Erin McCarthy, the 2020 Middle School Wisconsin Teacher of the Year, and Alyssa Larsen, a high school teacher in Waconia, Minnesota (2018 finalist), student expertise is realizing that if teachers begin with the students in mind, instead of the content, and work backwards from that, they capture their interest and engage their creativity. McCarthy shared, as a new teacher, she sometimes lacks confidence but when she realized “the thing that works right is always starting with them.” For example, if a standards-based unit is based on crisis, she begins by having students think, “When is a time you’ve been stuck with a decision and it seems like there is no good way out?” She insists her students not be “passive
learners” and even though they may spend hours on YouTube and Netflix that “doesn’t mean that’s how they want to learn or how they learn best.”

Larsen echoed this need to have meaningful connections. “I love being able to help kids get excited about learning and help them make connections between their own lives and the past or even another part of the world!” One key aspect of Larsen’s expertise is realizing that her attitude is contagious and sometimes what her students need most is for her to bring the energy. “I have to be excited about it because then the students are excited about it.” She admitted, at times, even if it is “the most boring thing ever,” she digs deep to find that energy and build that excitement because “especially in high school they’re just like—they’re tired, they’re working, there’s drama.” During Larsen’s interview, this focus on students and what is working in her classroom quite literally showed on her face as she spoke. “Anytime I can get them to think for themselves or from the perspective of others, I love it!” With this attitude and focus on students she argued, “you can reach kids for the majority of the time.”

Three of the other English teachers interviewed for this dissertation had vastly different personalities, but they all insisted having advanced skills in student expertise is critical. Joe Lawrence is a character, and he knows it. A former New York city actor, he said his students would describe him as “crazy, fun, and unpredictable.” He left the Big Apple for what teachers know can be an even harder crowd—high schoolers. In 2016, he was a finalist for the Minnesota Teacher of the Year award and like others quoted above, he also believed “if you don’t know a kid’s story, you can’t teach him anything.” His interview was one of the most entertaining and was full of laughs but there was no doubt he is passionate about teaching and his students are his favorite audience. A self-described empath, Lawrence said his superpower as a teacher is “getting people to do shit they never thought they’d do.” This comment, said with a healthy dose
of sarcasm, is just one example of how Lawrence has translated his skill for entertaining audiences to engaging and impacting students. He said students want a teacher who “talks with them and not at them” and are “in it for the right reasons.” Much like Larsen, he stated, “If kids don’t know that you care, they’re not going to care.”

Erik Brandt is also a high school English teacher and works at Harding High School in St. Paul, Minnesota (2013 and 2015 finalist). He eloquently described his expertise in this way, “Their subject is literature; my subject is them.” Brandt believes in many ways it boils down to really paying attention and listening. “Most of us don’t really pay attention to other people. We don’t. We’re so trapped in our heads all the time. You just gotta pay attention to people and the rest, I think, kind of falls into place.” Over and over again these exemplary teachers seemed to be describing a level of deep individual student study that yields significant rewards both for the student and the teacher.

Lanka Liyanapathirange was also a finalist in 2015 with Brandt and teaches middle school English in Woodbury, Minnesota. Liyanapathirange often works to view his class from the minds of his students. “I try to consistently remember, like they are going through a lot. One thing they need is less stress from me.” For him, reducing that stress comes with building trust and trust is built through student expertise.

They trust me to make sure the information I am giving them actually has a purpose. I love it when a student asks me, “Why are we doing this?” because it makes me justify why am I doing this? And if I can’t validate it, then I probably shouldn’t be doing it. Liyanapathirange identified, as have the others in this study, secondary students need a clear “why” and a valid purpose to what they are asked to do.
Student Expertise in Action

This form of student expertise can be exemplified and heightened by creating content around not just the interests of students but even the resources and culture of the community. I especially wanted to highlight this story as a key example of culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris 2012) and amplifying students’ voices (Jackson, 2011). This style of teaching was exemplified by Richard Erikson, a science teacher of 36 years and winner of the Wisconsin Teacher of the Year from Bayfield High School. Erikson also teaches in the district alternative education program working with at-risk students. This community is situated on the shores of Lake Superior in far northern Wisconsin. Seventy to eighty percent of the students are natives of the Red Cliff Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa (Anishinaabe).

During one particular point in the interview, Erikson lit up and sounded more like a proud papa than a science teacher as he described one very special unit. This unit tells the story of how this veteran teacher turned his student expertise into the epitome of engagement in experiential learning:

A few years ago, I had a student who was really into mushroom hunting and knew his mushrooms very well. And my classroom aid also knows about mushrooms as well. So, it was fun to have the two of them around. So anytime we were out, we'd be looking—they would be looking for mushrooms, regardless of what we're doing that became part of the lesson or part of the day. And they introduced me to this mushroom called Chaga. I don't know if you're familiar with it, but it grows on it's a fungus that grows only on birch trees and it historically has been known too. It has been thought to be very medicinal—that it potentially is a cancer preventative or a cancer treatment agent, but it also has other properties and we've done some research to see if it's that's backed up medically or not.
And again, there's a little bit of research that shows that. But anyway, it's a very culturally important fungus to the Anishinaabe here and we also learned to Siberians and to people in China and other northern climates.

So, I learned about this tea or learned about this mushroom and how to make tea with it, and it's a very slow growing fungus. So, it's not like mushrooms that sprout up and then are gone. It grows on trees, and it looks like a growth on the tree, but it takes years for it to grow. And what we were noticing as we as we learned more about it [was] that it also seemed to be disappearing in places. So, we started talking about overharvesting that people do as people are becoming more aware of it. They're out taking it and it might take 10 years to grow a piece of Chaga that that's like volleyball size and people would take the whole thing. And so, this student who introduced me to it talked about. He's Anishinaabe. And he talked about sustainable harvesting and respectful harvesting and how, you know, it's great to take things from nature if you if you make an offering to nature. But only take what you need and it, you shouldn't be taking it commercially to try to sell it. And so, it became this challenge for us to try to communicate to people, the value of Chaga and how to sustain them and use it. And so, we as a class developed an experiment, because you can reuse it. If you take a little piece of it like a golf ball sized piece you can reuse that to make tea several times. And so, the class decided to do an experiment to find out how many times you can reuse it. So, it was a great opportunity to take this traditional ecological Anishinaabe knowledge and blend it with Western science.

So, I didn't have the equipment, but I contacted Northland College, to see if we could borrow a spectral photometer where we could measure the light intensity passing through the tea. And then the kids every morning would make tea from the same piece of Chaga
and then we would measure the light transmittance and created this graph. And this is typically how we do things in the alternative program. So, we might take an experience like that, but then turn it into an all-inclusive program or lesson. So, we talked about the history of the Anishinaabe. The history and the culture. There was a science experiment, and we made a graph. So, there was a math involved. Then the class, as a class, wrote a paper and then the student who started the project presented at the junior science and humanities symposium in Wisconsin and took third place qualified to go to the national symposium. But then what the class also did-- then they created brochures about to teach people how to sustainably use Chaga and then they brought them to the tribal council and DNR so they could pass them out to people.

So, what started out as just kind of this observation, because we were out in the field, turned into a lesson that really the end is chemistry. That's it. That's it. That's a full quarter. It takes a full quarter to actually do it well. I think we've turned the science program and the alternative program into things that are not daily lessons. They're not 45-minute lessons and I like it. It feels good; it feels more authentic. It feels like you're really doing science!

There is so much to unpack in that story from an analytical perspective on student expertise.

First, Erikson was not the only expert. In this lesson, the student with the initial knowledge and interest in Chaga was the catalyst and main content expert. The classroom aid was also a key contributor and the fact that Erikson was the one with the science and teaching degree did not mean he had to have the stage. What Erikson provided was the time and the means for this exploration that most likely did not “feel” like school to these students. Erickson was an active participant rather than an all-knowing guide. He was actively learning along with the students.
and then bringing in his own scientific background to help them see the connections between their world and world of academia. This broke down barriers that a traditional textbook or scripted lab would struggle to ever overcome. This is a clear illustration of student expertise employed far beyond traditional pedagogy.

Secondly, the community became the classroom. Erikson understands the school building itself can be a trigger, especially if a student has school-associated trauma. Erickson recalled a particular student who was upfront:

he told me over and over again that he wasn't going to be there very long he was going to drop out. He hated school, he just, he said, “you know, it's nothing personal. It's not about you. I just don't like school.”

To combat the possible trigger students who are at-risk may feel in the traditional structure of a school building, Erikson used the community, nature, and the outdoors to bring the learning into an environment that felt safe and familiar. He also honored the culture and history of that community by using local topics and elements as the vehicle for science. It was not about some phenomenon in the city or in some university research laboratory, the science was, quite literally, in their own backyard. When Erikson did not have all he needed, he used the community again to procure the necessary equipment for his students. This is evidenced in his partnership with the local college.

Third, Erikson acted as an advocate and provided a genuine audience. As a student expert one must understand students need to know why something is important and what they can gain from it. Teachers can create buy-in as students become older and more sophisticated. Do they have to? No. Some may actually argue against this as an immature need for incentives. However, all humans want to know that what they do has value and matters. If educators look at their
reasons for giving assignments not as dangling points or grades as carrots, but rather providing immediate value, the results may be more significant, especially for those whom grades have lost their appeal. Erikson looked at the value his students conferred upon their community, their culture, and their enjoyment of exploration and then capitalized on that by providing authentic value. This is exhibited in the above story where Erikson showed students could not only learn about how to care for and save a natural resource being overharvested, but also how they could share that knowledge with their own community and the greater Wisconsin population. This occurred through their collaboration at the state and national science fair, and with the local tribe and DNR with pamphlet distribution. Erikson realized the teacher as the sole audience for a student’s work is often disappointing. Consequently, he provided a genuine and much larger audience for these students to showcase their work in a meaningful and lasting way.

Fourth, and finally, Erickson’s work with students in the Anishinaabe community provides a very clear connection to the necessary work in equity and culturally sustaining pedagogy. Paris (2012) recommends and specifically highlights the equity work of Jackson (2011) encouraging teachers to “adopt ‘high operational practices’ in learning and teaching such as engaging students in their strength building relationships, providing learning challenges and enrichment, integrating student experience in learning plans, and honoring student voice (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 85). Erikson and his work with his students is an outstanding example of achieving all of these elements in a very concrete and meaningful way.

The data clearly showed student expertise, beyond simple student focus, is a clear trait exemplary teachers keenly employ to improve student engagement. By becoming a researcher of their own students, these teachers then use that knowledge and hypersensitivity to student life to
create a classroom that feels like a community where each person is seen and valued. Wessling put it like this,

I think great teachers see their students. They see them. They see who they are when they walk in, they see who they can become, they see how they learn. It's the human work. It's one human to another human.

Relationship Development

As confirmed in extensive publications of trade literature and research, including those alluded to in the preceding literature review (Conner & Pope, 2013; Cooper, 2014; Hargreaves, 2000; Reyes et al., 2012; Roorda et al., 2011; Shoffner, 2009), the impact of teacher student relationships is firmly established in secondary education. Furthermore, the data compiled from the exemplary teachers included in this study confirms relationship building is a necessity, but also an art often individualized by each teacher’s personality, strengths, and temperament. The code of “relationship development” appeared in the transcripts 90 times and across all 17 participants. For exemplary teachers, the real meaningful learning will not happen until the relationship is established and real meaningful teaching is worth all the work because of the relationships.

Relationship Development Exemplar

Julie Beaver was a finalist for Minnesota Teacher of the Year in 2016 and has taught both math and Spanish in grades 6-12. This gives her a rather unique perspective as both an interdisciplinary teacher and one who has taught at both the middle and high school level. She currently works at Zimmerman High School, an outer ring suburb of the Twin Cities. Beaver identified herself as a relational teacher. “I do relationships—that’s what I do. That’s why kids keep coming back, even if they have a different teacher.” Beaver’s room is often full after school
as students sit around on couches and she sits down and “chat[s] with them.” This may seem rather unremarkable, but it is just the opposite. Watch the students stream, if not jog, out of most high schools at the end of the day and you get that if a student chooses to just visit after school with a teacher, that is significant. Likewise, for teachers, the end of the day is often packed with grading, emails, and prepping for the next day so the fact that Beaver stops and focuses on that key time with students is a testament to the value it holds for her and her students.

Beaver, as so many other teachers this year, is really cognizant of the issues of race and equity in education. 2020 was a painful and tragic year for Minneapolis, and the surrounding areas, with the murder of George Floyd and months of continuing riots, looting, and unrest. Beaver said, “I’m doing a lot of digging into equity and diversity and how to teach in a culturally competent way. That really often times comes down to relationships.” Beaver argues that for White teachers, a commitment to do the work to inform and educate themselves is critical. “We as teachers have to choose to do our own work. If I’m not doing my own work on me, then I can’t love my ninth grader who is all hormonal and can’t even function. My heart is burning for equity.”

Another seemingly common, but often under-invested practice, is greeting students at the door. Although common in elementary school, this practice becomes less common at the secondary level and often will only occur if teachers are required to be in the hall as part of their required expectations to maintain hallway safety and visibility. For Beaver, that time is brief but critical. “I try to greet kids, every kid, by name on the way in. How are you doing?” It may just be a brief check in, but it is focused on each individual student and “I have already made that connection before they even walk in the room.” Beaver notices, just as students notice, that not all teachers see the value in hallway greeting. “I will tell you I can look down the halls in my
building and tell you exactly who meets kids at the door and who doesn’t. It is often an indicator of relationships.” Furthermore, if a teacher chooses to be at the door and the greetings are genuine and personalized, students may adjust their attention and their level of engagement based upon the relational level of the instructor. When class does begin, it begins with another intentional connection point instead of launching immediately into content. For example, Beaver often begins with a greeting saying “I’m so glad you’re here. I really like you.’ Because who tells middle schoolers that they like them? Nobody does!” This study, however, would argue that some do, and that it matters. Beaver does tell them often, and with authenticity, that she likes them and that is why she stands out.

Continuing to spend time out of the classroom building relationships is an investment, but that is in part why it builds such large returns. The students see that investment. “I go to all the plays. I sing the national anthem for pretty much any game I’m at. And even if you’re not there for the whole game they know you were there.” Beaver also does social media for the school knowing that it is another platform where she can engage with students and connect.

Even this level of relationship building is not breaking news for educators and Beaver is one of several teachers who make this investment. However, with Beaver it gets more intense and verbalized to the extent that other teachers may find uncomfortable. For example,

I try to use language like “you are loved. You are valued. How can I love you better?”

And when you ask a kid, how can I love you better the first week they’re like “what?”

“What does that mean?”

This intentional language may not match the personality or comfort level of all teachers, but for Beaver it is being unlike other secondary teachers and loving students that makes her beloved by her students and their engagement escalates because of her approach. The nurturing teacher
mindset is often relegated to elementary school, but Beaver demonstrates that because it is uncommon, it has power. “By the end they’re like, ‘here’s what I need today.’” Not only giving students the space to verbalize their emotional needs but also instruct them in how to develop that higher level of emotional intelligence is a skill not often correlated with high school math teachers. “Sometimes you just have to eat Cheetos with them, you know? I think it’s so important to understand that we teach human beings.”

**Relationship Development by Other Participants**

Once again, the relationship development code was dominant and appeared in all of the interviews as an essential skill. It crossed disciplines, gender, locations, and student age groups (middle and high school). The English teachers, in particular, felt their discipline naturally creates an environment for deep relationships. Lawrence, who teaches high school English explained practices like journal writing create a space for students to share personal emotions and thoughts they may not share face-to-face. “I think it becomes easier for people like me that are in the subject I teach then it might be for somebody who’s got to plow through math curriculum. Part of teaching English is knowing their story, you know?” Lawrence believes this ability to empathize with the students and their struggles is “part of being able to teach.” This is notable because the skills of relationship development may rarely be part of teacher preparation. Yet, “If you don’t know a kid’s story, you don’t really know how to teach them anything.”

Fellow high school English teachers Bulman, Brandt, and Steil seemed to agree. Bulman contended, “The key to understanding teenagers is you let them talk about the thing they want to talk about more than anything else, which is themselves.” For Bulman, this is not a sacrifice of class time, but rather an investment in engagement. “I never mind taking 5 to 10 minutes out of a
48-minute block to do that because I think that’s the real teaching.” This investment is also not optional in his mind,

You’ve got to meet people where they are. You’ve gotta honor all those feelings. And if you do that, I think you’re in the game but if you lose sight of the compassion and the relationships, you probably aren’t going to be remembered by kids.

Brandt added, “You have to be vulnerable. If you’re being vulnerable and willing to share things about your life then hopefully that starts to build a sense of rapport that ‘Okay, he shared something. I can share something.’” For Brandt, this intentional relationship development may be obvious, but it is not happening often. “Most of us don’t pay attention to other people. We don’t. We’re so trapped in our heads all the time. You’ve just gotta pay attention to people and the rest I think kind of falls into place.”

Steil, whose high school English instruction focuses on communications as part of her journalism content, said this kind of intensive relationship development is not without its pain. “You’re almost like losing when they graduate. You’re almost like losing a body, a friend, and I think good teachers recognize that.” This may be unique to teaching as a field where deep relationships are formed, only to be separated a year or two later. However, the benefits of that relationship are not forgotten according to Steil. “They still talk about the teachers that had the most impact on them.” Like Bulman and Brandt, Steil has them journal and gives class time for conversation outside of her content area. “I really think part of that relationship building is allowing them to just have a few minutes to be themselves and talk to you as a person.” Once again, this connection is not optional, it is “the most important thing.”

Liyananpathiranage now teaches middle school English but has also taught at the elementary level and argued that a focus on relationships may decrease as the content takes on
more focus and importance. “When I taught at the elementary I noted people at the elementary level don’t necessarily love their content, they love working with kids—and because they love working with kids, they get into it.” However, as the content difficulty and expectations increase, Liyanapathiranage felt the pressure may also increase to focus on content over relationships for high school teachers. They “really care more about their content and maybe not only care about, but [also] feel the pressure because of AP testing, SATs, ACTs.” So, Liyanapathiranage felt he must focus not only on building relationships, but also helping students learn the skills of relationships building that they may not be learning at home. He uses social media to follow students and hold them accountable. “I’ll write, ‘That wasn’t a very nice thing to say’ and because it is coming from me, they’re like ‘Oh, sorry Mr. L.’” That support does not end after his class, he also makes it a point to use his social media accounts professionally to continue that support. When he gets together with past students, sometimes “50 to 60 a year,” he will ask them to reflect back, and he has noted that the teachers they love are “those teachers who love them also.” This goes as far as Liyanapathiranage employing and modeling the five love languages (Chapman, 1992) in his classroom by giving constant words of affirmation, pats of the back, high fives, and acts of service such as sharpening pencils or picking up trash. He does this “as a way of making sure that they know that there’s different ways they are cared about” while also instructing them on ways to show they care thus building meaningful relationships.

Although the data above supports the fervent support English teachers give to intentional relationship development, Beaver, who I have already showed exemplifies this trait, is a math and foreign language teacher. Liyanapathiranage suggested it may be more innate in the lower grade levels, however it is passionately defended by the high school teachers as well. In fact,
since all the teachers interviewed spoke to the importance of relationships, the data suggest instead that this is a critical element of exemplary teachers and not content area specific.

McCarthy, a middle school social studies teacher believed it goes beyond just knowing someone, to trusting them. “You have to really build trust with them because they need to understand what it is that happens.” Dauwen, a math teacher from North Dakota believed relationships are what set teachers apart and “the social emotional is what really makes the teacher, the great teacher. The great teachers are the ones I learned the most from and that’s because they built a relationship with me.” This again confirms the data that in order for learning to improve, relationships must be prioritized. Volk and Eldredge-Sandbo who both also teach in North Dakota, echoed their colleague’s opinion. Volk shared, “You can know all you want about the subject, but if you can’t connect, they’re not gonna be open to taking that in from you.” And again, these moments, though intentional, are often described as spontaneous, as Eldredge-Sandbo stated, it is “just those little conversation and then remembering it and following up.”

There is a recurring theme in the participants’ comments of intentionality, which is supported by taking hold of spontaneous moments of connection.

Other participants in this study referred to relationships in almost mythical and magical tones. Erickson noted, “If I can build a relationship with a student, I can teach him anything.” Larsen added, “Anything you can do to try to figure out what they’re in to is a great way to open the door.” And, McHugh shared, “I’m going to call it like a transcendent relationship where the caring goes deeper.” The findings yielded again and again quotations that emphasized relationship building in a manner that made it as important, and likely more so, than the focus teachers already give preparation in classroom management or lesson planning. Indeed, McHugh commented, “All teachers know that relationships are important, but you’re about a different
level.” Thus, the data clearly emphasize the need for intentional and ongoing relationship development in and out of the classroom.

**Relationship Development in Action**

During our interview, 2010 National Teacher of the Year, Sarah Brown-Wessling told a story of an interaction she had with a young man that exemplifies unique and stylized relationship development not only by the teacher, but also instilling that skill in the students:

His name is “Josh,” and he was a senior when I had him. He had just moved in during his junior year, at the end of his junior year, to Iowa from Atlanta. And yeah, and he was tough. He was *tough*. He wanted the whole class to be derailed all the time, you know, because it just made him more comfortable when everything was chaotic. And we have this thing in our school where you can call a foul on people. We do these social contracts and sometimes those contracts are just dumb, and sometimes they're not. Right? So, it's really not the contract. It's how you live it, you know?

So anyway, you can call these fouls so Josh was not only tough on me, but he could say kind of not crazy hurtful things to other people, but just enough to just not be nice, you know? And so finally this one kid, “Pete,” he's like, “I'm calling a foul on you [Josh].” And he said like “you crossed the line, man.” And so, I said, “All right, let's do the thing.” And of course, he [Josh] isn't. So, I said, “you need to tell him you're sorry.”

In my family we do a lot of making amends. Like, this is one of the things that I do with my children. We do a lot of making amends. And so, I talked about this is what *has* to happen. “You can't just say you're sorry. You have to make amends.” And I said, “so I'm going to ask you to do that by giving him an affirmation. Tell Pete something that you actually appreciate.” And so, he said something really dumb. Like, it was a backhanded
compliment something about, “I like your dirty shoes” or some stupid thing. And I said, “This doesn't count.” And so he did another [stupid] one. And I’m like, “okay,” so I gave in because I thought he was just doing it for attention. So, I gave him a post-it note and said, “You just write it. And when you get one, give it to me. And then I'll give it to him.” And then I can kind of carried on with the lesson.

So, he writes down a couple of things. And they're all some version of the same. And so I looked at him. But, and by this time, like the whole class is like waiting to see. Right? And I said, “Josh, and you don't know what an affirmation is do you?” And he said, “Well, maybe not.” I said, “Okay, got it. So, let's do it [together]. Good?” “What are you gonna do?” he said. I said, “Come up to the front.”

So, he came up to the front and I sat knee-to-knee with him. And I said, “I'm going to show you what an affirmation is.” I said, “Josh, I love how fierce, your brain is. I noticed that you always ask these questions that are not just about the things that happened, but they're always about ideas, and I really admire that about you.” I said, “I also really admire how strong you are. It's not easy to move. It's not easy to move under the circumstances that you have but you're fighting through it, you know? And you're going to make it. You're going to graduate and you're going to make it. And it's going to be okay.”

And he just like looked at me and didn't say anything. And he took the sticky note. And then he wrote like a genuine thing to Pete. I was like, “Wow he did it!” And then he kept the extra post-it notes and for the rest of class, he wrote a genuine note to every person in the class. He wrote a genuine thing to every person in the class. It was like his apology for being just like kind of a jerk, but, you know, of course he's not a jerk, right? Because
underneath this is a lot of anger and a lot of fear and a lot of loss of self-confidence and like there's no way for that to come out. And I think that's part of what students would say. “Yeah, we know you care because instead of just kicking him out of the class, you had a conversation with him, and you taught him what he needed in that moment.” And I think when students see that with one student they understand that you can also do that for them.

As a researcher, I will admit, this moment in the interview had me close to tears. There was something about that visual of a cocky, tough, closed-off young man, sitting knee to knee with this curly-headed, compassionate teacher and, maybe for the first time, heard he was valued, mattered, and someone truly saw him as a person of worth and ability. I could imagine the eyes of his classmates watching intently in that moment and feeling the electricity of a moment when the entire class is not just engaged, they are entranced. Brown-Wessling, in that moment, was not just teaching. She was very possibly changing that man’s life and creating a catapult forward in his emotional and relational development. Those are the moments teachers and students never forget and it is so much more than just relationship development; it is relationship brilliance.

**Teaching Valued Above Content**

One of the most detested platitudes hurled at teachers is “Those who can’t do, teach.” Not only does this diminish the knowledge, skills, and creativity so many teachers possess, but it also misses the point of teaching entirely. In talking to these top honored teachers, what they raved about was not their content. It was not their ability to brilliantly diagram sentences or master complex algorithms. What they love, is teaching. The saying “those who can’t do, teach” suggests that if teachers were more skilled in a certain field of study, they would not choose to teach it. For example, a brilliant mathematician would never stoop to teaching, or an engrossing
writer would abhor the thought of working with teenagers on essays. These may both be true, but the underlying premise is faulty resulting in a logical fallacy. The premise behind these statements is that teachers joined the profession based upon their love of the subject matter that they could not employ with enough skill elsewhere. This premise is flawed because most exemplary teachers did not go into teaching primarily for the content, it was always about the students and teaching itself.

Teaching Valued Above Content Exemplar

Alyssa Larsen teaches Advanced Placement (AP) history and human geography at Waconia High School which is about 30 miles from the Twin Cities. One of the first things Larsen shared with me in her interview was, “I always say I like history, but I LOVE teaching.” Larsen has a twin sister who is also a teacher, and they often plan and brainstorm together. She is also married to a teacher and can remember wanting to be a teacher since she was a child. However, when it came time to go to college, she actually had to think about what content would support her primary desire, which was to teach.

I knew I just love working with kids, but I had to find something. I wasn’t an artist. I enjoy music, but I’m not a performer in that way. History and social studies were something that I felt like I could relate to and that is able to transfer to the classroom. So yes, I like history, but oh, I love teaching. It’s just, it’s my thing, you know?

It may be because of this focus on the action of teaching rather than the consumption of content that Larsen is able to maintain a growth mindset in regard to her lessons and is often trying out new ideas. “I’ll spend hours on lessons and sometimes they don’t work. They flop. On the flipside, you CAN reach kids the majority of the time.” It is the focus on reaching her students and less on pushing through content that inspires her commitment to the role. “My job as a
teacher is to help train them to be thinkers and to be empathetic. It’s not just about turning in assignments. I just LOVE this job.”

Larsen’s approach to lesson planning is focused on connecting the students to the history rather than forcing the content on a student that may see no reason to engage. “I try to figure out how this [content] impacts kids or how it can relate to their lives.” Sometimes, she also uses the more enticing elements of a time in history to spur their engagement.

Like, you will remember this odd story about the one and only Chinese Empress who was kind of shady and was a nun, and then she got with the emperor and they had a kid, and it was like, “oh shit!” That’s the kind of drama they like!

Larsen uses engaging historical stories and the art of storytelling to pull the students in and then I work extremely hard to teach history from multiple vantage points. I preach to my students that if you remember nothing from my class, I want you to know what the world means and not to take part in ethnocentrism.

This focus on teaching may at times mean content is sacrificed or not as much is covered. Rather than see that as distressing, Larsen welcomes the flexibility. During the spring of 2020, when the COVID 19 pandemic hit and teachers were asked to make significant cuts to their content as they went fully online, Larsen was all in. “I had no issue with that. I’m like, I just want kids to develop and be lifelong learners. I don’t really care if I don’t meet all the standards.” For Larsen, that ability to pivot, create, and keep trying is the hallmark of great teachers. “Good teachers, they get the job done. They know their content really well. They’re nice. But great teachers never feel like they’ve perfected the profession.” It is this drive to keep getting better at what they do for who they teach, rather than what they teach, that the participants of this research consistently championed.
Teaching Valued Above Content in Other Study Participants

Teaching valued above content was coded in 16 of the 17 transcripts and when the “love of teaching” was merged with this code, it crossed all participants and included more than 100 excerpts within the data collected. Bulman, a high school English teacher cited earlier as an exemplar of student expertise, also spoke to this concept repeatedly with 14 excerpts recorded. For Bulman, content is a part of the job, but students are the focus. “You are not a specialist in content; you’re a generalist who has to become a specialist in working with people, and that is different.” So, for Bulman and other teachers, the goal is not to create English majors, historians, or future math scholars, but rather to impact them as part of a shared world. Bulman commented, Everybody’s going to interact with the world. Everybody’s going to come up against moral and ethical situations. So, if I remember that those skills are more important than understanding the color symbolism in The Great Gatsby, they’ll be better served.

This is not to say that teachers do not need a love and advanced knowledge of their content, but rather what fuels that love is teaching. Bulman shared the teachers who are remembered are those who made them “feel like their voice mattered.” That voice embodies the individualized focus in great teaching. “What I think separates people into being great educators is that they understand it is a human endeavor. It is not an academic endeavor.” The key to this piece of data is that it points to the humanity of a what has erroneously been viewed as a content-driven profession. Bulman added, “The greatest teachers I know were people that had their content locked down. But they also had a deep understanding of the human condition and that human condition is what drove their content, not the other way around.”

Liyanapathiranage, of Woodbury Middle School believed, “There’s a difference between people who love their content versus people who love kids.” Brandt echoed this sentiment
saying, “I love people more than my subject and that’s the thing.” Dauwen, a high school math teacher, stated, “It’s so important that your curriculum becomes so secondary that you are just involved with the room.” This, of course, comes with confidence in your content so a teacher can make that critical shift in focus without sacrificing learning, but these exemplary teachers say that shift is powerful. Beaver, a Zimmerman math teacher, said great teachers have to be willing to know when the content may need to be set aside for a time.

Say you’re going to teach English and maybe you love grammar and that’s amazing. But there are days when they come in and there’s not grammar happening and that’s okay because you know they’re going to figure out where to put their commas at some point in time.

However, on that day the teaching may take place outside the content. Beaver said this after sharing what it was like to teach the day after a student had died. The content had to wait. What this data shows is that content may often be the vehicle for exemplary teaching, but it is not the fuel. Students provide the real power to inspire memorable classroom lessons. As Steil from Stillwater put it, “They’re all our kids. I think that’s what makes one of the biggest differences—when teachers are invested and see beyond just the curricular content delivery and see that what we are shaping kids. We are educating the whole child.” Brown-Wessling of Iowa confirmed this emphasis: “When I walk into a classroom I have a plan in my head, but it never supersedes the students in front of me.” This emphasis beyond content to social-emotional and maturity development far exceeds state standards. Exemplary teachers know this is simply good teaching, even if you cannot represent it on a standardized test.

McHugh teaches science and math at the LaCrosse Design Institute in Wisconsin, so she is responsible for teaching two major content areas:
I don’t have a math textbook or a science textbook. It is in project-based learning. I think, “Is it where my students are at? Where’s the world is at? How am I going to create a rich, integrated project that engages my students and moves students one step beyond where they are at now?” Wherever they are at, that’s where I’m meeting them and that really highlights the authenticity and value of learning—learning as a process, not learning as an end product, or a grade, or anything like that. Learning is just the process and continually reflecting on that process.

Where a love for the students and an excitement for the content intersects is when lessons spur not only intellectual but also personal growth. Swanson, who works with at-risk students in an alternative education program in St. Paul knows the content has to mean something to the student to engage them. To foster this, the majority of the curriculum at her school is also project-based with real-world applications.

They’re not just regurgitating on the test, but they’re taking and applying it in this whole social justice context and it’s absolutely amazing. What is most rewarding to me is when I see them get to that level of questioning and application. It’s just so, so rewarding.

McCarthy believed at times this means digging deep into the curriculum to find the best content. I find what I really care about. It’s very hard for me to stay engaged when things get really repetitive and boring. I love what I do, and I don’t want to ever say “I know you might not care about this topic.”

For Callope, who teaches middle school, an age many often cannot imagine teaching, it is a love for the students and teaching first that shines through. “I love eighth graders. They’re kind of in that tween stage where they don’t want that feeling of I’m still a little kid, but they need you to be a kind of mom.” Erikson, who also teaches part time in the local alternative program, projects
a natural curiosity with his students. “I tell people all the time, when they ask me about the alternative program, I say, ‘You know I really don’t feel like a teacher. I feel like I facilitate, and I learn as much as they do!’” Erikson has been teaching for more than 36 years and so when he shares this attitude and students see it, he personifies what it means to be lifelong learner and not just a passive consumer of content.

Lawrence, a former New York actor, is now an exemplary high school English teacher and he understands, very well, the impact of a love for what you do over what you know:

If you’re really passionate about something, it’s contagious. When I get excited about stuff, I get excited about stuff. I look like a dork and they [students] look at me like “what’s the matter with you” because I’ll be dancing around to the new Kendrick Lamar song and I get pumped about what they do too, you know? The only reason I really like teaching is because I get to know these kids! I see stuff. I write plays for them every year because I’m inspired.

It is this level of passion for a job that ignorant critics might consider a step back, that actually makes teaching a career that exemplary teachers speak of with such appreciation. Luke shared, “There’s that intersection, that inner joy when I walk into the school building every morning. The kids are the best part of it.” Eldridge-Sandbo, a veteran teacher from North Dakota, has not lost that joy.

I just love my students so much and I’d always like them, but I can love them, and I do. If we can find ways to enjoy our students, even when they are driving us crazy, if we can just keep remembering, I really do love these kids. We’re in this because it’s important and those students are pretty darn loveable.
Again, and again the data, all the answers, all the stories, were about the students, not the content.

**Teaching Valued Above Content in Action**

David Volk has been teaching in Fargo public schools for 37 years. He began teaching Latin and English but invested much of his effort in growing interest in and appreciation of Latin in his district. Interest grew and he has now been teaching Latin for many years full time at the high school level and there is another Latin teacher at the middle school level. He said students will often comment on his sense of humor and his entertaining use of puns. “They would probably think I’m some sort of odd duck at first.” He also is known for having high expectations but giving students many opportunities to succeed and keep raising the bar. “I think of it as a high jump. You’ve got to constantly put the bar up higher if you want them to move forward.” There is no doubt that Volk has an advanced knowledge of Latin, but it is the success of his students that made him light up during his interview. His examples of his teaching style would often fall into stories about his students’ accomplishments and how he himself is part of their family:

When we have conferences. We are in a big gym. And they set up the tables and they put out a teacher table, and the teacher chair on the back of the table, and they put two chairs for the parents on the other side. At these conferences, I’ve been a rebel. I will push by table back. I will bring my chair on to the front, and I will set the two pair of chairs right next to me. That doesn't make me better but that explains, who I am. I'm part of the family. I look at myself as part of the family. And I'm there right beside them trying to figure out what's best for the child. I'm right along with them and I adopt the parents. I adopt their children.
For Volk, his students are a part of his family and he becomes a part of theirs. This is very different than the strict schoolmarm who walks up and down the aisles repeating Latin phrases and hitting hands with rulers. This is not the gruff old scholar who sits behind a desk and rarely says a kind word. The way Volk described his teaching is more of a father-figure than the Hollywood stereotypes of stuffy Latin teachers. He talked about his students in the same devoted and nostalgic manner you find parents reminiscing over sentimental moments with their children:

In fact, one of my fondest memories early on in my teaching career is this class that I had for many years. And they're all doing incredible. One’s an editor for The New York Times! Anyway, that class was there when I got married. Three of them came out to Montana for my wedding. And then our first child died in utero eight months into the pregnancy. They came out to the funeral. I mean this this was an incredible class and I still get together for lunches and suppers with them.

In fact, last year we had the National Junior Classical League Convention in Fargo and the one who's the editor for The New York Times, her daughter was coming to the National Convention. So here her daughter's now taking Latin and she flew up when she came with her daughter to see me. And I had one of the students who works out in San Francisco and a couple others. They all came in and we have this nice little lunch together at NDS. But when they graduated, they gave me a hat that said “dad.”

Volk’s student stories weave in and out of every answer he gives and cross decades of families. He spoke of favorite lessons and key concepts, but all within the context of how that impacted a student or created a memorable connection. It is a bit like looking through a mental photo album of all of his classes and he has special memories of each one. This is the life of an exemplary teacher.
I began this theme with what may be the most despised teacher motto, “Those who can’t do, teach.” The better response may be “Those who can’t, criticize.” If you have not experienced the magic of a truly powerful moment in the classroom, you cannot comprehend that it was not about the topic, it was about the students. The data clearly provide a strong association between teaching valued above content in all of the exemplary teachers included in this study. It is interesting then that the most common response when someone shares they are a teacher is, “What do you teach?” The more appropriate response may be something like, “I teach these incredible high school kids, and we use English/math/science/social studies/electives to create moments of spectacular wonder.” Teachers should not have to defend their career choice. Teachers like Beaver in Zimmerman who believe, “I was born to do this, and I love it. It just goes to my very core.” This study suggests teachers have arguably the most significant impact on humanity anyone can deliver.

Engagement at the Secondary Level

In the preceding literature review, the research showed that by high school as many as 40-60% of students are “chronically disengaged” (Klem & Connell, 2004, p. 262). Further studies showed, however, this may be largely mitigated by a focus on increasing engagement through teacher behavior (Klem & Connell, 2004). Consequently, this study has sought to fill a gap in specific details and determine what affective behaviors and performance techniques exemplary teachers describe and employ to increase student engagement.

Over the course of the 17 participant interviews, engagement was often addressed, but two questions in particular resulted in the most discussion on this key topic. One, “What do you think causes students to become less engaged in class at the secondary level?” Two, “How do you monitor student engagement as you teach and what do you look for?” These questions
sought to uncover not only possible causes for disengagement, but also the specific behavior exemplary teachers employ to combat that disengagement.

Once again, all 17 of the participants made comments in their interview on this theme with most of those comments focused on the positive; what helps engagement and what they look for to confirm it. There were 61 excerpts given on engagement cues, versus 28 on what harms engagement. This may be because of a desire to share what they have found that works or a desire to evade the negative. Regardless, if the students are not engaged, then learning does not happen, and these teachers were excited to share what they have learned through years of teaching and student interactions.

**Student Engagement at the Secondary Level Exemplar**

Although a bit tongue-in-cheek, a common tip to new teachers is steal, steal, steal. Classroom tested tips and techniques are often golden when learning the craft of teaching. Most teachers by nature clearly want to help others learn. Since Sarah Brown-Wessling became the Iowa Teacher of the Year and then the National Teacher of the Year in 2010, she has been splitting her time between classroom teaching and educating teachers through videos, conferences, blogs, advice columns, consulting, and professional development materials. As a top contributor and Tch Laureate Emeritus on The Teaching Channel, Wessling has published 145 videos and blogs aimed at helping other teachers become better.

Wessling will be the first to tell anyone that becoming an exemplary teacher takes a lot of hard work. “I think I’ve worked really, really hard to get good at paying attention to people. I have worked really, really hard at seeing what’s underneath people’s questions—at seeing what’s underneath people’s hesitation.” Much of what Wessling shared in terms of engagement has to do with laser-focused observational skills and learning vs. simple obedience in class.
Engagement to me is different than compliance. Doing the work is not what I’m looking for. What I’m looking for are very thoughtful questions. I’m looking for students who get stuck, but don’t want to stay stuck. They want to get through it.

Wessling teaches English at the high school level and suggested that the lesson has to prompt high engagement and critical thinking. “Do we craft assignments that are inherently complex enough to get students to traverse through that struggle?” If not, she contended, teachers may have compliance, but they will rarely have thoughtful engagement.

Wessling shared one of her concerns with incoming teachers is there is a misconception that learning is linear. “One of the things that I have seen that continues to pull on student engagement is the way we use assessment.” She noted some teachers believe, “that if you have a pre-test and then you have a set of lessons and when one doesn’t go right, you have an intervention that you’ve already planned. You can have a post-test and you can catch everybody.” This type of linear approach to learning is part of what Wessling argued works against engagement. “Learning is recursive. It requires curiosity. It requires failure. It happens on their time, not on ours.”

Wessling has done many videos and sessions on her best lesson ideas, but she warned that the lesson plan is not what does the teaching.

I am going to ultimately have to do the teaching and I can only do that when I have a connection to my students. We want them to care. We want to give them the right amount of challenge that frustrates them just a bit, so they keep after it. I think a lot of that comes with authentic work. So for me, engagement is authentic assignments and audiences.

Wessling also suggested engagement requires a shift in classroom culture from grades to learning, and organic conversations about how the brain learns. “Engagement is part of a culture
of learning, not a culture of machinery, not a culture of just getting kids through.” This shift in culture points to a greater focus on mindset over material to improve student engagement significantly.

**Student Engagement in Secondary Classrooms by Other Study Participants**

For McHugh (2019 WI TOY), like Wessling, engagement goes back to culture, “I like to just have a lot of fun! I create this culture where learning should be fun. It should be. You’re spending eight hours in school and we should be excited.” McHugh knows students like to talk so she gets students talking and collaborating and then has them report out on their learning. “I’ll say, ‘Okay, everyone’s gets 30 seconds to make sure everyone’s ready to share out.’ And then it’s random so everybody’s ready. You gotta have them talk. You’ve got to.” McHugh wants her students to enjoy good conversations that also support thinking deeply and learning together.

One notable pattern in this theme was the lack of a dominant pattern of behavior. All the participants had their own ways of looking for, creating, and supporting engagement. Lawrence, the actor of the group, looks at his class much like he would look at play audiences. His sarcasm and wit are always in full force. “Well, I’m good at it! How you can tell that an audience is engaged is when they are watching! Like a play, I think of everything from that perspective because I direct plays.” This is reflected in how he described his room as well. “There is no front to my room. I think of it as like the opposite of theater in the round. The audience is in the middle of the room and I work all around that.” McCarthy (2020 WI TOY) also uses the room to improve engagement. “It’s just using every space. There’s nowhere to hide. We’re all part of the community. We all need to contribute to it.” Lawrence focuses on keeping them locked in through ever changing action. “I don’t ever do any one thing for more than seven to eight minutes. But the talking for me is usually with them instead of at them. I’ll ask a question, ask
another question, ask a third question.” Lawrence has found a powerful way to blend his acting skills into teaching that really works for him. “Being able to improvise … I know I couldn’t teach if I wasn’t a theater person.” The personalities of the study participants varied widely, but when it came to engagement, it seemed clear that each teacher had to work to find their own authentic style that students would respond to.

For Volk, the veteran Latin teacher from Fargo, it goes back to his roots. “My dad, the tractor mechanic, what he has to do is look at what in the machine needs tweaked for it to run.” After a brief sidetrack to explain the Latin origin of repair comes from “to get ready again” as only a passionate language teacher could, he returned to his dad, the tractor mechanic. “But sometimes what he has to look at is not the machine. It’s the farmer. What are the things that that farmer could do to make it more efficient?” He used this analogy to explain how he has to look at everything from the lesson, to the students, to himself to see what tweaks have to be made to really improve engagement. It is an ongoing process to “keep it running.” From the stage of NYC to the barns of North Dakota is a big leap, but what both teachers are speaking to is their own special recipe for engagement where the ingredients are unique to the teacher.

Larsen (Waconia HS Social Studies) spoke to those naysayers who often arise when highly emotive and engaging teaching is discussed. “I’ve had some teachers who struggle with it saying, ‘We’re not here to entertain’ and I’m like ‘Yeah, but it has to be enjoyable!’” Larsen works with AP students and sometimes that includes complex topics and some lecture. She will often interrupt the lecture after about 15 minutes, even with these advanced seniors, because she knows she will be able to get their attention back after a break. “’We’re going to stand up and take a walk. This is the time to grab those phones. You better check the snaps.’ I’m going to wake them up.” This highlights not only Larsen’s ability to tune into the needs of her students’
attention span but also her sense of humor and rapport as she has her kids “check their snaps” and recognizes the phone does not have be every teacher’s enemy. “Some teachers are like, no phones! I give them time to do it and it’s going to wake them up and then they come back.” Larsen has adjusted her teaching style and the amount of content she can expect to cover based upon what amount of engagement and memory recall she can count on even in the most advanced high school classes.

The quick break strategy to improve engagement is not unique to high school, but teachers often modify it for their age group. Liyanapathiranage teaches 7th grade English and he also uses quick breaks but rather then checking their phones he often has them play a game. After that break, he works with them on how their own body language can improve their learning. “I try to teach them to sit up, lean in, ask questions, nod, track the speaker, this is how I know [they are engaged].” At times, he also stops a lesson because he can sense it is not going well or he sees them disengaging and he brings them into the solution. He asks, “Could I be doing something better? Do we need to backtrack?” For him, the use of games in his classroom has been very successful for engagement and so “we probably play a game every single day. Sometimes I get a little defensive because some people say, ‘all you do is play games’ and it’s like four minutes in a 65-minute class. We do so much more than that!” This need to defend when students are having fun suggests there is still a long way to go before it is widely accepted that learning and fun, engagement and body movement, and talking and thinking are all very much intertwined. These exemplary teachers are evidence of its effectiveness.

Relationship was also cited again for its impact on engagement. Beaver (Zimmerman HS math and Spanish) shared,
If you keep them moving and you have good relationships, then we don’t have to do discipline, discipline. I can just call out and say, “hey, stop that” and they do because they love me and they know I love them.

Eldridge-Sandbo also believed engagement goes both ways. She shared she often feels her own engagement and mood are impacted by her students.

I have so much fun. And I usually find I feel better afterwards. Of course, there’s class periods that just make you want to cry and not everything goes well, but just having that mindset. Sometimes it’s like a switch. I walk into a room and it’s like “Aww, students!”

This contagious emotion is also seen in Larsen’s classroom, “I have to be excited about what I’m teaching. I have to be excited about it because then the students are excited about it.” Although not surprising for anyone who deals with the ups and downs of emotions in their own relationships, this connection to classroom may often be overlooked.

Looking itself seems to be key for these exemplary teachers when it comes to engagement. What they see, coupled with what they feel, and how they move was cited as key to how they find and keep students engaged. Callope (8th grade math) said, “Their body posture in their chair can often tell you that they’re bored or don’t understand something. They’re physically in your room, but they’re not in your room.” Erickson (HS science) agreed she looks for body posture and facial expressions. “It’s also listening to conversations. You can tell a lot by the types of questions they’re asking.” Dauwen (HS math) watches their body language and uses her own. “Are you walking around the room to see what’s happening? Is their body language focused on you or are they slouched under their desk?” McCarthy (8th grade social studies) said,
We are more visual than we realize. I think some teachers depend on their voice. For me, body language is the starting point. It’s a look on someone’s face when you ask a question. I could draw you a picture!

Some teachers also spoke to an even more abstract assessment of engagement. Swanson (HS science) said, “You know you just feel it. It’s that vibe of the room.” Luke (HS Spanish) added, “It’s just being able to read the room. Listening to the volume levels, the excitement in their voice, or the boredom. It’s about having something better to kick out when it’s needed.” All of these environmental cues highlight the multi-tasking brain of exemplary teachers who adjust in seconds based on largely visual feedback.

A couple of the participants in this study warned against misreading student behavior. Both are veteran teachers, and both have been nominated for the top Minnesota award twice.

Rachel Steil (finalist in 2015 and 2020) said,

I probably would have at one point in my career said engagement is all kids participating or doing A, B, C. But I think we have to remember that it looks different for kids. As a learner myself I’m not the one with my hand in the air all the time. I’m often the one reflecting and thinking. I’m engaged, but my engagement represents differently. It looks different.

This caution to remember that engagement presents differently in different students was poignantly highlighted in a story told by English teacher, Erik Brandt.

**Engagement in Secondary Classroom in Action**

So far in this chapter my action sections have all been positive stories of a teacher employing high engagement in the classroom. However, as teachers know, sometimes a mistake creates much more learning. Erik Brandt teaches high school English at a very diverse high
school is St. Paul, Minnesota. He is National Board Certified, the coordinator for the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program at Harding High and was a finalist for Minnesota’s top teacher honor in 2013 and 2015. Brandt contended that “great teachers take big risks, and they experience failure.” He believed failure and doubt are an essential part of greatness. As an example, he told me the following story:

Let me tell you about two times that I was really wrong. I remember Ryan. 12th grade. This is maybe about, I don't know, seven or eight years ago. He’s sitting in the front row, had his phone out. This is kind of pre iPad, pre-one-to-one in our district and I was generally fine with it, but my immediate assumption was that Ryan was just like dinking around on his phone and not being engaged and I publicly call him on it. What is he doing? He's actually taking what we're doing in class and doing additional research to find out [more] so he has something to contribute to the conversation. I was wrong.

Okay, and this happened to be an Asian student and then a couple years later, I had this African American male, brilliant kid. He always had the hoodie up, rarely turned into work, skateboarder, kind of like slouchy in the seat, had this disaffect, you know? So, similar situation and my assumption was, you know, he's on his phone. And you know what he was doing? He was actually typing up the assignment to submit it on his phone.

So, what can I say about knowing kids are engaged, is that maybe we don't know a damn thing. You know, maybe we're wrong. A lot of the times, maybe because I'm a white male and I grew up in, you know, a rural community. And this is what engagement is, staring at the teacher and having a notebook out that looks like engagement. Well, it probably wasn't actually. And they're also teenagers were dealing with who aren't always
the best at communicating what they're really feeling or what's really going on. And it may come out in really unconstructive forms sometimes. I think, teachers, we need to be very mindful. As much as they can have their own potential biases and their own ways of reading the situation, it might be wrong.

This powerful check could cause some teachers to re-think everything the exemplary teachers had described above, but that is not the point. The point is all teachers should focus on how they can positively impact engagement in the classroom and then make sure they have the relationships and humility to back them up when things may not be as they appear to be. The message is not to stop looking for those cues, it is to remember that students, like teachers, are all unique. Teachers need to recognize and check their own biases and approach education with an equity mindset that students of all races, backgrounds, religions, and experiences are worthy and deserving of an education that meet their needs. There is always more to learn and perfect in this rewarding profession and that carries a weighty responsibility by impacting the lives of students.

**Teacher Humility and Transparency**

The craft of teaching is never fully mastered. Every day teachers practice through trial and error, inspiration and perspiration, and hone their skills. The next term or year, a whole new group of students awaits them, and, in many ways, they go back to the beginning and build again. However, this chapter has clearly established the teaching credibility of these participants. By limiting all interviews to only top finalists or winners of each state’s Teacher of the Year program, these teachers were vetted for their excellence, ability, and reputation. These 17 participants represent the very best of secondary teachers in the upper Midwest. They have the awards, gifts, letters, assessments, and resumes to prove it. Yet, what the data uncovered is that
they also have a healthy dose of humility and transparency about what they do and the ups and downs of how they do it.

**Teacher Humility and Transparency Exemplar**

Rachel Steil teaches English and journalism at Stillwater High School, which is about 25 miles from the Twin Cities. Beyond her two top 10 finalist awards for Minnesota Teacher of the Year (2020 and 2015), she was also named 2018 Minnesota Journalism Advisor of the Year. She has been a teacher for over 20 years and a former intern at the local NBC affiliate (KARE 11) and at ABC “Nightline” in Washington, D.C..

It is safe to say this is an accomplished and highly respected teacher, but her interview revealed a much humbler side:

I think I’m just human. I’m relatable. I’m probably the most humble person. I always feel somewhat uncomfortable when the spotlight is shined on me too long. Like even this Teacher of the Year stuff. It’s like, “thank you. I appreciate that.” It’s definitely an honor. But okay, now on to the next person. It’s never been about me in my classroom. It’s about them.

Throughout the interview, Steil would consistently shine the light on her students. It was not about a lesson she created or a moment of mental brilliance she had. It would be about what students did with a lesson or a success they all took part in as a class.

Steil’s personality in the interview was not the same dramatic, big personality of Lawrence, the actor/teacher in Delano, or Beaver, the high energy, lots of love math teacher from Zimmerman. In fact, her voice was very calm, her demeanor was relaxed, and it felt more like having coffee than an interview. She brings that same vibe to the classroom:
I'm just real, you know? I'm real, and I'm kind, and I care about you, and that will shine through in every single thing I do. So, I may not have the big gestures, I might not have those big moments. But I care about you. And so, when I'm teaching, I will make myself vulnerable to you. I will tell you stories about my kids, and myself, and my husband, and growing up, and try to make connections for you, so you get to know who I am throughout the course of the year.

Just getting up in front of a classroom full of teenagers is vulnerable enough for many, but Steil uses her transparent attitude to connect and draw students in. It builds a sense of community and comfort. “I think what the kids know as soon as they walk in, is it's a space where they can be themselves. Where we can be friends. It's comfortable. And it's not about me in that space.”

Steil also shared, like others, that being transparent, available, and humble, gives students the permission to do the same and to share things about their own lives outside of school.

Oh gosh, I'm gonna get emotional. You know, it’s those moments when the kids would come and sit at my desk or my table and we just chat. Shoot the breeze. Tell me about your boyfriend, your girlfriend, that car that broke down last night, the job you want to have this summer. You know? The funny thing your mom did last night. Those are those magical moments that build those relationships. Kids swinging by your room during passing time, stopping by before school, that authentic class discussion where you can have a small group that breaks off into this whole goofy thing about a, b, c, or d. You can’t substitute that face-to-face contact.

After more than 20 years, Steil is not cynical or caustic about her profession, as some teachers become. She still speaks about moments in the classroom with a sense of joy and love. And the students love her back. One of the best examples of this was when her students decided to show
their appreciation. Senior Jameson Stahl reached out to her favorite journalist at KARE 11, Boyd Huppert, “just because of everything she’s done for us” (Stahl, 2018) and invited him to surprise Ms. Steil in their third hour newspaper class. “I was very, very surprised. They know that I show almost all of his work and just rave about him.” The moment was captured on video and you can see her shock. She goes around to all of her students and is hugging them in the video captured of that day. For teenage students to go out of their way to show a teacher how much they appreciate them, creates a memory that impacts that teacher and the students for a lifetime. However, I did not find out about this story because Steil shared it out of pride. I found it online and when I brought it up she again avoided the accolade and quickly said “it was just very sweet.” This moment may not be an award that can hang on the wall or an accolade she can put on her resume, but it is a powerful testament to the impact this humble teacher is having on her students. More than two decades into the job she insists, “I’m not perfect. I’m still a work in progress.”

**Figure 5**

Boyd Huppert Surprise Visit to SAHAS (Stillwater High School, 2018).
Teacher Humility and Transparency Amongst Other Participants

It makes sense that teachers would laud the value of learning from mistakes, but in an interview on exemplary teaching, I was struck by not just the frequency, but also the almost necessity some of these teachers exhibited to mention their fallibility. It was as if they had to let me know they make mistakes and that there are many other teachers who deserve the award they were given. All but two of the 17 participants had one or more interview excerpts that alluded to, or directly highlighted, this theme of humility and transparency. For many, the transparency went even deeper to include vulnerability. What emerged was a clear sense that though they are highly accomplished educators, they still see themselves as evolving teachers.

Lawrence has been noted for his wit and personality already in this chapter, but he also was adamant that, “I don’t think I’m that different. I don’t think I’m that much better than most teachers.” Bulman, fellow English teacher in Mound West Tonka said, “You have to have humility. There’s this myth about teachers that we’re all people who did really well in school. I had to sit next to the teacher’s desk all year! I didn’t think I was smart.” Bulman shared part of what inspired him to go into education, was knowing what it is like to struggle in school. He now teaches honors classes and as the 2017 Minnesota Teacher of the Year has spoken to hundreds of educators who wonder what makes him different. “I’m no different. But I listen. If you want to be a good teacher, you have to listen.” He added that teachers have to avoid the trap that class difficulty equals quality. “You can have credibility and have compassion and flexibility as well.” He also shared having a successful class does not mean you can get comfortable. “You can rock it at nine and then you do the same lesson at 10:30 and it falls apart. I’m super critical. I get in my car and think, What was that? You screwed that up.” When he does have a bad class, he does not hide his mistakes from students. They were there. “I own it. I always apologize for it and I
say what can we do to make this better? If you can’t do that, you lose credibility with kids.” This level of humility along with transparency not only makes him a better teacher but it also models that same growth mindset for students. After all, how can teachers expect students to bravely accept critical feedback and improve, if they cannot do the same?

It is notable that even when sharing something from their teaching they were proud of, it was often tempered with a phrase of humility or even minimizing their own involvement. The students who take Larsen’s AP history classes in Waconia have a very high passing rate but, “I’m not like tooting my own horn.” Beaver said she is not alone in wondering if she deserves the recognition. “I’ve talked to several people who have won awards for teaching and there’s always this kind of imposter syndrome.” One of the Wisconsin participants admitted that at times she laments not being the teacher students come back to visit. “I struggled with that for a while. Like, why don’t I stand out that way? However, I realized you need all kinds of different things at that age. But I’m kind of in a self-doubt place right now.” Even after just receiving a top award for her teaching, some of these teachers bravely shared that they still deal with doubts. There is a powerful message in that for teachers struggling with their own weaknesses. Even exemplary teachers have bad days and improvement is always in progress.

Volk, the Latin teacher from Fargo said the first thing he felt when he won the award was “shock. I didn’t even think I would ever be on the radar!” Brandt has been a finalist twice but said, “The more you know the less you know, right?” When I asked McHugh what made her different than other teachers, she struggled to respond even though she had been bubbly and very talkative though the entire interview. “I don’t know if I’m really all that different. I don’t know if I see myself as different. I’m so stumbling over this question! I think every teacher brings their
own action and their own uniqueness to the classroom.” Erickson, a Wisconsin teacher for more than 36 years agreed. “I don’t know that I’m that different. We all have our own thing. We all have things that we do better than others and I have my weaknesses.” Eldridge-Sandbo, who coordinates a group of Teachers of the Year in North Dakota, is a veteran teacher, and has mentored many new teachers but she said, “I don’t have illusions that I’m the most stellar teacher in the school. I try to do as much as I can.” Liyanapathiranage was quick to lump himself with other teachers even though many of his answers had confirmed how he was practicing ideas and strategies in his class that were very unique in his building but “I think all teachers are very intentional with what they do.” As Volk put it, “The fact that you are recognized for what you try to do…sometimes you get lucky.” Yet their students and colleagues nominated them for many reasons. The pattern here is a struggle to accept that spotlight.

Where does this minimization of their own exemplary abilities and efforts originate? It may be because of a sensitivity to making others feel “less than” in a profession that is so demanding. It may also come from a realization that when used as the model example, they may also have their faults revealed. However, revealing their thoughts and feelings to their students seems not only common but also clearly encouraged by these same teachers. Callope said you have to be authentic. “I just think that is everything. I think you have to really be honest and a little vulnerable sometimes.” Luke teaches in a small town of 4400 people and she feels you have to “show the side of you that’s human.” She runs into her students often outside of school, These are the same kids I see when I go to the grocery store, pay for my gas or whatever. They see that human side and they get that I am part of the school, but they know I see what they do outside of the classroom.
Brandt, who teaches in St. Paul in a major urban high school, also spoke to the value of vulnerability. “You have to vulnerable in a way that invites them too. If you’re being vulnerable and being willing to share things about your life, then hopefully that starts to build a sense of rapport.” The data from these interviews clearly show that transparency and vulnerability are key to unlocking deeper connections with students and engaging them beyond the context of a grade or exam.

**Teacher Humility and Transparency in Action**

Ask any teacher about a really bad day in class, and they will have a story. In fact, they will probably have dozens. Some days, a teacher will go out to their car and cry, scream, or just wilt. It is a part of risk and reward. These are the same teachers who may have been up all night the night before putting together materials, finding just the right video clip, creating draft after draft of their big closure moment only to have it flop epically the next morning. If you are a teacher, you have been there. It also makes the days when the room is buzzing with engagement, and kids hug or high-five you at the end of an awesome class, that much sweeter. To really relish the highs, one must survive the lows. Diana Callope is a middle school math TOY in Wisconsin and when I asked her what she feels is the difference between good teachers and great teachers she surprised me by sharing when she had one of those days:

I think you have to really be honest and a little vulnerable sometimes. True story. I think it was two years ago. I had an algebra class that tried my patience like no other algebra class I've ever had. And I had students who just were not respectful and we're not catching on to that very well. And I don't even remember what it was that was said or what happened. But it was probably the umpteenth disruption to good conversation that happened. I don't even know. But I ended up with this lump in my throat. And I just, I set
the marker down and I had to walk outside. So, I step out of my room and there's a drinking fountain across the hall. I got a drink. I paced in front of my door. I was trying to fight back tears. Another teacher came by that was on their break and said, “Are you okay?” and I'm like, “Nope, just need a minute …” you know? And I went back into the room and the students were looking at me like, “What just happened?” and I could not tell them without tears. Like, how much it hurt that they were being this way toward each other and that they weren't allowing the learning to happen. And it was amazing how things changed after that because I was honest, and I was vulnerable. I walked out of the room crying, you know? And I think that they could see that “Oh my goodness. She is a human being and it really does hurt her feelings. She's not just saying that” you know? And it made a difference. And I just think that that authenticity is, I think that's the key. It is so powerful and noteworthy that a bad day became a breakthrough and when this exemplary teacher was asked about what makes teachers great, she thought of one of her hardest days. In her mind, and many of the others interviewed, being great only comes with being humble.

These teachers are exemplary. They have many students who will attest to their impact. However, that clearly has not diminished their hunger to always improve. None of the participants came off as arrogant or self-aggrandizing. Quite the opposite. When I would congratulate them and thank them for their work with students, they often looked uncomfortable or would say a polite “thank you” and quickly move on. However, this is not because what they do is not important, progressive, creative, compassionate, exemplary, or inspiring. It is because they choose to put the spotlight on those they care about. Brown-Wessling, who went on to receive the highest honor of National Teacher of the Year may have put it best: “Humility is at
the center of all good teaching because in the end, if I’m really humble, as a teacher. It’s just not about me. It’s about them.”

**Exemplary Teachers and the Impacts of COVID-19**

In March of 2020, I began contacting Teachers of the Year all over the Upper Midwest. I was excitedly filling up my calendar with in-person interviews and classroom observations and I thought the biggest struggle would be trying to determine how much drive time I would need to squeeze in between my interviews and teaching full-time. Almost as a way of filling the matrimonial tank before weeks where my focus would shift to work and travel, I went to a beach with my husband for spring break. At first, the days were sublime but by midweek, I was taking phone calls and shooting off frantic emails as schools began to close down, face masks went on, and COVID-19 changed 2020 forever.

It felt like I was holding my breath as the weeks passed. I was praying I could still squeeze in my research just under the wire before schools let out for the summer. Schools did not reopen, and my lofty data collection plans became impossible fantasy. Thanks to my ever-optimistic advisor, Dr. Noonan, I eventually admitted my methodology would have to change and jumped into Plan B. All the interviews shifted to Zoom, and I had to let go of in-person observations. I will admit I am still grieving this change because there is something irreplaceable about seeing exemplary teachers in action with their students up close. However, I was not going to waste the opportunity to connect and learn from so many outstanding teachers.

Consequently, I went into my revised data collection interviews feeling depressed and hoping it would still be meaningful. As this chapter has shown, these teachers did not disappoint. Each interview fueled my fire to teach, and every interview went over the allotted time because
there was a sense they needed this moment too. My passion returned in force to share their incredible insights by publishing this study.

Naturally, we talked about COVID-19 (C-19) and how it was impacting their teaching. They had just wrapped up being flung into the virtual teaching environment and were grappling with the possibility, and eventually the inevitability, that they would be online again in the fall. When answering a question, it would often be prefaced by, “Well, before COVID …” What follows is a summary of what these teachers were feeling and communicating during this momentous and abrupt shift in education.

**The Needs of Students during Distance Learning**

It was unavoidable that a discussion on teaching during this time would include the impacts of C-19. What the pandemic could not change, however, was how committed these teachers are to their students. Their comments were largely about how concerned they were about the impact distance learning was having on their students and what might happen if it continued in the fall, which it did.

Steil from Stillwater HS shared they had two weeks to turn everything around in March and get fully online. She pointed out a key difference between the spring and the fall.

In the spring, we had six months of relationships with our kids. I knew my kids. I knew their parents. I knew what to expect. I knew who to anticipate was going to struggle.

There was a prior relationship there.

There was a sense of loss for the students they could no longer have in the room. I interviewed Callope (Whitewater MS) at the end of August when she had just returned to her classroom to prepare for a fall that would be fully online.
The initial days were a little overwhelming and just kind of emotional. I came in with this giant lump in my throat and just felt like I could cry at the drop of a hat. I think part of it is knowing that I’ll be here, but the students won’t.

In the upper Midwest, many secondary schools in the Fall of 2020 were online or hybrid, and almost all had a fully virtual option.

The pattern that emerged in their comments was they were really concerned about their students and, for some, they were losing them. Larsen (Waconia High School) said when they went online, some students just stopped participating. “I can’t reach some kids. That’s the reality. I lost kids.” Beaver from Zimmerman High School agreed students were struggling at home. “It wasn’t so bad at the beginning. But then, you know, participation dropped off by the end of May.” For some, the drop off may have been disillusionment with online learning but also, “You know some are taking care of all of the kids and to tell them they have to meet with me from nine to 9:30 it not fair. Equity right now… my heart is burning for equity.” Brandt also saw the impact of home environments on his students. One student, in particular, was not turning in any work once they went online.

I can’t make him do a damn thing. He doesn’t want to do it. I can’t make him do it.

Depending on which home he is in … he’s bouncing amongst a few different homes and there’s no kind of parent.

Larsen (Waconia High School) also felt distance learning was creating a disturbing equity issue. “It’s not equitable to require kids to meet online. It’s not, because I have kids that are working kids and that are sharing computers.” Luke teaches in rural Wisconsin and shared that many of her students do not have internet access and she even had to drive into school just to make videos because it was the only spot with reliable internet. “I didn’t do any zoom meetings with my kids.
I didn’t want to leave behind the kids that didn’t have access.” Many of these teachers were visibly upset and anxious about the school year ahead.

The long-term impacts of distance learning on students are still to be determined, but the initial data, including these interviews, is deeply concerning. McHugh recognized the impact of so many issues arising at once for this generation:

Students are going to be so different because of COVID and that’s a major thing. COVID, the racial riots going on, our president [Trump], mask wearing, statues being taken down … I mean, just all their experiences over the past year. It’s gonna be a whole new generation of kids to work with. So how do I avoid burnout? I don’t know. I just continue to embrace the ambiguity, embrace being a lifelong learner, and centering on my students.

This dedication to students meant that many of the teachers, at the time these interviews took place (summer of 2020), were spending much of their vacation finding ways to adapt. This is usually a time when these extremely hard-working teachers recharge for the year ahead, but the year ahead looked very different.

The Need to Adapt

In the spring of 2020, teachers had only a couple of weeks, some of them days, to move their classroom online. As evidenced above, they saw many of their students struggling and so these exemplary teachers were doing what they do best, getting better. McCarthy (Greendale MS) was jumping into the fall planning with her colleagues. “Just yesterday I was talking to someone about planning the year and how I think it really needs to be completely flipped and I can’t really do what I did in the past.” When I asked her to elaborate, she confirmed that it was the students who had been struggling in the spring who were pushing her to adapt. “It’s those six
to seven kids that didn’t do anything. I’m doing all of these things that seem to be best practices and some of it’s beyond me, but I’ve done everything I can.” Steil had not been able to do synchronous classes in the spring but felt it would be critical in the fall. “I can see you, and I can hear your voice, and you can get that inflection, right? I can hear your question versus impersonal email.” She added, “I’m hoping that creates a higher level of engagement, but I think it’s going to definitely draw on teachers’ and parents’ support systems.” Dauwen (Sheyenne HS) agreed it was going to take support. “This fall I really want to stress with the parents of my kids, and hopefully our whole school does, you need to communicate with us, so we are able to help.” These teachers were far from giving up. They were gearing up.

Liyanapathiranage (Woodbury MS) put in many hours in the spring and learned skills he hoped to build on in the fall. Like Steil in Stillwater, they were only asynchronous in the spring, but he continued to fight for engagement:

I hosted game days, two days a week for anyone who just wanted to come online and play. I hosted lunch groups. I had to change my content and make it more engaging and more engaging in a way that it would kind of sell itself. I had to make sure it was tiered in a way that developing learners have success with it. And that was really tough. I did jokes of the day in videos. I learned a lot of video editing skills to try to get them a little more engaged. It’s tough when they watch, like, 62 videos on Snapchat or Tic Toks all day but I asked them to watch a three-minute video of me. I learned how to green screen more, but I didn’t get the one-on-one contact at all that I wanted. It’s not the same.

This blend of “I’ll do whatever it takes” but “I really miss my kids” was pervasive in the data.

Brown-Wessling (Johnson HS) said the natural tendency when teachers go online is to go into “transaction mode.” She stated this can come from nerves with a new teaching platform and
“when you are nervous and when you don’t know what to do, you rely on these very surface level transactional techniques.” She contended, however, that you have to keep fighting for the human connection.

You have to make time to build the relationships, and make time differently, because you don’t get that one minute here or two minutes there when you’re online. You really have to foster it differently and I think we can do that.

High school English colleague, Bulman was also committed to adapting to relationship building online. “I think schools are going to have to spend a lot of time on social emotional learning at the beginning.” He suggested having students share what went well and what did not in the spring with their new teachers.

I think a lot of Zoom calls early on just have to be opportunities to have kids talk about what their experience was last year in order to build that trust. Like, “what is it that you need from me?”

Strong as ever, the hope was still there that the distance learning would not last long, but Bulman cautioned teachers want to have that relationship already established when they come back. “So, all of the sudden a month from now you’re in classes with people. You want to be able to walk into that room and not have to be like, ‘Hey, I was that weird person on the screen.’” This is still teaching valued above content and teaching during a pandemic creates an even greater need for social-emotional support.

**The Need to Go Back to School**

The loudest message these teachers consistently sent when it came to the impact of C-19 is virtual learning cannot replace in-person classroom instruction. They need to go back to school, and have their students, as Callope put it “in 3D. I need kids. I need them. It’s a deep-
seeded need. I want them here more than anything.” For some like Beaver, “it’s not even the classroom. It’s the relational piece. Going to the games, cheering for kids. I mean, high school kids are still huggers.” Dauwen from North Dakota agreed, “I’m a hugger. COVID’s killing me.” This may seem soft or too “touchy feely” for some, but as evidenced in this chapter, these exceptional teachers are fueled by connection and their students thrive because of it. Take away that physical proximity and engagement and you remove what makes these teachers the best of the best.

Exemplary teachers, like the ones in this study, have significant impact and the evidence proves what they do is not just working, it is changing lives. So, when they say what they need, there is a responsibility for the education community to listen. Their comments describe sentimental moments of connection that are not naturally happening online. Brandt described, “When you’re together you have lot of these quick conversations and that maintains relationship and it’s about paying attention. You know? Like, ‘Hey, I like your shoes’ or ‘Tell me about this thing you did last night.’” Part of the challenge of naturally forging relationships online is the screen barrier. Brandt explained, “Everyone is here in the whole conversation and I can’t have a side conversation with Dakota. Everybody is listening. It’s like you’re on stage.” Even if teachers work to break students into smaller groups the virtual barrier can remain.

“Communication is hard, even in regular times because they’re teenagers and now it’s infinitely harder.” Brandt cautioned without that full visual and conversational information, teachers will frequently default to assumptions and “I’m wrong nearly every time I make an assumption.” The evidence supports Brandt’s claim because exemplary teachers are hypersensitive to observational data and much of that is missing or difficult to capture with students spread across the screen in little boxes.
McCarthy has also noticed the impact of screen presence on her students. “There’s something about the barrier of the screen and seeing everyone. It’s so much overload of the visual, of lots of people being seen or not seen.” With so many things going on across the screen to distract and detract from the teacher, the impact of teacher presence and personality is significantly affected. Luke added, “Just that human interaction and being able to read their faces when they see something new or difficult … I didn’t have that feedback.” Luke has been teaching for 29 years and this information is critical to her teaching efficacy. “Facial expressions, their body language, to be able to address things quick when they fell behind. I even missed bells, just the change of faces. Just bringing their humanity into the equation.” Not only does this early data suggest the efficacy of these exemplary teachers is impacted by distance learning, but some feel it has also impacted their collaboration with colleagues as well.

These teachers exhibited highly relational teaching styles so it is no surprise that their planning and collaboration would also be impacted by a lack of interaction. Dauwen shared, “We need to build morale and we miss each other. Like, when we’re not here to bounce ideas off each other.” Although Dauwen said they did have some meetings online and even virtual cocktail hours to try and maintain connection, she insisted “you miss having that personal relationship with your colleagues, as well as your students. That’s probably the hardest part.” Brandt said natural conversation in a building are also much more efficient. “Undoubtedly a 15-second conversation you have with somebody … to even get close to just that amount of communication—that’s going to be five emails with that person.” Additionally, Zoom fatigue came up more than once and “as an educator you are overwhelmed with the daily news of the avalanche of emails,” said Brandt.
Those email communications are also replacing natural and organic moments of conversations with students. Dauwen explained, “it’s not just the 29 that are in my room. It’s out in the hall where other students stop by and ‘Oh, Mrs. Dauwen! How are you? I miss you.’” What these teachers shared was emotional, and at times comical, as they reflected on what they miss. Lawrence admitted, “I miss 14-year-olds. I miss that kid that comes into my room every day after lunch and farts and clears out half the room and we all have to open windows.” Luke spent many hours alone creating online content in her classroom last spring and “it was miserable being alone in the classroom like that. Ugh, laughter—those teenagers—like, the laughter of kids and the stupid stuff that they do. You know? That’s the part that I missed most.” Larsen remembered joking around with her students in the classroom and “Kids laughing at my jokes. They’re not great jokes, but I work hard one them.” She recalled a funny moment trying to show her students that you can map Mesopotamia on your fingers. “I made up this whole story and it was so funny, it’s totally a lie, but they loved it. Heck, I had kids make up a shirt with that stupid map on it--the loved it so much!” They may be able to cover content, but the human connection suffers online. Steil stated, “I think there are a lot of kids who need that social emotional connection and they probably don’t know they need it, but they need it. It’s a wellness issue too.”

I struggled with this final theme and how to approach it. It felt negative after all the findings that clearly showed the impact of exemplary teachers. Yet, this research hit during a moment in history that will undoubtedly have a permanent impact on education world-wide. To exclude these findings would be irresponsible and silence the voices of those who have proven their tremendous value and genuine ability. Furthermore, their message is not meant to depress, it is meant to impress the necessity of human connection and visual acuity in student engagement.
and teacher efficacy. There are vital nuances of exemplary teaching that cannot be, or are not easily, duplicated on a screen. These include organic moments of connection, side conversations, hypersensitivity to observational data, physical touch, the use of proximity, full body gestures and movement, and speed of transfer in person versus electronically.

The C-19 situation took teachers away from what they did best—forming authentic relationships by establishing a safe and inclusive learning environment. The arrangements to protect health and safety of all interfered with their ability to provide an A+ education that requires natural interactions with electronic barriers. Up close and personal contact is a bedrock foundation of excellent teaching. Although increased aptitude with educational technology and creativity with online supports can and should continue post-COVID, the message from the participants of this study is clear; Teachers, and student they love, need to go back to school. Exemplary teaching is amplified by the power of a shared space.

Summary

As a researcher and teacher, I entered this study with a lofty goal. To provide the ingredients of that secret sauce that creates great teachers. The affective behaviors and performance skills of great teachers is indeed in these findings. Even without the afore planned visual and observational data, these exemplary teachers were able to articulate in meaningful and significant ways why they stand out and have exponential impact. The patterns that emerged in the coding are the themes this chapter presented: student expertise, relationship development, teaching valued above content, engagement in secondary classrooms, and humility and transparency. Also included are their reflections and experiences of teaching during C-19. This was included to add to the data that is still being amassed on this significant period in history and to consider the unprecedented impact on modern education.
The first theme of student expertise identified a level well above that of the more commonly used “student-focused” or “student-centered.” At the exemplary level, teachers move beyond a focus on students to an advanced and individualized understanding of what consistently engages students and improves teacher efficacy. The findings showed this includes hypersensitive observational skills. For example, an exemplary teacher cannot only gauge the “vibe” of the room, but they are also able to keep teaching while simultaneously processing and addressing visual cues. These may include posture, facial gestures, energy levels, and eye contact. Then they immediately cross-reference that observational data with their personal knowledge of the student and prior interactions. Additionally, exemplary teachers employ “radical listening.” At times this may require a full stop in a lesson, or something they were working on, to make sure that student is heard and feels valued. These skills are enhanced by high levels of emotional intelligence giving them the ability to empathize and motivate a wide variety of students. This requires an intense level of dedication where they are often seen spending time studying their own students both in and out of the classroom. This is by their choice and they see it as an investment that must be made to understand the students they teach.

The second theme of relationship development showed teachers going far beyond that standard getting-to-know you step, to actually forming a loving bond and trusting partnership with students and their families. All of the participants make community building and individual relationship development their first investment with a new class. This means content is often delayed at the start of the school year to focus on this necessary precursor to classroom success. These teachers are involved outside of the classroom from in the halls, to games, to the local grocery store. They see all opportunities to engage and connect and are not afraid to say they “love” their students. At the secondary level where this word usage is often discarded, these
teachers purposefully chose to use the word love, and they describe a level of connection that forms a “transcendent relationship.” Consequently, like student expertise, these teachers are employing a widely accepted teaching skill but taking it to a level where the intensity and intentionality are largely unparalleled by their peers.

In the third theme of teaching valued above content, the data revealed the subject area is most often not what inspired exceptional teachers to join, or stay in, the profession. They all have an appreciation for their content and for lifelong learning, but what they really treasure is being with students. Consequently, they will create, revise, and sometimes suspend content to focus on teaching the whole student. This includes their social emotional development, critical thinking skills, and relationship aptitude. They see this as a necessary investment in developing students as part of the human race and not just to improve their content knowledge or test scores. One indicator of this level of teaching is the ability to adapt in this midst of a lesson when they see a teachable moment. When they do focus on content, which they also value, it is driven by the human condition and their ability to connect that content to their students’ interests and curiosity.

Theme four, engagement in secondary classrooms, really spoke to the consummation of the research question. The research question was looking for impact on student engagement so when these exemplary teachers described and explained their skills in engagement, they provided clear data to address the purpose of this study. The findings showed that exemplary teachers understand the key difference between engagement and compliance. Compliance may be obedient participation, but it lacks curiosity, interest, and a genuine enjoyment of learning and being a part of a community. One way these teachers create engagement is by creating authentic assignments rooted in student choice and exhibit a clear value. They can be further inspired when provided authentic audiences for their work beyond the classroom teacher. These teachers will
passionately defend that learning can also be enjoyable and fun. They use games, discussion, experiential learning, and movement to support this excitement and high levels of full-class participation. There is “nowhere to hide” and students want to be there. This is evidenced by students who often come in before or after class or hug/high-five their teacher on a regular basis.

The fifth finding was somewhat surprising but enlightening. Although these teachers are highly recognized and rewarded for their teaching, they remain intentionally humble and transparent. This is driven by a constant desire to “keep getting better” and seeing their teaching as a “work in progress.” They recognized teachers have to take big risks to enjoy big rewards, so they accept the necessity of failure. They choose to be transparent and even argue “you have to vulnerable” in order to develop trust and rapport with teenagers. Although they have been awarded one of the top honors in education, they will choose again and again to be humble because then it is “about the students.”

Finally, this study findings included how these exemplary teachers were feeling and processing teaching during a pandemic. They had just completed their final months of the school year distanced from their students and were planning for a very different fall term. The data showed that even with very intentional moments of connection and online check-ins, distance learning creates barriers and also raises concerns over equity and mental health. National Teacher of the Year, Brown-Wessling, pointed out the “transaction mode” that teachers often default to online and how it harms relationships. These teachers, however, were working hard to adapt and learn new skills but were sacrificing their vacation and wellness at times because the need was so high and so urgent. The data clearly argued that A+ education requires natural interactions and these teachers by far preferred, and even needed, students in the room. They spoke emotionally to the often-neglected power of a shared space. Consequently, the teachers
felt that though distance learning can be done, exceptional teachers are at their best and provide students with personalized education and engagement face-to-face.

To summarize, these six themes along with the major findings of the interviews, have been encapsulated in an infographic that is included here (Figure 6). These findings inspired several implications and recommendations for teachers and preservice preparation programs in the final chapter. The next chapter, however, will further focus and interpret the findings with educational (the affective domain) and psychological theory (dramatism).

**Figure 6**

*Interview Findings Guide*
Teacher of the Year
INTERVIEW FINDINGS GUIDE

Theme 1
STUDENT EXPERTISE
• Hypersensitive Observational Skills
• “Radical Listening”
• High Emotional Intelligence
• Intense Level of Dedication
• Top Research Interest= Their Own Students

Theme 2
RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT
• First Priority Each Year= Relationships
• Involvement Outside the Classroom
• Not Afraid to Love and Build trust
• “Transcendent Relationship”

Theme 3
TEACHING VALUED ABOVE CONTENT
• Like Their Content--LOVE Teaching,
• Will Sacrifice Content to Teach the Lesson
• Adapts to Student Needs in the Moment
• Human Condition Drives Content Creation

Theme 4
ENGAGEMENT IN SECONDARY CLASSROOMS
• Foster Engagement vs. Compliance
• Authentic Audience for Assignments
• Culture of “Fun”= Engaged Learning
• Movement and Variety

Theme 5
TEACHER HUMILITY AND TRANSPARENCY
• Always a “Work in Progress”
• The Necessity of Failure
• The Power of Vulnerability
• Teacher Humility to Spotlight Students

Theme 6
IMPACT OF COVID-19
• Distance Learning Creates Barriers
• “Transaction Mode” Harms Relationships
• Exceptional Teachers Adapt but also Sacrifice
• A+ Education Requires Natural Interactions
• The Power of Shared Space

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CHAPTER FIVE: THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

At the American Psychological Association Convention in 1948, a group of psychologists met to talk about frameworks for educational objectives and academic thinking (Krathwohl et al., 1964, p. 3). In that group was Benjamin Bloom whose work on the cognitive domain and levels of thinking would come to be known as Bloom’s Taxonomy. This approach speaks to levels of thinking, encourages deeper critical thinking, and is still widely taught and used in education today. David Krathwohl and Bertram Masia attended the convention too. They discussed all dimensions of human experience and realized there was another dimension of the process that needed to be explored and qualified, namely the affective domain. “It was the other dimension of our specifications—the types of human reaction and response to the content, subject matter, problems, or areas of human experience which seemed most significant for our purposes” (p. 3). The affective taxonomy emerged from their work. I adopted the affective taxonomy as the overarching framework in my analysis of exemplary teachers.

The purpose of my study was to determine how the affective behaviors and performance techniques of exemplary secondary teachers impacted student engagement. The affective domain theory, first described in Chapter Two, provided a hierarchy of affective levels: receiving, responding, valuing, organization, and characterization by value or value complex (Krathwohl et al., 1964). This theory emphasized emotion and tone and provided a crucial element of not just what a student can do (cognitive), but more so why they choose to do so (affective). The participants of my research all demonstrated the first two levels and my deeper analysis focused on achievement of the third, fourth, and fifth levels of the taxonomy.

I adopted a second theory, dramatism (Burke, 1968), to analyze the way exemplary teachers used movement to engage students. Burke postulated that life is not like a drama; life is
a drama (Griffin et al., 2015, p. 293). As such, motivation and engagement by the audience are better understood by analyzing the dramatic elements from the scene which create a sense of identification between the speaker and their audience. This theory proved critical to my analysis because of the focus on performance techniques and how exemplary teachers described and exhibited these dramatic elements.

The combination of these two theories, affective domain theory (Krathwohl et al., 1964) and dramatism (Burke, 1968), provided a framework for closer examination of the elements and descriptors used by exemplary teachers. The elements exerting the most significant impact on student engagement begin with the affective domain. This theory encompasses the primary ways teachers use the affective domain to form relationships and foster student engagement and achievement. In this chapter, I applied these theories to the dominant themes demonstrated by the participants and the emphasis on movement they all described.

**Affective Domain Theory and Exemplary Teachers**

The affective domain is defined by Krathwohl et al. (1964) as “objectives which emphasize a feeling, tone, an emotion, or a degree of acceptance or rejection” (p. 7). The affective taxonomy is made up five levels in hierarchical order and arranged along a continuum of internalization from lowest to highest. These levels are receiving, responding, valuing, organizing, and characterizing (see Figure 1 in Chapter Two). Each of these levels also have corresponding sublevels or indicators to further clarify achievement or attainment of levels.

I provide a brief example of how the participants exhibited the first two levels, but these levels are not what may separate exemplary teachers from those who may be less effective. My analysis focused on the final three levels of the taxonomy: valuing, organization, and
characterization. The participants easily achieved the lowest levels on the taxonomy. However, to achieve the highest three levels required considerable expertise in the affective domain.

In the affective domain framework (Krathwohl et al., 1964) receiving, level one, refers to awareness of the need for teachers and for the profession (p. 139). Level two is responding to that need and entering the profession. It can be assumed that all teachers have met the first two levels of this affective taxonomy. The data showed how exemplary teachers routinely used the elements described in the final three levels of taxonomy, including valuing, organizing, and characterization come into fruition. I provide examples of the first two levels to illustrate how exemplary teachers achieved the lowest levels of the affective domain—a necessary achievement to reach the higher levels. After illustrating levels one and two, I then provide an in-depth analysis of exemplary teachers and levels three, four, and five.

To help visualize the data and analysis, I developed a metaphor entitled The Physiology of an Exemplary Teacher (see Figure 7). Using the anatomy of the human body as a metaphor for the make-up of an exemplary teacher, the application of both the affective domain (Krathwohl et al., 1964) and dramatism (Burke, 1968) may be more easily understood. Level one of the affective taxonomy, receiving, is represented by the gut. This is fitting because most humans understand, or have a gut feeling, that teachers are important and that the need exists. Secondly, the second level of responding is represented by the hands as teachers both figuratively pick up the call to teach. However, the next three levels and the addition of movement through the dramatist lens is where my study’s data proved most remarkable.

Figure 7

*The Physiology of an Exemplary Teacher*
Level One: Receiving

In the first level of the affective taxonomy, receiving, the learner, or in this case the teacher, becomes aware of certain phenomenon and a will to “receive or attend to them” (Krathwohl et al., 1964, p. 98). Some teachers come to profession having always known they wanted to be a teacher. Dauwen, a math teacher from North Dakota, remembered being a teacher
from a young age. “You know, I've really wanted to be a teacher. Since I was able to talk and walk, probably we played school constantly when I was growing up, so I've just always loved what I do.”

Others, like Bulman from Mound West Tonka High School, did not join the profession because school has always been where they thrived.

There's this myth about teachers that we were all people who did really well in school. So, we went into education because we did really well on school. That was not my experience. I was actually a pretty poor student.

Yes, what all of the participants have in common is their experience as students and their awareness of the need for teachers.

Level Two: Responding

The next level, responding, goes beyond basic awareness to actively engaging with the phenomenon (Krathwohl et al., 1964). This can be determined by the subdivision marker in responding which is a willingness to respond (vs. receive in the first level), controlled attention, and then satisfaction in that response. For teachers, this is exemplified by making this decision to teach. It takes them beyond the awareness of the need to the choice to respond to that need. The initial motivation to teach can vary widely but several study participants articulated why that response is necessary and worth of attention. Larsen, a Waconia High School social studies teacher put it like this:

There's no day that's ever the same--even though this job can be difficult, the rewards are amazing. Everyone can think of a teacher that's impacted them in a positive way and the
fact that I get to try really hard to be that support system for a student is pretty remarkable.

The theme of making a difference quickly emerges at this level of the taxonomy among the teachers. Lawrence from Delano High said, “It's just something that I think I can make a change in the world by doing. I think a lot of other teachers feel that way. At least almost all the good ones.” This drive to make a difference in the lives of the students they teach keeps these teachers coming back year after year.

For example, Bulman believed teachers are, at their core, people who will work to keep getting better. “They're people who just like to be with people and they always want to be better. You know, I mean, every day I want it. I always want to be better.” Going from this level of simple responding to truly valuing and identifying as a teacher paved the way for advancement of exemplary teachers.

**Level Three: Valuing**

At level three on the affective taxonomy the awareness has been seen and the teacher has responded to that call, but now the hard work really has to begin and continue for years, testing the stamina of teachers. The third level of the affective taxonomy, valuing, is most clearly achieved when a student, or teacher in my study, has “taken on the characteristics of a belief or attitude” (Krathwohl et al., 1964, p. 139). Furthermore, this is the only level terminology the scholars described as “common” to those also used by teachers in the expression of their student cognitive objectives. As such, it this is “value” that overlaps both the teacher and student domain. For the purpose of my study, I defined value as a willingness to put in the hard work to commit to the students and to the profession. As such, in terms of the physiology of a teacher
metaphor, the level of valuing is represented by the lungs—the very air that keeps a teacher alive and moving.

Scholars delineated three ways of ascribing worth to the valuing phenomenon (Krathwohl et al., 1964). These subdivisions are: acceptance of a value, preference for a value, and commitment. Each subdivision gives more specificity to the term “value” than in present in ordinary usage in that is defines three levels of valuing, each representing a stage of deeper internalization” (Krathwohl et al., 1964, p. 139). I found each of these values were present in the data collected from exemplary teachers.

**Subdivision One: Acceptance of Value**

According to the theory, at this level “we are concerned with the ascribing of worth to a phenomenon, behavior, objects, etc.” (Krathwohl et al., 1964, p. 140). As outlined in the theory, the test of this level of value is when teachers go beyond the mere satisfaction of wanting to teach to a willingness to adjust their behavior in pursuit of this value. Teachers valued students over content—which was an important theme described in Chapter Four. For example, when Liyanapathiranage of Woodbury Middle School described his work, he connected it to the commitment he has to his students. “They trust me to make sure that the information I’m giving them has purpose. I love when a student asks me, ‘Why are we doing this?’ If I can’t validate it, then I probably shouldn’t be doing it.” This is a way in which the teacher is clearly ascribing worth to a behavior and not just for their own value, but also the value of the students.

This value goes beyond a job to a choice. This was articulated by veteran teacher Erickson of Bayfield High School when he shared, “I don’t feel like it’s a job. I feel like I’m doing what I would choose to do.” He went on to describe teaching as something he was
“supposed to do.” This exemplifies a clear acceptance of value and articulates the acceptance is not an acquiescence of will but rather an adjudication of merit.

This acceptance of value is not without recognition of the work it takes to make this phenomenon of exemplary teaching possible. Larsen of Waconia High School described the challenges and rewards, “Even though this job can be difficult, the rewards are amazing. There’s no day that’s ever the same.” She added, “Everyone can think of a teacher that’s impacted them in a positive way and the fact that I get to try really hard to be that support system for a student is pretty remarkable.” One should note the words “get to” rather than “have to.” This shows a value ascribed to the work because rather than being a job one must do, teaching is a role one gets to do. This transition is what Krathwohl and his colleagues (1964) said marks the movement from acceptance of value to preference for a value.

Subdivision Two: Preference for a Value

The preference for a value is a subdivision that “arose out of a feeling that there were objectives that expressed a level of internalization between the mere acceptance of a value and commitment or conviction in the usual connotation of deep involvement in an area” (Krathwohl et al., 1964, p. 145). In other words, valuing moves beyond just agreement that the behavior has value to wanting to give that behavior the value one feels it now deserves. As Krathwohl and his colleagues put it “the individual is sufficiently committed to the value to pursue it, to seek it out, to want it” (p. 145). In this case then one must want to teach.

Each teacher has their story and motivation, which initially drew them to the profession. Bulman of Mound West Tonka High School said he entered teaching to fill a need he had as a student himself. “I wanted to teach and do it in a little different way. Like I had really quality educators growing up, but I knew what it was to be that kid that was on the outside.” Others said
school was something they always liked, and it became something they knew they could do. Erikson of Bayfield described how he felt in their classroom, “The first time I was in a classroom [teaching] it just felt good. It was like ‘this is it.’ It’s not just a job. It’s who we are.” This clearly meets the value markers of pursuing it, seeking it out, and wanting it (Krathwohl et al., 1964).

Once this level of acceptance and preference are achieved, one subdivision of value remains, commitment.

**Subdivision Three: Commitment**

According to the affective taxonomy, value has three subdivision that build upon each other: acceptance, preference, and finally, commitment (Krathwohl et al., 1964). As represented by the lungs of a teacher, the data show exemplary teachers move beyond answering the call to teaching to “being all in” the profession. Their level of commitment represents a critical move from getting the job done to becoming the best they can be.

Volk, one of the most veteran teachers of my research at 37 years in the profession, said teaching takes effort and a continual renewal of purpose. Teaching “makes me every year remind myself that even though I may be tired, that its important work that has to be done.” He admitted teaching is a job “that can put stress on your personal life to a great degree. There are gives and takes with that—talk with my own children.” So why do it? Volk went beyond his role to the lasting impact of teaching. “I want teachers to be teaching my grandchildren and I want there to be people who care about our future. I can plant those seeds.” This level of commitment reads almost word for word like the description the taxonomy gives for achieving value commitment.

The person who displays behavior at this level is clearly perceived as holding the value. He acts to further the thing valued in some way, to extent the possibility of his
developing it, to deepen his involvement with it and with the things representing it. He tries to convince others and seeks coverts to his cause. (Krathwohl et al., 1964, p. 149)

Not only does Volk represent this level of commitment, but all of the participants used words like “for our profession,” “important work,” or other comments that implied their participation in my study was largely driven by their commitment to further the development and growth of teacher education.

Commitment also extends to the students. Wessling, 2010 National Teacher of the Year, said, “My purpose here is for you [students] to not need me anymore.” This commitment goes beyond just being liked, to being truly effective. Liyanapathiranage said, “I know that there are teachers who kids love because they’re just funny, or they can get away with things, or the don’t challenge their rigor. I don’t want to fall into that category.” Instead Liyanapathiranage mixes challenge with caring. “I challenge you. I make you critical thinkers. I care about you. I value you. You will be better person all around because of the time we spent in this classroom.” In this way he was not only expressing his commitment to them but also striving to convert them to his cause and inspire them to put in the hard work to get there.

As Lawrence of Delano High School put it, “It’s just something that I think I can make a change in the world by doing. And I think a lot of other teachers feel that way too. All the good ones.” Teaching, for these exemplary teachers, is valued at a level that they are not afraid to call life and world changing. They recognized their impact and therefore the value their work beyond acceptance to preference for, and commitment to it at an acute level. It puts the air in their lungs each day and it gives them the stamina to keep investing in the lives of their students and striving to get better.
This is significant because if educators understand the importance of value is not just their decision to take the job but, more importantly, why that value provides motivation and incentive to persevere through challenges, fewer may leave the profession prematurely. That is why value is represented in the physiology of a teacher by the lungs because without it, one quickly loses the life-giving purpose that brought them to the role in the first place. Furthermore, this implies teachers must purposefully revisit and reinforce their value to maintain the exemplary level of teaching the participants have attained and maintain.

**Level Four: Organizing**

Just as the upper levels of Bloom’s Cognitive Taxonomy (1956) are seen as more complex and difficult, the same can be said for the upper two levels of the affective taxonomy (Krathwohl et al., 1964). At the fourth level, the exemplary teacher moves beyond the exertion and commitment-making of the value level to a very cerebral task of organizing and examining areas to perfect. In this way, the head stands for the fourth level of the affective taxonomy, organization.

Krathwohl et al. (1964) noticed that as a learner, or in my study, teachers internalized the same values they encountered in situations where more than one value was present. Organization takes place to “organize the values into a system, determine the interrelationships among them, and establish the dominant and pervasive ones” (p. 154). For example, at a more basic level, when a teacher selects the value of teaching over content (theme three in the prior chapter) they made a decision to organize two competing values, content and teaching, and give one a dominant place in their classification of value. Krathwohl et al. (1964) then subdivided this fourth level into two subcategories: conceptualization of a value and organization of a value.
Subdivision One: Conceptualization of Value

When teachers move into this fourth domain, they began to recognize their responsibility in improving human relations (conceptualization of value). As such, the second theme in the previous chapter, relationship development, represented a conceptualization of value as it pertains to improving the interactions and trust a teacher has with their students. For exemplary teachers, the real meaningful learning will not happen until the relationship is established and real meaningful teaching is worth all the work because of the relationships.

Swanson, a science teacher at an alternative high school in urban St. Paul, organized relationships at the top of her priorities because her teaching would not be effective if she could not remove the barriers some students have by this stage in their education. “I can say that for almost all of my students they come in with the wall built up. You’ll see this roller coaster they go through because man, they’re dealing with some stuff I can’t even imagine.” For some students there is a learned behavior of mistrust and that requires an exemplary teacher to step back, organize their priorities and recognize the investment in the relationship is critical because without it, the growth and learning cannot begin.

Erikson, who teaches both mainstream science and alternative education, confirmed this. For those with educational trauma, even the “building itself can have a stigma.” Because of this, he has focused much of his teaching on experiential learning and getting out of the building and using relationship and space to open them back up to the process. This came from observing those students in school. “They’ve turned off to learning. They’re not engaged. They don’t enjoy it. And so my philosophy is I need to go back to play.” Whether its checking trail cameras or just quietly walking through the woods looking for specimens to study, this disruption in the pattern gives Erikson a unique opportunity to connect with students. By organizing the relationship and
connection above the traditions and standards, he has consistently engaged a chronically unengaged student population. This is representative of a head-level organizational system that exemplary teachers employ to perfect and improve their efficacy with all students.

**Subdivision Two: Organization of Value**

In the second subdivision of the organization level of the affective taxonomy (Krathwohl et al., 1964), objectives of the teacher are brought into an “ordered relationship which is harmonious and internally consistent” (p. 159). At this level, teachers may be faced with situations where multiple values are present, and they need to integrate the possible risks and formulate a personal code of professional ethics. Verbs that may applied at this level include adheres, alters, integrates, reconciles, synthesizes (pp. 158–159). At this point in an exemplary teacher’s development, therefore, they have not only determined the value of what they do but they have also considered how their choices are organized and what priorities are not only effective, but also supported by their ethical underpinnings.

During my research, a value premise that emerged and quickly rose in importance was the need for humility and transparency. In this respect, participants were exercising an organization of values that went beyond basic behaviors or choices, to ethical and moral conclusions. For example, Steil has been honored as a finalist for Minnesota Teacher of the year twice and yet she insisted, “It’s never been about me. It’s never been about me in my classroom. It’s about them.” This is significant because in most professions success is measured by individual achievement. The Teacher of the Year award is awarded to the individual, yet what the data consistently produced is an ethical and moral imperative teachers had to shift that focus to the students.
Of all the teachers in my study, the one with highest achievement in this particular arena, National Teacher of the Year, was attained by Brown-Wessling of Johnson High School. Yet she also was adamant that if a teacher is truly exemplary it is not about them. “Humility is at the center of all good teacher because in the end, if I’m really humble as a teacher, it’s just not about me. It’s about them.” There is little doubt when reviewing this teacher’s accomplishments and work in the field that she is highly respected in her profession, yet she reconciled that recognition with the belief that the students give her back even more. “I mean they teach me so much, so much more than I teach them.” Brown-Wessling has organized her value for her profession, education, and students into a taxonomy that in some ways works to make her eventually extraneous. “My purpose here is for you to not need me anymore.” For a profession that draws so many with the opportunity to make a difference, this suggests that exemplary teachers have arranged their efficacy on the advancement of others.

Bulman, 2017 Minnesota Teacher of the Year, applied this concept of advancing the “others” in the room as part of a larger decision to see teaching as a very humanitarian effort. “I think what separates people into being great educations is that they understand that it is a human endeavor. It is not an academic endeavor.” This organization of care over content may change the way we approach teacher preparation which currently focuses largely on content preparation and classroom procedures. Bulman stated, “You can be a really wonderful tactical teacher who knows your content but if you lose sign of the compassion and relationships, you probably aren’t going to be remembered by kids.” Bulman said instead that they “remember how those people made [them] feel. That’s the most important thing. You have to create the conditions that that kid feels special.” In this respect, Bulman has organized his value for teaching into a paradigm that can only be successful with the inclusion of others and emotion. To him teachers are “people
who just like to be with people and they always want to get better.” Again, this confirms the advancement of others and that personal advancement in a continual work in progress to get better at helping others succeed.

Therefore, at the fourth level of the affective taxonomy, organization, teachers are continually examining areas for improvement, placing relationship above achievement, and maintaining humility as a necessary choice to keep the focus on the students. This is facilitated by several intentional and thoughtful choices where they take competing values and needs and organize them into their own personalized classification for teaching. The impact of this is that professional success in this field shifts from the traditional upward advancement model to more of a circular pattern of meet, mentor, engage and advance year after year. What makes these exemplary teachers so noteworthy is that the circles they have created spread out across the world and their influence in consistently amplified and exponentially multiplied by each life they touch. It is not a singular circle of influence but rather a vast sea of ongoing impact.

**Level 5: Characterization**

When reading Krathwohl et al.’s (1964) description of the fifth level of the affective taxonomy, it seemed reminiscent of Maslow’s (1943) Hierarchy of Needs at its apex—self-actualization. Maslow (1954) described this pinnacle of development saying, “What man can be, he must be.” When applied to teaching at its highest level, teachers become aware that what can be, they must be. It is an inner compulsion and duty that, like self-actualization, not all realize. At this level, the values are not only identified and organized into a personal ranking, but they internalize their role as form of personal identity. In fact, Krathwohl and his colleagues (1964) postulated that “realistically, formal education generally cannot reach this level” and that instead
it cannot typically occur until maturity is reached and “some years after the individual completed formal education” (p. 163).

The impact of this is that not only does this level require time, but it also requires that one mature and add “time and experience” in order to finally solidify, “Who am I?” and “What do I stand for?” (Krathwohl et al., 1964, p. 164). Therefore, teachers who have gone beyond initial awareness, to valuing, to responding, to organizing only now can internalize deeply enough the characterization of what is means to be an exemplary teacher. In that respect, level five of the taxonomy is represented in the Physiology of An Exemplary Teacher (Figure 7) as the heart. It is the lifeblood and the very essence of whom that teacher has worked to become.

The excitement of this revelation is that this represents what the cognitive and solely logical study of a teacher cannot. There is an emotional (affective) layer that is only activated to this level when characterization is achieved. Krathwohl et al. (1964) explained:

At this, the highest level of the Affective Taxonomy, the relation between the cognitive and affective processes becomes very pronounced. We can say that the man who has achieved a philosophy of life—a man who knows who he is—has arrived at this truth through painful intellectual effort in which the more complex mental processes of the Cognitive Taxonomy are clearly functioning (p. 166).

Therefore, an individual who has achieved this level can be best described by two dominant characteristics that “act consistently in accordance with the values he [she/they] has internalized at this level” (p. 165) and thus indicated by two things:

(a) The generalization of this control to so much of the individual’s behavior that they are described and characterized by a person by the pervasive controlling tendencies; and
(b) The integration of these beliefs, idea, and attitudes into a total philosophy or worldview. These two aspects constitute the subcategories.

These two subcategories are presented clearly in the data contributed by the participants.

**Subcategory One: Person Characterized by Value**

For the purpose of my study, the first subcategory of characterization is defined as a conscious and moral decision by an individual to identify their purpose as a teacher and to see that work as inextricable from their own identity. This does not mean they do not find value and enjoyment in their life and connections outside of teaching, but rather they cannot extract the part of them that is a teacher from how they identify and find purpose in their life. Brown-Wessling, the 2010 National Teacher of the Year, illustrated the intertwined phenomenon of self and teaching when she described her days with students by saying, “They challenge me as a human being. They are this incredible truth serum, and I cannot be fake around them and expect to know them.” In this way, Brown-Wessling is her truest self when she is in the classroom interacting with students. Beaver, 2016 finalist in Minnesota, realized, “I was born to do this. Like, I was born to do this, and I love it and it just the very core.” In this respect, being a teacher has gone well beyond what someone says they do to who they are.

For some, this includes an ethical choice to maintain optimism and purpose despite the challenges and difficulty of the work. Lawrence, another 2016 Minnesota finalist, has experienced the negativity in the workplace and said, “It sucks to work in a place where everybody just bitches all the time. I’ve gotten to the point though, where I’ve been secure enough in myself that I move away from them.” This conscious effort to maintain value in their environment and mindset was also evident in Larsen, a 2018 Minnesota finalist, who admitted her colleagues sometime find her optimism off-putting. She said they described her as “you’re
always positive. I have some colleagues that are just like, ‘Can you just be a downer for a second?’” Brandt, a two-time Minnesota finalist, said he chooses to be with those who are professionally like-minded. “I surround myself with colleagues who are positive, constructive. I like collaborating. We challenge and push each other and that’s essential.” This sentiment was echoed by McHugh, the 2019 winner in Wisconsin, when she said, “I have the most incredible team. They are teachers of the year to--without the title. We support and feed off of each other.” McCarthy, 2020 winner in Wisconsin, said, “I just don’t ever go into the negative, even though I know it exists. This is who I am, and I really love what I do. I find what I really care about.” These exemplary teachers articulated not only a value for their work, but also an internalization of those values that critically impacts their efficacy and daily mindset.

Bulman, 2017 Minnesota Teacher of the Year, addressed the discomfort he has witnessed when trying to address emotional intelligence and mindset at the secondary level. “Dismissing the importance of social emotional learning for teachers is a huge issue. I work with a lot of people that would think this is complete BS.” Still, Bulman contended that elements of emotion and things brushed off as “trust fall and groups hugs” may seem unimportant when in reality they may be what makes these teachers thrive. “In my head it’s like, ‘Well maybe there’s a reason I had to go meet the president and you’re just wailing at the darkness.’” Undeniably, each of these teachers have reached a level of conviction and dedication on who they are as educators that they are no longer swayed by others to lose or diminish that value.

**Subcategory Two: Integrated Philosophy**

This final step in the affective taxonomy is the “peak of the internalization process” (Krathwohl et al., 1964, p. 185). The use of the word by Krathwohl and his colleagues (1964) was intentionally positioned to represent “objectives so encompassing that they tend to
characterize the individual almost completely” (p. 171). For the purpose of my study, it should be noted that not even the most exemplary teachers necessarily reached this level. In fact, the examples given by Krathwohl et al. (1964) make this level seem achievable by only a very few in generations. They reference “Christ, Socrates, Lincoln, Ghandi, and Einstein” (p. 171). Yet having a lofty goal, attained or not, does seem to resonate with these exemplary teachers. After all, “it is the attainment of a philosophy of life, of a code for governing one’s conduct, that is the ultimate goal of education” (Krathwohl et al., 1964, p. 172).

As educators and lifelong learners, what my study can affirm in that exemplary teachers see themselves ever on a path of improvement and growth. Lawrence of Delano High School said, “Nobody’s 100% effective, which is why we have different teachers year after year. And if you get the right staff assembled, then people get better.” As such, growth is not a solitary effort and it is also not without mistakes and failures along the path. Brown-Wessling, a National Teacher of the Year, was also one of the participants most adamant that the best teachers keep learning and trying new things:

One of the things people don’t necessarily understand, even teachers, is that they might think a sign of getting good is that it’s not messy or that one of the signs that you have grown as a teacher is that you don’t make as many mistakes. I think it’s just the opposite. I think the sign of a good teacher is somebody who is just right in the mess all the time because learning is really messy. I think it’s about developing an awareness of one’s teaching persona.

The impact of this is that teachers who just keep doing what they have always done and no longer lean into the “mess” may never achieve the higher levels of the affective taxonomy and
consequently the level of satisfaction and efficacy exemplary teachers are purposefully striving to attain throughout their lifetime.

The natural impact of this internal characterization of self as a teacher is that some in the profession may continue to view it with less conviction or passion. Beaver, of Zimmerman High School, said those teachers must consider the negative impact that could have on the students in their care. “I love to do this, and I try to tell kids that a lot because they don’t necessarily get to see somebody who loves their job.” Furthermore, Beaver contended when that passion is lost, there is good reason to move on. “There are teachers who don’t love their job and sometimes it’s like ‘You’ve got to retire or please go into something else where you are not miserable, and the children are not miserable.’” Although by nature of the definition exemplary teachers are not the norm, it is rational to expect all teachers to find value in their role. The impact of those who struggle to find joy and meaning in the work can be devastating to the hundreds of lives they impact in the classroom. As such, one of the ways the level of characterization is exemplified in exemplary teachers is their passion to improve and advance the profession and a moral imperative to care deeply for those they teach.

For teachers like Steil, two-time finalist in Minnesota, caring goes beyond a feel-good emotion to a “magic” exemplary teachers employ. She said, “I mean they’re shocked when you’re like, ‘I think you’ve got something to offer.’ It’s like nobody ever told them that before. I have found that to be a kind of magic—just seeing a kid.” She combines that magic with her own authentic attitude toward each student. “I’m just real, you know? I’m kind and I care about you and that will shine through in every single this I do.”

This culture of caring is a characterization of value that was on brilliant display amongst the participants of this study. They have determined that caring is a character trait exemplary
teachers possess in abundance and bestow frequently. Lawrence said, “If they don’t that you care, they’re not going to care. If they can’t see that you love them. They’re not going to love what you try to teach them.” Volk of Fargo added for student teachers one of the key things he focuses on in their development is:

getting them to understand that these are humans you’re working with and you want to connect. You can know all you want about the subject, but if you can’t connect, they’re not going to open to talking that in from you.

What these teachers have shown is that a philosophy of care is engrained in the heart of an exemplary teacher.

Characterization is a level of personal actualization that may be difficult to achieve and complex to define but it gets to the basic human need of purpose. It is the sense that what one does matters and doing it well is possible and worth extraordinary effort. The impact of this is an understanding that to achieve the highest levels of the affective taxonomy the work will need to go beyond the academic and into the heart of the matter—the heart of a truly exemplary teacher.

**Dramatism and the Exemplary Teacher in Motion**

When I began my study, I planned to do classroom observations with each participant, but the pandemic required me to change plans. There were many reasons why I originally adopted this methodology, but at the most basic level it was because visual images can speak louder than words and show so much more variety. Seeing an exemplary teacher in action is like experiencing the view from 14,000-foot mountain top for the first time—beyond words and deeply emotional. There is a sense that what is happening is magical. As a researcher, a galvanizing moment in my commitment to this methodology was a visit to the Ron Clark Academy in Atlanta Georgia. Ron Clark has achieved some of the highest awards in teaching
and with the backing of many prominent names and corporations, he founded the Ron Clark Academy. This school is known for cutting-edge, high-energy, active learning. I have often described it to colleagues as “Disneyland for teachers where wishes really do come true.” I had felt to my core that this kind of teaching was possible and had fought to employ it daily in my own classroom, but to have it take on the momentum and energy of an entire school had me, quite literally, in tears as I watched. Below is picture of Ron Clark during a math lesson I viewed (see Figure 8). However, this was a math class re-imagined with hand signals, chants, music, club lighting, a snow machine, and a teacher moving around on top of desks.

**Figure 8**

*Math Lesson Image*

*Note*. Taken by researcher at the Ron Clark Academy in 2019.
I share this example because it was upon my return to my school and my colleagues that I realized it was nearly impossible to put into words, much less attach the level of emotion, what I had seen at the Ron Clark Academy. I had seen other moments where exemplary teachers did something I wished I could have captured in a photo. Add the research and reputation of Dr. Harper, a professor I had the pleasure to learn from, and I was determined to use photos. Although still gaining notoriety in educational research, in 2011 the International Visual Sociology Association annual meeting, Harper (2012) noted that the “range and depth of photo-elicitation studies was nothing less than phenomenal. It is clear that photo elicitation and its variations have passed from a status of quirky and esoteric to nearly the mainstream of several research traditions” (p. 180).

I believe it is important that readers understand the loss that was felt when this prong of my data collection was removed and the importance it should have in further research. As a result of COVID-19, schools closed to in-person learning just as my data collection had begun. Even if some returned, it would be fully masked which would dramatically impact the ability to view and document non-verbal communication and facial expressions. Consequently, my amount of data was impacted in the visual realm. However, what I realized is that the theory of dramatism (Burke, 1952) was still described and lauded by the comments the participants made on the importance of movement in the classroom. Thus, though dramatically abbreviated in scope, this theory still applies to my study and introduces promising areas for examination and further research.

Dramatism (Burke, 1952) conceptualizes life as a drama, much as Shakespeare proclaimed that “All the world’s a stage.” Therefore, any communicative action is considered a drama. Burke insisted that “anything freely said for a reason is a rhetorical act—an actor
choosing to perform a dramatic action for a purpose” (Griffin et al., 2015, p. 293). As such, teaching, when viewed through dramatism, is a performance with reasons. Burke developed the pentad as a way of applying his theory in a symbolic way. “Dramatism provided researchers with the flexibility to scrutinize an object of study from a variety of angles” (West & Turner, 2017, p. 22). The pentad is made up of five points: act, agent, agency, scene and purpose (see Figure 2 in Chapter Two).

In his seminal work *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke (1952) defined dramatism as:

A method of analysis and a corresponding critique of terminology designed to show that the most direct route to the study of human relations and human motives is via a methodical inquiry into cycles or clusters of term and their functions. (p. 445)

He went on to summarize this “in a wider sense [as] a study of human relations in terms of action” (Burke, 1952, p. 445). My investigation sought to address that gap by using the foundational theories of the affective domain (Krathwohl et al., 1964) and dramatism (Burke, 1952) to examine what elements and descriptors of exemplary teachers dominate and present themselves repeatedly with the most impact on student engagement. The theme that emerged in the research to address this theory is the use of teacher movement.

**Teacher Movement and Dramatist Pentad**

Teacher movement is the dramatist pentad in action. “Act” is the teaching itself. “Agent” is the teacher making the movement. “Agency” is the movement as it is described by the exemplary teacher. “Scene” is the classroom in which the movement takes place. Finally, “purpose” is the reasoning and impact of that movement. For the purpose of this theoretical analysis, the explanations and descriptions of the agency (movement) and its purpose (impact)
are the lens into a dramatism interpretation of exemplary teachers (Burke, 1952). To connect this theory to the larger visual of the Physiology of the Exemplary Teacher (see Figure 7) teacher movement is represented, quite obviously, by the feet.

Bulman, 2017 Minnesota Teacher of the Year, was featured in an Education Minnesota video including video of him teaching. See Figure 9 below for photographic stills captured from this video. During the interview, I mentioned the amount of movement shown in that video:

I never stop moving, you know? It’s funny that you reference that video Education Minnesota made because that is pretty much me all day. I’ve had students say, “How do you stay skinny” and I never stop moving. I’ve done that since my first day. I always feel if you plant yourself it becomes about you. Whereas if you move it becomes about them.

**Figure 9**

*Corey Bulman, 2017 Minnesota Teacher of the Year Examples of Classroom Movement*

For Bulman, the use of constant movement about the room is the agency he employed because it shifted the impact (purpose) to his students. In the video, he can be seen repeatedly kneeling down by students desks to talk, teaching while moving all around the room, sitting on top of a desk, placing an encouraging hand on the back of a student. Bulman also used this time to gather visual and auditory information to inform his pacing and delivery and assess how well the class was going. “I hear every conversation moving around the room. So that’s when I get the real information I need and if you pay attention, you get to know them—you know a lot about their lives.” In this way, Bulman took the Shakespearean adage and made all the classroom the stage and the key players are his students.

For some participants, the physical set up of the room is intentionally developed to not only allow, but more so require, movement and variety. Lawrence, English teacher in Delano, described his room in the interview:

My desk is up there, but my music is over here. My guitars are up there. So, it’s like all the fun stuff is all around the room. I don’t ever do anything for more than seven to eight minutes because that all you can do unless you are the greatest stand-up comedian ever—and you’re not. Being a teacher, you have seven minutes to talk and then they’re out. But the talking for me is with them instead of at them.

Lawrence did not start teaching until his 30s because he studied theater and went to New York City first to act. He now harnesses that skill to engage the students. “I teach prepositions by pretending to be an old lady and stand on their desk.” As the teacher, Lawrence is the agent, the staging has shifted to the classroom and the movement takes on an even deeper purpose because it is not to simply entertain, it is to educate. “If you’re really passionate about something, it’s contagious.”
The movement may be just as much for the teacher’s energy and kinesthetic engagement as it is for the students. Brandt works in a large urban high school in St. Paul and described movement in his room:

I try to move around all the time just to keep my brain going. I don’t really house myself anywhere. When I sit down, I try to sit amongst the students and I usually try to sit in the most awkward place possible to get their attention. Then I go sit back in the desk with them and I do quick write there. If I’m in a room where the desks are facing forward, I intentionally go and stand in the back of the room. I try to be a little unpredictable.

This unpredictability is anything but unintentional. By keeping the students minds, bodies, and even eye contact moving, Brandt employs movement (agency) to increase engagement and for both his own mind, and the minds of the students placed all around the room (purpose). This is significant because some secondary teachers rarely leave a podium, are often seated at their desk, or never get to the back of the room. This impact is gaps and pockets of the room where engagement suffers, and invisibility thrives.

This use of constant and intentional movement is not without controversy by some educational pedagogy, but the exemplary teachers insisted that movement equates to meaningful engagement and interaction. Larsen, a Waconia social studies teacher explained:

I joke with my students all the time that my classroom is my stage and not that I want the attention—it’s not that. I like to do circles around my room. There’s some text that was like “an effective teacher doesn’t move around very much because its distracting.” And I’m like, “Sorry!” I move around because I want to be able to interact with students!

For Larsen, the benefits of proximity and connectedness have given her the confidence to make her own determination in the value of movement even if it is in conflict with some of the
educational theory. This is another example of characterization (level five) because she has internalized the value and made her own classroom-tested philosophy of education.

Beaver, a Zimmerman math teacher, is known for her energy. “I’m a really good mover! Like, I’m ALL over the classroom.” Beaver makes sure her students are moving too; she even sets a timer to make sure she remembers. “If I don’t set a timer, then I forget to move them. So, they’ll have 12 minutes and then a minute to move. They’re doing different things.” These “different things” are both physical and mental as she described group activities, learning stations, choice boards, discussion, and even quick walks around the school. “Sometimes you just have to go eat Cheetos with them. I think it’s so important to understand that we teach human beings.” Like Bulman, Beaver also uses this movement to gather information as she works. “I’m always looking for clues. If you keep them moving and you have good relationships you don’t always have to be discipline, discipline.” Beaver also cautioned new teachers to make movement a priority. “First year teachers—you’re so focused on your notes you forget to get out of your notes—maybe some veteran teacher to. Keep the kids moving. I keep myself moving!”

Although Burke’s (1952) work on dramatism was not focused on teachers specifically, the application is obvious. Exemplary teachers, much like the most gifted thespians, know the value of movement all around the room and for all the players. It is movement with purpose and yet a walk down the halls and peeks into the rooms of any secondary school will attest that it happens far too infrequently. My research and analysis aimed to address that discrepancy and improve student engagement by encouraging and highlighting the impact of teacher movement.

I adopted the theory of dramatism (1952) to focus on movement for two key reasons. One, the impact of the data show that movement may be a new element of focus for teacher preparation programs and professional development. Two, dramatism employs the skills,
knowledge, and practices of theater and as such, it provides a paradigm in which the skills of movement can be taught. I further develop these recommendations in the concluding chapter of my study.

**Summary**

I adopted the affective taxonomy (Krathwohl et al., 1964) as the overarching framework to analyze the primary themes. While all teachers demonstrate the first two levels of receiving, and responding, it was in the depth of the manifestation exemplary teachers adopted in valuing, organizing, and characterization of the profession that was most remarkable. Although all teachers understand the need (receiving) and make the informed decision to join the profession (responding), not all teachers demonstrate the consistent markers of the top levels of the affective taxonomy. As such, it becomes vital to study and understand what exemplary teachers display and describe that powers their ascension in the affective domain. As the data analysis chapter demonstrated, it is the deeply affective elements of relationship, expertise, humility, and teaching above content that thrust these teachers into the spotlight and the hearts of their students.

Exemplary teachers not only show a deep commitment and value for the work they do but they also constantly strive to perfect their craft and have taken on the identity of a teacher to their very core.

A consistent pattern amongst exemplary teachers concerned the depth and length they described they would consistently go to achieve the final two levels of organization and characterization. Teaching at these levels was described as a very human condition where ego is set aside, and work is championed because of the very real impact it has on the lives of the students. As such, a teacher seeks to organize and develop their skills as a lifelong learner while maintaining a code of excellence that spurs them on to higher skill, performance, and impact. In
doing so, they are willing to shed the titles and honors gained along the way to ever highlight the growth and passions of their students. They remain humble without being self-deprecating and deeply believe all teachers should strive for, and are capable of, this level of investment and reward. They have the lungs, head, and heart of a truly exemplary teacher.

A second analysis involved dramatism and a focused examination of movement by the teacher in the classroom. By moving intentionally and often about the room, these teachers gain the verbal and non-verbal data they then use to rapidly and expertly adjust their teaching to improve the impact of what they are teaching and engagement of the students. The use of proximity is also a key tool for connection and relationship building. They become part of the room instead of the head of it. This movement also serves to energize the room—both students and teacher. This keeps the blood pumping and energy high. This addition of movement when combined with the key affective parts of teacher (lungs, head, heart) create the physiology of a truly exemplary teacher.
CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I began this study with a goal to clearly elucidate what makes a truly exemplary teacher. The elusive nature of what makes a teacher engaging and how they impact students for a lifetime was very broad. Yet all teachers want to be that teacher students love and never forget. As a teacher educator in a private college of teacher preparation, and a secondary English teacher for more than 13 years, I recognized the use of theory, methods, and subject-based content knowledge dominate teacher preparation programs (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005). What was often ignored or vaguely described was the impact of emotion, affect, and performance behaviors (Schoffner, 2009). My study sought to address this gap in scholarly literature and textbooks on effective practice.

Summary

I focused my research study on secondary teachers (grades 6-12) because the literature showed a significant decrease in teacher student relationships (TSRs) where emotion was largely regarded as a “threat” to classroom order (Hargraves, 2000, p. 823). Hargreaves (2000) postulated that though secondary teachers were mostly compassionate towards their students, their classrooms lacked the “emotional intensity” often found at the elementary level. Secondary teachers were more likely to qualify their “positive relationships with students as ones of acknowledgement and respect than loving or liking” (p. 820). However, in a meta-analysis of 810 studies the literature confirmed relationships and emotion played an even more important role than in elementary school because older students often face decreasing engagement and increasing complexity at the upper levels (Roorda et al., 2011). My study showed, in contrast to Hargreaves (2000), exemplary teachers often speak of their students using terms of love and
affection. Participants considered the relationship a critical precursor to any significant learning. Consequently, the data from my study confirmed not only the importance of TSRs already cited in the literature (Furrer et al., 2014; Hargreaves, 2000; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Mueller, 2001; Reyes et al., 2012; Roorda et al., 2011; Wilkins, 2014) but also provided important supporting data on the way students develop relationships from honored, veteran teachers. Highly regarded teachers emphasize relationship development as one of the key tenets of exemplary teaching.

The literature also showed that the “chronically disengaged” (Klem & Connell, 2004, p. 262) students may be inspired to reconnect with learning due to teachers’ behavior focused on student engagement (Klem & Connell, 2004). Another middle school study of almost 1400 students (Reyes et al., 2012) found “classroom emotional climate” as the strongest predictor of student engagement over time (p. 707). However, a clear gap existed in a pattern of how teachers could use affect and performance to address disengagement.

When I analyzed the data, I found clear pattern of six tenets described and employed by all exemplar teachers, including: student expertise, relationship development, teaching valued above content, engagement and energy, teacher humility and transparency, and teacher movement. The findings linked to corresponding recommendations serve as the central focus of this chapter.

**The Six Essential Tenets of Exemplary Teachers**

After analyzing the data with the dominant themes and through theoretical analysis, I focused my findings and conclusions on these timeless six essential tenets of exemplary teachers (1) student expertise, (2) relationship development, (3) teaching valued above content, (4) engagement and energy, (5) teacher humility and transparency, and finally, (6) teacher movement. I created an
infographic to highlight these final six tenets (see Figure 10). Although all of these tenets are specific to affective behaviors, high emotional intelligence, and performance skills, they are not elusive. In fact, these tenets clearly point to a set of six areas that can be studied, taught, learned, and applied. As such they are not soft skills, they serve as core tenets for exemplary teaching and valued as necessities for high engagement.

Figure 10

*The Six Essential Tenets of Exemplary Teachers*
**Tenet One: Student Expertise**

The data clearly showed student expertise, beyond simple student focus, is a clear skill exemplary teachers keenly employed to improve student engagement. Expert teachers become researchers of their own students and use their knowledge and hypersensitivity to their students to create a classroom that feels like a community—where each person is seen and valued. Wessling put it described it as the way teachers see their students and the unique human nature of that work.

The first of the key elements of student expertise exemplary teachers described and employed was hypersensitive observational skills. Similar to the popular work of Goleman (1998) on high emotional intelligence (EQ), participants used key non-verbal and verbal data to pinpoint the affective needs and emotional temperature of their students. Using this data to make quick in-the-moment decisions and actions, teachers supported positive emotions, such as curiosity, happiness, and wonder. They diffused negative emotions, such as confusion, frustration, and fear of failure. The multi-tasking brains of expert teachers allowed them to keep speaking and moving about the room, while simultaneously picking up on subtle facial expressions, body language, and energy levels. They repeatedly examined and assessed the effectiveness of their teaching and the level of students’ engagement and learning.

The second descriptor to student expertise involves “radical listening.” This term, used specifically by Brown-Wessling, referred to going beyond just hearing what students said to determine what students need as well as the response from their teachers to feel valued and understood. The positioning of one’s body and facial expressions shows interest, investment, and attention. The body employs the skills of empathy. Teachers “read” their students, using the convergence of data gained from radical listening to view students in new, radical ways.
The third descriptor of student expertise involves high emotional intelligence (EQ). Expert teachers recognized empathy served as a crucial skill to promote teaching excellence. Teachers “naturally use[d] their emotional radar to sense how others are reacting” (Goleman, 1998, p. 167). The key understanding here with exemplary teachers involved what Goleman (1998) described as a critical difference between declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge. One is knowing concepts and its technical details (teacher pedagogy) and the other is being able to put those concepts and details into action at the right moment (high EQ). Quick thinking is required because these teachers do not have time in the moment to go back to their education textbooks for guidance or look up an instructional strategy. Instead, expert teachers use their emotional intelligence to know how to capitalize on their own emotion, body language, energy, and movement to make their content come alive.

The fourth descriptor of student expertise includes an intense level of dedication. Exemplary teachers are highly motivated by not just the cognitive, but also all the emotional needs of their students. They know the value of investing some personal time at a sporting event or music recital to see the payoff on students’ faces at the event and in their class. Teachers always sought to get better, know better, and do better. It is not that exemplary teachers do not value family and life/work balance. They carefully managed all the time they invested in teaching to make the greatest impact. If that means, for example, spending three hours creating game pieces for an activity that will take 45-minutes, they do it because the payoff is in the enhanced and engaged learning that comes from their efforts. When it comes to their efficacy, expert teachers were not satisfied with “pretty good.” They strove for excellence.

The fifth descriptor the exemplary teachers highlighted in student expertise involved their decision to make students their top research interest. Although a research focus may be more
commonly referred to at the higher education level, exemplary teachers are also excellent researchers. Research is a part of their intense level of dedication. Their research centers around the students in their class. They research to keep getting better mainly through effective practice but also through their own action research. Sometimes participants learned about a topic they have little or no interest in so they can strike up a conversation with a student and build a relationship. For others, it may be researching high interest books or fun techniques for memorizing the metals of the periodic table. Teachers invested time to research the best practice for student with special needs. They experimented with strategies for what they might try next.

Participants were also observational researchers. They noticed student groups and friendship, learned about what music they listened to, and learned about what YouTube sensation everyone was buzzing about. These activities may not be traditionally academic, but they were all very relevant practices to their teaching. Participants spent hours looking up ideas, bookmarking sites on the web, and conversing with other top educators. They sought this information to be more effective. Participants believed the more they know and feel, the more ways they can have an impact. Exemplary teachers are in some ways the champions of lifelong learners.

**Tenet 2: Relationship Development**

Bulman, 2017 Minnesota Teacher of the Year, pointed out that the teachers students remember, for the right reasons, are teachers who lean in, instead of shying away from relationships with secondary students. “You’ve got to meet people where they are. And if you do that, I think you’re in the game but if you lose sight of the compassion and the relationships, you probably aren’t going to be remembered by kids.” The four key descriptors to the tenet of relationship development included: (1) the first priority of every year is relationships, (2)
involvement outside the classroom, (3) not afraid to love and build trust, and (4) transcendent relationship. My recommendations for each of these elements provide opportunities for teacher preparation programs. This encourages teachers to find courage in building relationships rather than avoiding the importance of relationships—a disturbing choice made by some to back away from their older students.

Exemplary teachers begin with a focus on relationships. They are willing to delay teaching content and push back immediate “academic rigor” to make what they feel is a necessary investment in building relationships first. The reason for this emphasis on relationships related to participants’ belief in its power as Volk noted: “You can know all you want about the subject, but if you can’t connect, they’re not gonna be open to taking that in from you.” In order for students to listen and engage in academics, the first lesson students need to learn is who is going on that journey with them and do they really care.

Tenet 3: Teaching Valued Above Content

The third striking tenet of exemplary teachers involves the way teachers value teaching above content. They actively abnegate the premise that what draws teachers to the classroom every day is their content alone. While a healthy background and respect for the content is necessary, exemplary teachers describe a predominant love for teaching and students above content. This was represented in the data by four key elements: (1) they like their content—they love teaching; (2) they will sacrifice content to teach the lesson; (3) they adapt to student needs in the moment; and (4) the human condition drives content creation.

Larsen, a social studies teacher from Waconia, Minnesota, said as part of her interview, “I always say I like history, but I LOVE teaching.” This statement and similar statements made by participants revealed exemplary teachers feel most inspired and fueled by the craft of
teaching. The content may be what brings students to their doors, but teachers recognize a teachable moment and its own power to transcend content and create life lessons. Bulman, an English teacher in Westonka explained, “You are not a specialist in content; you’re a generalist who has to become a specialist in working with people, and that is different.”

The second highlighted result in this tenet concerns the way exemplary teachers sacrificed content to teach the lesson. Exemplary teachers exhibited a keen awareness for teachable moments. These moments can come from discussion with the content, an interchange between students in class, a connection to current events, or an emotionally charged reaction. 2016 finalist, Beaver explained,

Say you’re going to teach English and maybe you love grammar and that’s amazing. But there are days when they come in and there’s not grammar happening and that’s okay because you know they’re going to figure out where to put their commas at some point in time.

But on that day the teaching may take place outside the content. Beaver then told the story of teaching the day after a student died. She knew going in that day’s lesson was not going to be about math. It was going to be about whatever they needed and how she could grieve with them.

The third descriptor of this tenet involve how exemplary teachers adapted to student needs in the moment. As Steil from Stillwater put it,

They’re all our kids. I think that’s what makes one of the biggest differences—when teachers are invested and see beyond just the curricular content delivery and see that what we are shaping kids. We are educating the whole child.

Brown-Wessling of Iowa confirmed this emphasis. “When I walk into a classroom I have a plan in my head, but it never supersedes the students in front of me.” This clearly showcases teaching
valued above content. Exemplary teachers recognize that a plan is not an edict. It can and should be adjusted based upon the needs of the students in that class at that time. This may mean the lesson changes every hour, but since no one student is the same, exemplary teachers can adjust and rarely teach one lesson the same way.

The final descriptor of the teaching valued above content tenet is that exemplary teachers use the human condition to drive content creation. This is the kind of curriculum building rarely found in a bound textbook or district scope and sequence. Exemplary teachers look at that content and see its potential; they adapt the curriculum to focus on the elements students relate to and connect with their life experience.

Bulman, 2017 Minnesota Teacher of the Year, said, “What I think separates people into being great educators is that they understand it is a human endeavor. It is not an academic endeavor.” The key to this piece of data is that it points to the humanity of a what has erroneously been viewed as a content-driven profession. Bulman added, “The greatest teachers I know were people that had their content locked down. But they also had a deep understanding of the human condition and that human condition is what drove their content, not the other way around.” The implication of this goes back to the tenets of student expertise and relationship development. Part of the necessity of relationship development is an exemplary teacher needs individualized information about their students before they plan their content. They kept their students in their minds as they prepared for each class.

**Tenet 4: Engagement and Energy**

Exemplary teachers command the room. Their actions demand engagement and exude positive energy. On some days they may have to dig deep, but when they step into the classroom, they ignite the room. The same is true of exemplary speakers, presenters, performers, ministers,
and leaders. They understand their energy is contagious. If teachers want their audience of students to respond, they must first bring the energy and emotion in themselves. This is the fourth tenet consistent amongst exemplary teachers—engagement and energy.

Exemplary teachers do not focus solely on strong classroom management; they favor engagement instead of compliance. Exemplary teachers inspire. Management teachers require. The difference lies in choice and desire. An exemplary teacher creates the desire in a student to engage and they willingly choose to participate because they feel motivated by what they see, hear, and feel from that teacher. Brown-Wessling, National Teacher of the Year 2010, explained the emphasis on engagement:

Engagement is different than compliance. Doing the work is not what I’m looking for. What I’m looking for are thoughtful questions. I’m looking for students who get stuck, but don’t want to stay stuck. They want to get through it.

Notice the focus on the student’s desire versus a teacher’s demand.

The second descriptor exemplary teachers produced in this engagement tenet involved the way teachers found authentic audiences for student assignments. A prime example of this was shown in Chapter Four where Erikson of Bayfield High School used his students’ passion for the outdoors and tribal culture to engage them in science. Their work took place outdoors and the results were presented to the community and distributed to the DNR. No longer was Erickson the sole audience of their efforts. Instead, students saw their work informing the community and those they cared about.

Tenet four on engagement also revealed exemplary teachers understand the power of fun. Teachers engage their students in the same kind of excitement and curiosity found in early elementary students by creating a culture of fun connected to learning. They bring back students’
natural desire to learn and participate. McHugh (2019 WI TOY) described how engagement is clearly connected to classroom culture: “I like to just have a lot of fun! I create this culture where learning should be fun. It should be. You’re spending eight hours in school and we should be excited.” McHugh also uses the room to improve engagement. “It’s just using every space. There’s nowhere to hide. We’re all part of the community. We all need to contribute to it.”

Lawrence of Delano High School focuses on keeping students locked in through ever-changing action. “I don’t ever do any one thing for more than seven to eight minutes. But the talking for me is usually with them instead of at them. I’ll ask a question, ask another question, ask a third question.” Lawrence found a powerful way to blend his acting skills into teaching - really works for him. “Being able to improvise … I know I couldn’t teach if I wasn’t a theater person.” The personalities of the study participants varied widely, but when it came to engagement, it seemed clear teachers worked hard to find their own authentic style responsive to their students. In other words, teachers needed to find how to make their teaching fun for themselves and then transmit that energy to their students.

The fourth descriptor of this tenet involved active learning and variety. Exemplary teachers rarely passively lecture and often mix-up their instructional strategies. Larsen of Waconia High School teaches advanced placement social studies, where the rigor and amount of content often pushes teachers to lecture and plow through material. However, Larsen contended, “I’ve had some teachers who struggle with it saying, ‘We’re not here to entertain’ and I’m like ‘Yeah, but it has to be enjoyable!’” Liyanapathiranage teaches 7th grade English and even when he is talking, he has his students actively responding. “I try to teach them to sit up, lean in, ask questions, nod, track the speaker, this is how I know [they are engaged].”
The final descriptor of the fourth tenant of engagement and energy is the way teachers embodied high energy and passion. Science teacher Emdin claimed “magic can be taught” in a TED talk entitled, “Teach Teachers How to Create Magic” (2013). Emdin explained, “You teach it by allowing people to get into those spaces where magic is happening.” Swanson (HS science) said, “You know you just feel it. It’s that vibe of the room.” Luke (HS Spanish) added, “It’s just being able to read the room. Listening to the volume levels, the excitement in their voice, or the boredom. It’s about having something better to kick out when it’s needed.”

**Tenet 5: Teacher Humility and Transparency**

A misconception of exemplary teachers or winners of the Teacher of the Year award is that they believe they have arrived and are the best. The truth is these teachers were often their own harshest critics. Teachers quickly turned the attention off of themselves and onto their colleagues and students. Teachers embraced the idea about always working toward improvement. They were very transparent in their struggles involving both students and their fellow teachers. Success was not measured by accomplishments on a resume, but rather by students the who took their lessons to heart. The four key concepts these teachers embodied included: (1) they always a “work in progress,” (2) the necessity of failure, (3) the power of vulnerability, and (4) they embrace teacher humility to spotlight students.

Becoming a teacher of the year is one of the top honors in education but exemplary teachers do not take this as a benchmark they have arrived at perfection; quite the contrary. Exemplary teachers sought improvement. Bulman (2017 MN TOY), said, “People who just like to be with people and they always want to be better. You know? I mean, every day I want it. I always want to be better.” This drive to improve kept their teaching from becoming static and immovable to the changes in education and in their students from year-to-year.
Another misconception is that exemplary teachers do not experience failure. The fact is exemplary teachers take risks and with risks comes failure and reward. Bulman “You can rock it at 9:00 o’clock, and then you do the same lesson at 10:30 and it falls apart. I’m super critical. I get in my car and think, ‘What was that? You screwed that up.’” When he does have a bad class, he does not hide his mistakes from students. They were there. “I own it. I always apologize for it and I say what can we do to make this better? If you can’t do that, you lose credibility with kids.” This not only shows his dedication to consistently bringing his best for his students, but also the teachers model how to handle failure as well as the necessity of failure.

Brandt, a two-time finalist for TOY, believed great teaching involves risk. “I think failure in doubt, are both essential parts of greatness. I think someone needs to doubt themselves—needs to always be questioning. Great educators take big risks, and they fail.” He then added, “The more you know the less you know, right?” Exemplary teachers are lifelong learners. They specialize in teaching and their content comes alive. The true measure of success in a lesson involved the response of the students. Exemplary teachers were not afraid to try something new and then toss their work in the trash and start again if it is not successful.

Another key descriptor from this fifth tenet is there is real power in vulnerability. Steil, a journalism teacher in Stillwater, Minnesota, and two-time finalist for teacher of the year, shared, “I’m just real. I’m real, and I’m kind, and I care about you, and that will shine through in every single thing I do.” Steil understands secondary students will not open up to someone they think is being fake. To combat this, Steil keeps is real and transparent.

When I'm teaching, I will make myself vulnerable to you. I will tell you stories about my kids, and myself, and my husband, and growing up, and try to make connections for you, so you get to know who I am throughout the course of the year.
Brandt, who teaches in St. Paul in a major urban high school, also spoke to the value of vulnerability. “You have to vulnerable in a way that invites them too. If you’re being vulnerable and being willing to share things about your life, then hopefully that starts to build a sense of rapport.” What these teachers discovered is that vulnerability is not a weakness, in fact, it is a powerful tool for connection.

In the previous data chapter, Chapter Four, I shared the story of Callope, a middle school math teacher and TOY from Wisconsin. This exemplary teacher said she left the room one day because she was so upset. When she came back she opened up to her students about how she felt, and they responded immediately. However, I would posit that students responded to Callope because they cared and that comes with relationships. This is another reason in support of teacher-student relationships as the first priority. Students may not care that a teacher is upset if they feel their teacher does not see or care about them. This is why there are horror stories of students that “made the teacher cry” or considered it a triumph when the class descended into chaos. These moments keep new teachers up at night. However, exemplary teachers knew the need for connection, and this was amplified by key moments of vulnerability.

Finally, exemplary teachers used their own humility to cast the spotlight on their students. Steil of Stillwater was quick to take the focus off of herself because, “It’s never been about me in my classroom. It’s about them.” In almost the same words Brown-Wessling, who went on to receive the highest honor of National Teacher of the Year, may have put it best. “Humility is at the center of all good teaching because in the end, if I’m really humble, as a teacher. It’s just not about me. It’s about them.” Exemplary teachers realized their success was inextricably linked with the success of their students. Maxwell (2010) said, “The measure of a great teacher isn’t what he or she knows; it’s what the students know” (p. 151).
Tenet Six: Teacher Movement

Mehrabian (1967, 1971, 2009), a UCLA psychology professor, conducted multiple studies and found face-to-face communication can be broken down into three components: words, tone of voice, and body language. The widely accepted results of his studies involved the “7-38-55 rule.” What one says accounts for only seven percent of what is believed. The way one says it accounts for 38 percent. What others see accounts for 55 percent (1967, as cited in Maxwell, 2010, p. 44). More than 90 percent of what a teacher conveys has very little to do with what is said and everything to do with how it is said and shown. My study adds to scholarly research by showing the importance of movement as key tool for communication and engagement. Five elements of teacher movement emerged from the data: (1) teacher move often and with intention; (2) teachers vary their levels of stature; (3) teachers “teach” from all over the room; (4) the classroom environment is one of collaboration, and (5) proximity improves relationship connections.

The first key element of this tenet is that teachers move often and with intention. Bulman, 2017 MN TOY, This is movement just for the sake of keeping the blood flowing, it is movement for the sake of keeping the energy moving in students and the teacher alike. Exemplary teachers also vary their levels of stature as they teach and facilitate. These teachers will use their body to track eye contact and assess the engagement of the students. If they are presenting, they may sit down to tell a story and draw the students in and then rise to show visually a transition to the next activity or instruction.

Another key recommendation in terms of teacher movement is to purposely teach from all over the room. Brandt, a two-time finalist for MN TOY, shared that he is always moving around the room in part to keep his own brain going. Larsen of Waconia also insisted that
movement improves engagement and interaction. “I like to do circles around my room. There’s some text that was ‘an effective teacher doesn’t move around very much because its distracting.’ And I’m like, ‘Sorry!’ I move around because I want to be able to interact with students!

The fourth descriptor of this tenant is that exemplary teachers inspire a classroom environment of collaboration where both teachers and students are moving. Beaver, Zimmerman High School math teacher, makes sure her students are moving and even sets a timer to make sure she remembers. “So, they’ll have twelve minutes and then a minute to move. They’re doing different things.” These “different things” are both physical and mental as she described group activities, learning stations, choice boards, discussion, and even quick walks around the school. “Sometimes you just have to go eat Cheetos with them. I think it’s so important to understand that we teach human beings.” In those Cheetos-type moments, a teacher may look chill and relaxed, but exemplary teachers always take in what they see around them. As Beaver stated, “I’m always looking for clues.”

Finally, exemplary teachers understand and employ the power of proximity to improve relationship connections. Proximity is often discussed in terms of classroom management, but it has a much more positive connotation when linked with relationships. There needs to be opportunities for teachers to interact and engage with students individually and within their proximity each class to not only improve their engagement, but also improve the relationship.

**Theoretical Analysis**

I selected two theories to support my study and used theory to construct a model of affective behavior and dramatism. The first theory I adopted was Krathwohl et al.’s (1964) Affective Domain Theory. This theory provided a hierarchy of affective levels including, receiving, responding, valuing, organization, and characterization by value or value complex.
The affective taxonomy emphasizes emotion and tone. The second foundational theory adopted to explain and interpret my view findings involved the work of Burke’s (1968) communication theory of dramatism, including an assessment tool of the dramatist pentad. These two theories provided a framework to analyze the data and resulted in the creation of the Physiology of an Exemplary Teacher (see Figure 7) created to illustrate the connections. The anatomy of the human body is used in this figure as a metaphor for the make-up of an exemplary teacher. The “Physiology of an Exemplary Teacher” shows how both the affective domain (Krathwohl et al., 1964) and dramatism (Burke, 1968) may be more easily understood in the context of exemplary teaching.

Level One: Receiving

In the first level of the affective taxonomy, receiving, the learner, or in this case the teacher, becomes aware of certain phenomenon and a will to “receive or attend to them” (Krathwohl et al., 1964, p. 98). Some teachers come to profession having always known they wanted to be a teacher.

Level Two: Responding

The next level, responding, goes beyond basic awareness to actively engaging with the phenomenon (Krathwohl et al., 1964). This can be determined by the subdivision marker in responding which is a willingness to respond (vs. receive in the first level), controlled attention, and then satisfaction in that response. For teachers, this is exemplified by making this decision to teach. It takes teachers beyond the awareness of the need to the choice to respond to that need.
Level Three: Valuing

At level three on the affective taxonomy, the awareness has been seen and the teacher has responded to that call, but now the hard work really has to begin and continue for years, testing the stamina of teachers. The third level of the affective taxonomy, valuing, is most clearly achieved when a student, or teacher in my study, has “taken on the characteristics of a belief or attitude” (Krathwohl et al., 1964, p. 139). As such, it this is “value” that overlaps both the teacher and student domain. For the purpose of my study, I defined value as a willingness to put in the hard work to commit to the students and to the profession. As such, in terms of the physiology of a teacher metaphor, the level of valuing is represented by the lungs—the very air that keeps a teacher alive and moving.

Level Four: Organizing

Just as the upper levels of Bloom’s (1956) Cognitive Taxonomy are seen as more complex and difficult, the same can be said for the upper two levels of the affective taxonomy (Krathwohl et al., 1964). At the fourth level, the exemplary teacher moves beyond the exertion and commitment-making of the value level to the very cerebral task of organizing and examining areas to perfect. In this way, the head stands for the fourth level of the affective taxonomy—organization.

When teachers are at the fourth level of the affective taxonomy (organization), they continually examining areas for improvement, placing relationship above achievement, and maintaining humility as a necessary choice to keep the focus on the students. This is facilitated by several intentional and thoughtful choices. They took competing values and needs and
organized them into their own personalized classification for teaching. This way of thinking affects teachers’ professional success. A shift occurs from the traditional upward advancement model (typically described) to more of a circular pattern of meet, mentor, engage and advance year-after-year. What made these exemplary teachers so noteworthy is that the circles they created spread out across the world and their influence in consistently amplified and exponentially multiplied by each life they touch. It is not a singular circle of influence but rather a vast sea of ongoing impact.

**Level 5: Characterization**

Characterization is a level of personal actualization that may be hard to achieve and complex to define but it gets to the basic human need of purpose. It is the sense that what one does matters and that doing it well is possible and worth extraordinary effort. The impact of this is an understanding that to achieve the highest levels of the affective taxonomy the work will need to go beyond the academic and into the heart of the matter—the heart of a truly exemplary teacher.

In short, the examination of what truly separates exemplary teachers in terms of affective behavior and dramatic performance in front of students appears to be largely relegated in the literature to individual descriptions and broad narratives. This study clearly addresses that gap by using the foundational theories of the affective domain and dramatism to examine what elements and descriptors of exemplary teachers dominate and present themselves repeatedly with the most impact on student engagement. These dominant patterns and descriptors focused the recommendations of my study and provided key areas for further research.
Recommendations: Implementing the Six Tenets of Exemplary Teachers

After years of study, months of research, data collection, and writing, this final chapter has come when the focus turns to “now what. What my research revealed is that emotion, connection, and yes, even transparency should not only be included in the evaluation of exemplary teaching, but also that they are the no longer the “secret sauce” that makes exemplary teachers truly remarkable. In fact, they are the verifiable and foundational ingredients of meaningful engagement. Too often the academic field thinks of emotion as an afterthought or not worthy of hard study in relation to professional pursuits. The data shows it is a critical link to engagement.

I do not think the importance of affect comes as a surprise to educators. As I shared my research and findings with many teachers, the most common thing I heard was that this research focus was overdue. However, why does so little of standards of evaluation, teacher preparation, and professional development focus on, much less elude, to these key elements? The most common answer I found is the elusive nature of the “art,” and yet my findings show there are clear patterns that can be implemented, taught, and practiced.

Consequently, it is time these key tenets of exemplary teachers are addressed in standards of evaluation, teacher preparation, and professional development. As such, I have organized my recommendations into three key “P” areas for implementation: policy, preparation, and professional development and practices. Policy recommendations involve standards, key state or district requirements, or actions at the administrative level. Preparation refers directly to preservice teacher preparation and first year supports. Finally, professional development and practices provides recommendations to current classroom teachers and to areas for focus in secondary staff programming.
Tenet 1: Student Expertise

Exemplary teachers are experts in the needs, interests, and behaviors of their students. They employ key skills, such as hypersensitive observational skills, radical listening, high EQ, dedication, and their own research efforts to provide the most effective and engaging classroom environment and content. Classes are individualized based upon the teachers’ research.

P1: Policy Recommendations

The Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparations (CAEP) vision is “excellence in educator preparation accreditation” (NCATE, 2021). The standards outlined by this body are used to inform excellence and expectations in state teacher preparation programs across the nation. As of 2022, a new set of standards will be enacted based upon review of educational research. These standards are already available online. However, what I found truly disappointing is the absence of standards teacher preparation and accountability in understanding student relationships and affective behavior.

The one standard that speaks most directly to what teachers need to know and be able to do, Standard 1: Content and Pedagogical Knowledge, focuses on four key areas. They include: (1) the learner and learning; (2) content; (3) instructional practice; and (4) professional responsibility. In learning and learning the closest it comes to addressing the six tenets is “creating safe and supportive learning environments” (NCATE, 2021, Standards). The language here is all very vague and does not get to the specifics regarding the affective side of teaching. As such, specific language to foster the time and focus needed to support teachers in becoming
student experts should be added to the state and national standards. These standards could address the need for both training and evaluation in observational skills in the classroom, the teacher’s emotional intelligence aptitude, and research skills in developing highly effective student expertise.

Finally, before these standards can be included, policymakers must also consider what can be removed, refined, and reduced to make not only the new focus less overwhelming, but also the practice of student expertise more attainable and recognized for its value. Likewise, assessment in this area must allow for qualitative data and growth over time.

**P2: Teacher Preparation Recommendations**

Exemplary teachers shared that teachers must have high student expertise but right now there is little room to implement this focus in the current rule. However, just as exemplary teachers do what is best for their students, those of us in teacher education may need to re-interpret the current content and make a way for student expertise to find focused study and practice in our programs.

Substandard Two of the Minnesota Standards of Effective Practice for Teachers (Rule 8710.2000, Subp. 3) focuses on student learning. One of the sub-stands specifically states, “The teacher must understand that a student’s physical, emotional, moral, and cognitive development influence learning and know how to address these factors with they make instructional decisions.” While developmental psychology and methods classes may speak to these elements, the need exists to go beyond understanding to how they “address these factors” in the classroom. That is where there seems to be less preparation. A way this might be addressed is the addition behavioral psychology specific to classroom settings. Pre-service teachers must not only have to
“read” students, but also adjust their behavior to manage energy levels, engagement, and emotion as they teach.

To practice the implementation of behavior psychology in action, more emphasis should be placed on performance skills, getting up in front of the room, watching the room, reacting to the room, versus the overwhelming focus on seated instruction. In short, the principals of active learning need to be more intentionally utilized in teacher preparation as it has become in K-12 classrooms. This could be supported by a flipped classroom model where the distribution of knowledge takes place before class and the active application of that knowledge and evaluation of its effectiveness is the focus of in-class course time.

**P3: Professional Development and Practices**

Currently the focus of work on emotional intelligence has been largely limited to business and leadership. When it is addressed in secondary education, the focus is on developing emotional intelligence in the students, but no mention is made of the teacher’s emotional intelligence. There are several workshops and trainings on improving emotional intelligence including a four-day workshop at Harvard (Harvard Division of Continuing Education, 2021). My study exposes a key need for EQ development in teachers. Until now, the research has been focused on improving the social-emotional skills of students, when those who teach those skills may have little or no training, or high EQ, themselves. It can be taught, is being taught in other professions, and now it needs to be taught to preservice and classroom teachers because the data clearly supports its value. High emotional intelligence and observational skills, which lead to heightened student expertise, should no longer be a “secret sauce” or dismissed as “soft skills” when the data clearly show just how well they work.
Tenet 2: Relationship Development

Expert teachers not only know the immense value of TSRs, but they also know how to make them happen. This is a skill all teachers can learn. It begins with a relationship focus as the priority for each year or term. This relationship, however, is heightened and even accelerated by involvement with students outside the classroom. Finally, to really build that transcended level of relationships exemplary teachers are not afraid to love and build trust. These top teachers know the deeper and more genuine the relationship the more successful the learning.

P1: Policy Recommendations

Every five years in Minnesota, full-time professional teachers must renew their license with a minimum of 125 clock hours of documented professional development. However, those hours do not have any specific expectations for development in student expertise, improving their own emotional intelligence, or, for that matter, any of the other tenets from this study. The required areas are limited to positive behavior intervention, accommodations/modifications, mental illness, suicide prevention, reading preparation, English language learner, and cultural competency. Although these are all vitally important elements of teacher education, none of the six tenets identified by exemplary teachers are addressed in these professional development requirements. As such, even with the most robust and revised teacher preparation, those in the classroom could spend their entire career without any further study or required development in these key areas. That has to change.
**P2: Teacher Preparation**

As a university professor, I can attest that at the higher education level, the most common focus on day one of any class is usually the syllabus. In secondary schools there may be many ice breakers and getting-to-know-you activities, but these only provide an initial surface level introduction. Just as they are titled, it only breaks the ice. If teachers move on from these activities too quickly, those relationships may remain surface level long-term. In teacher preparation day one lesson planning centers largely around setting up routines and expectations. All of this work is valuable but will hardly penetrate the sometimes-tough exterior of an average high schooler.

Instead, I would recommend that teacher educators encourage doing the unexpected and even allow from some transparency on day one. This can involve a story about ones' personal struggles or even being courageous enough to say, “First days are hard! You are all staring at me and sizing me up and all I really want is to get past this awkward phase and really start to enjoy our time together.” Teacher preparation could emphasize the need to spend focused time, and more than one activity, during those initial weeks to keep building relationships and community.

Furthermore, exemplary teachers are not afraid to love and build trust. This verbiage, in particular the word “love,” is more complicated with older students. Teachers, young, new teachers in particular, need to be careful of anything that would even suggest the appearance of misconduct in a relationship between a teacher and student. However sexual misconduct is not a matter of love; it is a matter of repugnant morality and inexcusable debauchery. The tragic consequence of this kind of illegal and deplorable action on the part of a very small minority of teachers is that the love once dotted upon younger students is considered dangerous and ill-advised with secondary students.
However, secondary students, especially those at-risk, genuinely want to know that their teachers care about them. Mueller’s (2001) case study used the extensive data of the National Longitudinal Study of 1988 to analyze the needs for at-risk students related to relationships. The results clearly pinpointed student-teacher relationships as an “especially high” need for at-risk students. At-risk students described these teachers as “interested, expected them to succeed, listened to them, praised them, and cared [about them]” (p. 241). All of my study participants spoke to the importance of relationships and the words like, care, and love were all repeatedly included in their interviews. Therefore, this same language can and should be a part of the way relationships are discussed and emphasized in teacher preparation.

One of the best ways to prepare preservice teachers for this practice is to show them healthy models of this type of relationship and ways to practice it appropriately. National Teacher of the Year, Brown-Wessling, models and teaches students to give affirmations. One of these powerful moments with a student was highlighted in the data analysis chapter where she described in vivid detail sitting knee-to-knee with a student in front of the class and telling him, “Josh, I love how fierce, your brain is. I noticed that you always ask these questions that are not just about the things that happened, but they're always about ideas, and I really admire that about you.” This is the kind of love students crave and respond to.

**P3: Professional Development and Practices**

One of the ways to assure relationship development and trust highlighted by my study participants was involvement outside the classroom. This can be literal, as in the halls, and was also referred to as making “appearances” at extra-curricular events. These intentional but unscripted moments make individual students feel seen and valued beyond their performance in class.
Although hall duty may still exist at the secondary level, it is usually viewed more for safety and crowd control than relationship building. Videos can be found posted around the internet, highlighted on teacher websites, and featured on morning news programs of elementary teachers signing songs, doing special handshakes, and hugging students as they come into the room for the day (Edutopia, 2019; Good Morning America, 2017; Newsflare, 2020). However, in secondary school teachers who must be in the hallway are often relegated to the role of security guards instead of giving a welcome greeting.

High school math teacher, Beaver, has evidenced the value of positive hallway engagement and greeting students at the door. It may just be a brief check in, but it is focused on each individual student and “I have already made that connection before they even walk in the room.” Beaver wants to send the message from the first minute that, “‘I’m so glad you’re here. I really like you.’ Because who tells middle schoolers that they like them? Nobody does!” (2020). This study, however, would argue that some do—and that it really matters. Greeting students as they come in is a simple recommendation that can be implemented with very little effort or training. This may mean a few less minutes of prep time or a little more effort to bring up the energy on those long days, but the investment results in relationship capital.

Exemplary teachers take their relationships to a much deeper and intentional level. It begins on day one, moves in and out of the classroom, involves love and trust, and transcends what students expect from their teachers. To have a transcendent relationship with students, teachers must exceed their expectations and overcome their doubts. This is built over time and much like the characterization level of the affective domain (Krathwohl et al., 1964) it is a level often aimed for but very difficult to achieve. A key marker of this may be a heart-felt letter given
at the end of the year from a student who is struggling to say good-bye or a genuine hug from that student one may have thought they could not reach.

The most obvious recommendation to current classroom teachers is creating an honest assessment of how deep their relationships with students really go. “All teachers know that relationships are important, but you’re about a different level” (McHugh, 2020). An analogy for this could come from music. Some pieces are light, fun, and easy to listen to. Then there are others that transport, evoke strong emotions, and take on a special place in the heart and mind of the listener. Like music, exemplary teachers create transcendent relationships that evoke just as much power.

One way to access TSRs is obvious but rare—ask the students themselves. In teacher preparation, the strategy of giving students an exit card or final question to answer is common. However, that exit card is usually about what the students learned or what questions they still have. Based on my study, I would recommend that teachers continually self-asses their efficacy and relationships with students by giving exit cards or other opportunities for students to give feedback at least once a month. Those prompts should include questions like, “How can I be a better teacher for you?” and “What is something about you that I should know?” The first should allow students to answer to anonymously while the second is purposefully looking to get specific relationship building information from each student.

I would also recommend that teachers provide safe spaces for students to share thoughts, ideas, and struggles with them. As teachers, we may not be equipped with the acumen and required preparation to be their counselor, but teachers can transcend the typical surface level relationships and invest the time and effort to be the one the know cares and sees them.
Tenet 3: Teaching Valued Above Content

Exemplary teachers will put aside the content to teach the lesson. These teachers recognize teaching the whole student may require a change in the lesson plan. The content is a vehicle for learning, but the development of the individual is the true goal. The implications of this are significant for both current and preservice teachers. The focus on what one teaches must be secondary to whom one teaches.

**P1: Policy Recommendations**

While the necessary content and pedagogy should not be eliminated, so much of the standards of effective practice (standards for all preservice teachers) and content standards (standards for preservice teachers specific to their content specialty) fill up the time programs have during the semesters allotted. It becomes an almost impossible task to make space for this new focus. As stated previously, but worth repeating, state licensing agencies need to work with teacher preparation programs to sharpen the focus of standards on content and methodology much more efficiently so there is room to add the time and focus on the higher craft elements of teaching displayed by the most exemplary teachers.

This also means the education field needs to rethink the overemphasis on standardized testing and required district-wide curriculum. Teachers must have the freedom as experts in their craft and their students to make important choices in how they teach their students. The frantic pace most teachers feel to get everything done and all the content covered stifles moments to
really focus on the immediate needs of the students—both academic and emotional. There needs to be more equitable and varied pathways to assess student learning. This is a systemic change that cannot be made by the teacher alone.

This recommendation is predominately directed at administrators, assessment companies, school boards, and legislatures. It is a recommendation that has been repeated over and over again by teachers. However, despite the classroom experts clamoring for change, little has happened since before No Child Left Behind legislation. This recommendation is not saying get rid of all assessments. Rather, it is challenging the schools to create more authentic and manageable assessments for the sake of students and teachers.

P2: Teacher Preparation

Exemplary teachers know how to show rather than tell. This was evidenced in their storytelling prowess when they often answered questions with a memorable narrative. As evidenced back to the time of biblical parables, teachers know how to use the art of storytelling to engage the brain and emotions. There are specific storytelling skills that could be taught to all preservice teachers to improve their abilities. It would also be a very popular choice for professional development and academic conferences! For further support of this recommendation, I enthusiastically encourage current teachers and education students to watch a 2020 TED talk by Eber entitled, “How Your Brain Responds to Stories—and Why They’re Crucial for Leaders.” This is a highly persuasive and research supported talk on how the brain responds to storytelling and the phenomenon of neural coupling. Neural coupling is when the brain mirrors the reactions of the storyteller (Eber, 2020). The implications of this are teachers will ignite not only the cognitive but also the emotional centers of the brain and improve long-term memory when they tell stories.
Furthermore, programs need to train teachers to be secure enough in their content and their ability to catch back up that they feel the freedom to take this time. For new teachers this is also the confidence that comes with being able to put down the lesson plan and teach without having to repeatedly glance at their notes. If a teacher is overfocused on getting through the agenda on the board or on the lesson plan, they may often miss the cues students are sending them that they need to talk and that something bigger may need attention.

To prepare students for this, teacher preparation programs should include more classroom scenarios where the teachers have to adjust based upon new and unexpected variables. Similar to how doctors, nurses, military, and law enforcement have scenario training where the unexpected is put in and they must adjust in the moment, similar scenario training could take place in active learning teacher preparation programs. One of the ways this may work best is by having one-way mirrors in lab-style classrooms. Whether it is working with students as part of a lab school in partnership with the teacher preparation program, or using their peers as role players, teachers need to both practice and observe how unscripted needs arise and how they can respond to them. This kind of on-the-job training occurs once most teachers are hired and often when they have no one in the room to guide them. This may contribute to teacher attrition. When new teachers are placed in situations where they are not prepared and feel unequipped to handle students, they will make mistakes. If the class goes poorly and impacts students, these new teachers care enough that this haunts them and makes them question their efficacy. More of this on-the-job training needs to shift to at least active scenario training during teacher preparation. This gives new teachers a greater sense of confidence and classroom tested techniques they can pull from.
P3: Professional Development and Practices

As a university field supervisor, in classroom observations I consistently see both new and veteran teachers begin their lessons with immediate academic content. Students are told to take out their homework, open their books, or do bell work on skills. However, that largely ignores the human condition. Instead, teachers need to look at it through the lens of the student and consider:

- Where did they just come from and what are they probably thinking about?
- What do they care about?
- How do I get them interested and thinking about what we are going to talk about today?
- How does this connect to their world right now?

The exemplary teacher is quite easy to spot in this situation. They begin class by connecting to the students, hooking them in with a topic, discussion, video, even a meme they know will pique their interest. Then they expertly channel student interest to segue into the content. A student-centered beginning is an essential step the exemplary teacher ignores because they see the difference when they engage the student audience before jumping into the content.

A second recommendation would be a much more intentional and social-emotional closure to each class. In my observations of teachers at all stages, the piece that often gets the least amount of time and preparation is the closure of a lesson. What should be the grand finale of the class is too often a race to get in last minute instructions or homework details. Instead, new teachers should be instructed, and current teachers thoughtfully exercise, carefully crafted closure that answers the “so what” of the day. Teachers should consider, “So what do I want my students thinking, feeling, remembering as they leave today?” The primacy/recency effect in
cognitive psychology (Jahnke, 1965) posits that our brains remember best what is presented first (primacy) the tendency to remember the most recently presented information best (recency). Teachers need to consider very carefully and thoughtfully what they present first and last in any lesson.

In terms of building relationship and trust, one of the ways student gain respect for what they learn in the class is by thoughtfully considering what the content means to them and what is in it for them. An exemplary teacher can give this “so what” thinking and plan in a way that reminds them not only of the importance of what they covered that day, but also the relevancy it has to them and to the human condition. The challenge is to not let the clock run out and skip the closure step. When teaching is valued above content, an exemplary teacher knows if they end in haste, it is just a waste. As corny as that may sound, the sentiment is substantiated. Ask a student about class that day and if the closure was done well, they can recall the “so what.” What they share shows how they internalized the values of the teacher and their efforts to connect on a very human level.

**Tenet 4: Engagement and Energy**

The classroom of an exemplary teacher has a buzz and an energy to it. Students naturally respond to the energy and attitude of their teacher. Exemplary teachers know how to use this naturally empathetic response to improve the classroom environment and increase engagement. These teachers recognize they have to bring it every day and they have the ability to turn in on
from the moment they step into a room. Their classroom reflects their own passion and excitement for teaching and learning.

**P1: Policy Recommendations**

Administrators are the leaders of school culture. What they promote, model, and reward fuels the entire building and creates a sense of purpose. If that focus is on standards, test scores, and metrics, the fire and passion of the teachers lacks the fuel to make those results happen. Just as students need their “why” to learn and engage, teachers need fuel to keep their “why” for teaching alive and on fire. This is not going to come from legislative action or standards revision. It comes from the leaders of the school culture. As such, my recommendations in engagement and energy are focused on what administrators and school leaders can do to stoke the fire of their teachers.

The issue with words like “magic” and “vibe” is there is a misconception that they cannot be captured and taught. As Edmin (2013) affirmed in his TED talk, not only can it be taught, but the best way to do so is to get people into the spaces where it is happening so they can see it first-hand. It needs to be seen and watched. My own excitement and dedication for teaching exploded as I interviewed the exemplary teachers in this study. Teachers can inspire other teachers but there is rarely the opportunity to visit each other’s classrooms and too much pressure is placed on once or twice a year performance observations.

Administrators can encourage, or even better provide time, for teachers to visit and shadow other teachers they admire. This may be in their building or in another school. Administrators could really promote this by offering substitute coverage for these hours and some sort of recognition for those teachers who will often have observers as a result. Administrators know best the rock star teachers in their building, but rarely do other teachers get
to see those colleagues in action with students. When weaknesses are identified in performance evaluations, one of the key supports would be to offer that teacher a real-class example of a teacher who excels in that area and provide the time for that teacher to observe and reflect. This will also promote a culture of teamwork and a high mentorship model.

The rub in these recommendations are the teachers who refuse to change or become cynical of the teachers who may get positive reinforcement from this practice. This again puts the weight on the administration and department leaders to not only promote this practice as continual learning and growth, but also use this moment to coach those who have stopped trying to either find their fuel or move on. One way to test if this passion can be refueled is by sending key school administrators and teachers to schools where the culture of fun and active learning is on display.

One of the schools doing observation at a whole new level is the Ron Clark Academy (RCA) in Atlanta Georgia. Here, they have conducted training with more than 80,000 educators by welcoming them right into the classroom and putting top teaching on display (Ron Clark Academy, 2021). The students and teacher remain in the center of the room and they are very used to visitors. In each classroom there is seating all around the walls because teachers are invited to watch daily classes in action as part of the professional development offerings. This is very unique because usually professional development takes place with just the teachers, but similar to the lab atmosphere I suggested for teacher preparation programs, here the teachers watch the classroom and see for themselves what “magic” can look like (see Figure 11).

**Figure 11**
*Classroom Observations at the Ron Clark Academy*
To epitomize the culture of fun and learning, educators are given the opportunity to ride “big blue” a large tube slide in the center of the school at the end of the experience. There is music, students, cheering, and lots and lots of energy. This is something I have tried to describe over and over to my colleagues, and I realized it must be seen and experienced to really feel that “magic.” As such, I have since gone back with my university president and a faculty member from each of the campus colleges. They were blown away. So much so, that there is now an initiative in the works to send every new faculty member to the Ron Clark Academy. This is significant because this is a middle school, and they are university leaders! Yet the power of exemplary teaching is on display at RCA in full force and it translates to teachers of all ages.

As proof of my own dedication to promoting teacher energy and passion, I am hiring a new education professor to my department this fall and the first conference I am sending her/him to is the RCA Experience at the Ron Clark Academy. It is an investment that has possibly the
most significant impact I can recommend out of any of the recommendations from this study. Attend the “RCA Experience” at Ron Clark Academy and get ready to set the traditional picture of teaching on fire. This school exemplifies what this study proves to be true—exemplary teachers are magical teachers—and it can be learned.

**P2: Teacher Preparation**

One of my favorite comments from students on exit cards is “I was always excited for class because I never knew what we were going to do that day.” Although some routine can provide comfort, how the learning happens and what a teacher does to present that content can and needs to be varied to improve engagement. If a teacher plays the same game every day even that game will lose its interest. By addressing various learning styles and engaging different kinds of presentations, teachers keep learners plugged in and on their toes.

One of the ways this variety can be taught is to provide, model, and practice a wide variety of strategies in teaching methods courses. Some of the strategies suggested by these exemplary teachers included learning stations, movement to pantomime content, varied response strategies, turn-talk-report, debates, walking presentations, gamification, room transformations, flexible seating, costumes, use of music, and a wide variety of discussion techniques. The constant here is exemplary teachers are always looking for fresh ideas and new things to try in their classrooms.

This can also be supported by very intentional selection and placement for preservice teachers’ field experiences. Although something can be learned from any experience in the field, teacher education program needs to double down on finding and recruiting the best teachers to use as powerful examples with new teachers. It is like having a mediocre tour guide versus the one who knows a ton and is so excited to share. The later tour group is engrossed and hanging on
their every word. They leave educated, inspired, and grateful. That is what a field experience can be if the best of the best teachers are selected and matched with preservice teachers at key moments in their preparation.

This is a recommendation with a critical tie back to school administration. Teacher preparation programs are often very limited to what teachers they can use based on those administrators will allow. Likewise, in some school cultures hosting a preservice teacher is portrayed as one more thing on a very full teacher’s plate. However, the future of the profession and the quality of teachers entering the field is dependent upon these partnerships. I highly recommend administrators find ways to promote, recognize, and reward teachers who host preservice teachers to encourage this essential investment in teacher preparation.

**P3: Professional Development and Practice**

One of my mentors, Jerilyn Bach, once said, “If the students aren’t learning then you aren’t really teaching.” What this implies is that just because one gets up in a classroom and presents, it does not mean they are teaching. Teaching requires engagement and active learning. In the exemplary teacher’s classroom that engagement comes naturally because the students are responding to the energy and passion of the teacher and they feel their place in that class is valued.

One of the ways teachers can inspire engagement is through choice. As secondary students exert their independence one of their greatest desires is to have their own choices. School is not a choice. It is a requirement. Even if they enjoy it, they also know that they have to be there. Teachers can provide more intrinsic motivation by offering students choices in their classroom. Some recommendations for this include choice boards or menus for assignments. As
long as the objective is met, why must the product be the same? Instead, teachers can at times give students the choice to show their learning in their own way.

Another way to increase engagement and energy in the classroom that the exemplary teachers in this study shared is to provide an audience other than just the teacher. Teachers should look at their key assessments and brainstorm an authentic audience outside of their classroom. This can also be practiced in teacher preparation when assessments are created in methods classes.

If students know their work is going to be displayed or presented, even in the halls of the school, they may engage more effort. This engagement may skyrocket if they will be presenting to a real-world company, a local school board, or sharing their work with the community. Exemplary teachers do this when they take science units outside and solve real-world problems, use math to provide key data to address a local issue, or apply civics lesson by having students present at the city council. When a choir sings at a local care facility or students write letters to soldiers, the engagement skyrockets because they now see a very real audience and purpose to their work. I would recommend at least once a unit or term teachers provide their students with an authentic audience outside their classroom to inspire their work.

Furthermore, my study confirmed that if something is enjoyable, it is not difficult to get participants to enjoy the fun. It is important to note that fun is not limited to play. It can also be very fun to hear stories, listen to performances, engage in a deep discussion, or brainstorm solutions to problems. The constant factor is that it is enjoyable and meaningful. To improve this in classrooms, one of the most important questions teachers need to ask themselves is would I want to be a student in this classroom today? Also, answer honestly, Would I be excited about what we are doing right now? If the answer is “no” then the lesson needs to change.
One of the most powerful solutions involves engaging students in that problem solving. An easy way to add interest is to ask them what they do for fun and see if there are ways that amusement or activity can be used in the lesson. Likewise, if their behavior makes movement and independent learning chaotic and disruptive, talk to them about it. If a teacher is really excited about a lesson and it fails in reality, talk to them about it. If a lesson is coming up that even the teacher dreads in honest reflection, ask them how it might be changed. Students, at this age, know they need to learn and that there are certain skills and content they need to cover. However, what they are rarely asked is to be a part of the process of planning how that happens. Although some of their ideas might not be plausible, just giving them a voice is “fun” and validating to the relationship.

Most importantly, this study showed that when teachers invest energy into their students, they see that energy come back. It comes back in student engagement, in their work, their attitude, and the energy they then even pour into their teacher. As Bulman (2017 MN TOY) said, teaching is a very “human endeavor” and just as much as students gain from an exemplary teacher, exemplary teachers are daily fueled by their students. They invest in them because if they do not see the results, they drain their own capacity to keep up the very hard work of teaching. As the next tenet shows, how exemplary teachers know their success and love for what they do is a synergistic relationship with the students. The interaction between the two produces an effect that is much greater than the effect produced if teachers focused on their fulfillment alone.
Tenet 5: Teacher Humility and Transparency

Although there is some doubt to its origin, the wisdom paradox posits that the more one knows, the more they realize how little they know. As lifelong learners and dedicated professionals, exemplary teachers in many ways echoed this belief. Exemplary teachers realized that because the students and the world is always changing, learning never stops, and teaching is ever striving to adapt. It is this strive for excellence that brings with it mistakes, risk, and vulnerability. Expert teachers model the process of learning which means they are open about their mistakes but also always working to become better. The expert teachers in this study have been granted one of the highest awards in the field and yet they are quick to push the spotlight back on the students. They may be humble and transparent, but they are far from average or apathetic. Exemplary teachers consistently rise above to meet the needs of their students and then step back to let the students shine.

P1: Policy Recommendations

The recommendation I have to improve education is this area may not be popular and some will argue it is impossible. However, I maintain that one of the greatest roadblocks to continual teacher improvement is tenure. Although teachers deserve again and again, and then again to be rewarded for their hard work and dedication, tenure also makes it nearly impossible for those teachers who consistently do not improve to have their classroom responsibilities removed. This is not fair to the teacher and it is devastating to the students.
Most, if not all, teachers can name at least one colleague in their school who is “holding on for retirement” or “waiting for their benefits to kick in.” These teachers are often resistant to change, recycle the same dated lessons year-after-year regardless of their effectiveness, and are not tricking any student into thinking that they want to be there. Similarly, if a new teacher is really struggling and is clearly not coachable, the answer is not to give them tenure and hope they will improve. Tenure gives poor teachers guaranteed time with students year-after-year with little or no consequence to them, but the consequences to the students can be life changing.

When teachers lose their passion and energy for teaching, they have a moral and ethical obligation to leave the classroom. Instead of pouring thousands of dollars into the veteran salaries of teachers no longer committed to exemplary teaching, that money needs to be redirected to mentoring and supporting the 40 to 50% of new teachers who leave the profession within five years (Ingersoll & Phi Delta Kappan, 2012). Many of these teachers came to work with the passion and desire to make a difference but struggled with the weight and pressure of on-the-job training and unrealistic teaching loads.

I also recommend administrators and department chairs re-evaluate how class schedules are distributed. Many new teachers are given remedial classes with known difficult classroom management, little to no special needs support, and a cart to take their materials from room to room every hour. More veteran exemplary teachers need to step up to take on those challenging classes and allow new teachers to have a lighter and more manageable load. First-year teachers prep every day for a brand-new lesson and are often still learning the content themselves. Administrators can support manageable schedules for new teachers, provide them with a consistent classroom space, and implement effective mentorship programming and uniquely focused professional development.
The exemplary teachers in this study would be hired again and again and are highly sought after because of their skills. They are not dependent on tenure for job security, and they want colleagues to share their passion rather than dismiss their results. This is a call for a systematic change that is long overdue. Students deserve educational policies that keep the most effective and talented teachers as their guides and protects them from those who consistently fail to make a difference.

**P2: Teacher Preparation**

Expert teachers consistently improve because they always see feedback and then apply the feedback because they deeply care about their students’ success and emotional well-being. One recommendation to encourage teacher humility, but also reflective practice, is to make sure feedback given is not just read, but more importantly reflected upon and then assessed again in practice. Although this is good practice for all teachers, it is especially critical in teacher preparation where habits and skills are first developed.

Preservice teachers are very busy, so it is reasonable to assume that what is not required is often not attempted. Therefore, focused feedback that must be applied and resubmitted for re-evaluation. This is a practice often given lip-service, but it may lack consistency across all faculty and programming.

Another recommendation for teacher preparation is more active modeling versus lectured presentations. In a recent educational psychology class with my university students, I had them debate me on the controversial topic of their choosing. I purposefully let them come up with arguments, present them, and then I tore them apart. I was confident, delivered passionately, and was purposefully intimidating. After their initial shock at the intensity of my refute, I then had them turn and talk to each other about what I had really said. “Was it all logical? How could they
just as powerfully respond? I had them consider that I sounded convincing but was the content of my responses really valid?” When the emotion and intensity of my performance was removed what they realized that I had actually made a lot of illogical connections and much of what I had said could be easily disputed.

I used this moment to show them the power of body language, tone, and delivery. I could have given a lecture on the importance of confidence and delivery, but I knew the lesson was much more likely to stick if I showed them. Then I changed the tone and I shared with them that I have a slight speech impediment and that I am often scared it will distract my audience and make them judge me harshly. I also deal with nerves and the “imposter syndrome” (Clance & Imes, 1978) thinking maybe I am not good enough to be a professor of education. After all, students look to me as a role model and what if I mess up? I shared that I have to continually remind myself that it is okay to make mistakes as long as I learn from mistakes and make changes.

There needs to be a balance between a teacher’s confidence in what they know and do and their transparency in what they fear and feel. It was what I have heard exemplary teachers call the “art of the debrief” after a really charged classroom lesson. Exemplary teachers recognize and use this power of transparency and vulnerability to create moments that stick with students for a lifetime.

**P3: Professional Development and Practices**

To become a teacher of humility and transparency, one must keep striving for improvement and trying new things. One of the best ways to inspire this is by studying good teachers and communicators. The fastest way to callous indifference is to stop getting inspired. That is why I recommend secondary schools provide more time and opportunities for teachers to
observe other teachers they admire and respect and to travel to see teachers and communicators they aspire to emulate. They need to bring in the best teachers and communicators they can afford for professional development and focus that invested money and time on stoking the fire of their teachers’ abilities and passion.

When I first began my teaching career I was in a high school where I immediately stood out because of my creativity, non-traditional lessons, and high energy. Two years in, I was given the opportunity to move to a top school district and decided to make the leap. I quickly found out that I was no longer the star teacher. I was in a building full of stars. My principal told me she considered her most important job was to get the most talented teachers in the classrooms of her school. She delivered. I was in awe. Being a part of that staff pushed me. It inspired me when I saw new approaches and even grew a bit jealous of the teachers students adored. I grew more over the next five years than I ever would have if I had stayed comfortable. I also learned that the more I focused on the students and less on myself, the more I loved my job and loved my students. Teachers remain humble not only because they know they are always a work in progress but also because they know the real stars are the students and the future they hold.

“Good teachers, leaders, and speakers don’t see themselves as experts with passive audiences they need to impress. Instead, they see themselves as guides and focus on helping others learn” (Maxwell, 2010, p. 26). This is also why I made the transition to teacher education. I firmly believe that if one has exemplary skills and talents that one of the most important ways they can multiply that impact is by teaching those skills and talents to others. After my study with some of the most gifted teachers I have ever met, I am convinced that one of the most rewarding things an exemplary teacher does is spread knowledge about what really works with kids. They are some of the most powerful motivational speakers and they spread inspiration and
encouragement for their fellow teachers like glitter. Once it is tossed about it sticks to everything and the sparkle is a constant reminder that it is worth all the work.

Tenet 6: Teacher Movement

Exemplary teachers are multitasking ninjas, and they use the whole body to really engage every student. Teaching is an active sport and exemplary teachers use movement to communicate and facilitate learning in every inch of the room. I noted that at the higher the education level, more educators seem to stay up front. Elementary teachers know they have to move to keep all the students focused but this should not end just because students no longer bounce in their seats, well at least not often. Movement is an activator and whether it is taking a seat right in the center of the action or carrouseling around the room like a conductor, the exemplar teacher moves with purpose.

It should be noted before jumping into recommendations that this tenet will also be the one of the focuses for my key areas for more research because my study was unable to include classroom observations because of the COVID-19 pandemic. My findings and recommendations, therefore, are based on interview descriptions, provided sample pictures and videos from TOYs, my own classroom observations as a university field supervisor, my own observations of movement impact in my 20+ years of teaching, and the exemplary teachers I have had the honor to observe over the years in classroom and at schools like the Ron Clark Academy.
**Policy Recommendations**

Every five years in Minnesota, full-time professional teachers must renew their license with a minimum of 125 clock hours of documented professional development. However, those hours do not have any specific expectations for development in student expertise, improving their own emotional intelligence, or, for that matter, any of the other tenets from this study. None of the six tenets identified by exemplary teachers are addressed in these professional development requirements. As such, even with the most robust and revised teacher preparation, those in the classroom could spend their entire career without any further study or required development in these key areas. That has to change. Without a clear expectation that the impact of affective behavior and performance techniques must be continually fostered and developed there is no consistency or accountability that it will happen.

Likewise, school funding for classroom technology and even room layout needs to change in a post COVID-19 world. The global pandemic has forced schools to provide both online and seated instruction and many of these shifts may continue as demand for more alternative educational options and accommodations increase. As such, teachers cannot be stuck at a computer station or limited to a small camera frame. The death to positive classroom movement may be the lack of technological funding to create classrooms that can thrive across platforms. Furthermore, the small space in classrooms has become even smaller due to the needs for social distancing. This has exacerbated already limited layout most classrooms give for not only teacher but also student movement.

As school design adapts and improves post-pandemic, schools need to move away from the panoptic structure of control to more open spaces, cozy nooks, colorful layouts, break out movement areas, and more flexible seating. If most adults had to sit in a small, plastic desk for
several hours a day, this change would have already occurred. This again highlights that exemplary educators consider learning from the perspective of the students and adapt to create environments that will inspire rather than contain.

**P2: Teacher Preparation**

Movement is an element of educator performance that is minimally practiced in teacher preparation before student teaching. There are several presentations and practice lessons, but those are often done with peers and in a university rather than secondary classroom setting. Assessment is largely based on content and instructional strategies. I recommend that preservice teachers observe, practice, and critique movement throughout their program. This can be done by charting teacher movements in classes or teacher videos they observe. This should include reflective discussion on why the movements happened or did not happen and what they might do in their own teaching.

Movement includes the use of gestures, facial expressions, and physical movement around the room. One might think this is innate, but my experience in observing preservice and new teachers is that often they get “stuck” up front by their materials and equipment because they do not have the confidence in their content enough to move away and because they are still somewhat intimidated by their students. Once relationships are developed and their content confidence improves, movement usually also increases. The message in this is clear, exemplary teachers move in part because they have mastered their content, but also because they want to be a part of the room and interact with their students rather than remain distant from them.

Too often, a walk down a high school hallway will reveal teachers seated at desks, on stools, or firmly rooted at a podium. This does not mean teachers have to jump on desks or dance around the room. It is movement with intention and the intention is to connect and engage. This
is why computer clickers and wireless technology exists so they can no longer be tied to the equipment. If a new teacher gets too comfortable at a podium, put a post-it-note on their notes or computer that simply says, “MOVE!” and if low energy is a cause for taking a seat, keep in mind that energy is very contagious. Just as students will respond to their teachers’ energy levels, teachers can also benefit from the energy given off by their students when they are engaged and participating actively in the lesson. One of the best energizers for teachers is when the room is abuzz with participation and genuine engagement. That is the environment where exemplary teachers thrive and refuel their passion for what they do.

Preservice teachers need to study the movement of highly effective teachers on video or in person. In elementary classrooms, teachers often have to kneel and bend to get to their students’ level. Just because the students are taller does not mean there is not real value in continuing this practice at the secondary level. When a teacher kneels down by a student’s desk to talk, it not only changes the power stature they may be nonverbally communicating but it also shows an effort by that teacher to connect with them like they are the only one in the room at that moment. Surprise students by jumping into an empty desk to chat or hop up on the side counter to ask them questions. The brain and body respond to variety and proximity and changing the levels of stature is a simple way to mix things up with purpose.

Teaching takes place not only when instruction is being given but in the little moments when a teacher checks in with a student or nods along while they listen in to a really powerful comment in a small group discussion. Teaching happens with the whole room and whole body and if the students can see the teacher, it does not matter if they are talking or not, they are teaching in everything they do, or do not, do. If movement is emphasized from the first day of
preparation and practiced until the end of student teaching, it will more likely become an engrained practice as they take on their first teaching positions.

**P3: Professional Development and Practices**

Based upon my findings, I recommend that teachers foster movement through classroom collaboration. For example, teachers can mix up student groups, whom they sit by, and the classmates they often partner with in discussion. When first learning names, seating charts are essential, but after that point, rotating seat assignments or mixing up groups is key to eliminating pockets of disengagement or the emergence of social cliques in the classroom. Number students off for different activities starting in different parts of the room each time. Have partner boards where they have to meet with a different partner based upon the square the teacher chooses. Use a group randomizer application like Team Shake, Class Dojo, or Team Maker Lite. These are all free applications that allow teachers to quickly create random groups or order groups by number of team members or number of total groups. Students appreciate that the teacher is not trying to split certain people up or allow certain people to be with friends. It is computer generated and with the environment of collaboration and cooperation established, students will learn not only the value of working with a variety of different people, but also develop some of the social emotional skills needed for healthy development. This combines movement and collaboration where both teachers and students are interacting and learning from and about each other.

Another key finding from the interviews of exemplary teachers is that they understand and employ the power of proximity to improve relationship connections. Proximity is often discussed in terms of classroom management, but it has a much more positive connotation when linked with relationships. There needs to be opportunities for teachers to interact and engage
with students individually and within their proximity each class. This may not only improve their engagement, but also improve the relationship between students and build classroom community.

Many secondary classrooms have 30+ students and limited space to move around. The most basic recommendation to address this is to carefully consider classroom desk placement. Teachers need to assure that they can get to every desk or table even with 30+ bodies, long legs, and bags strewn about. Although rows may facilitate this most simply it also puts all the emphasis on the front of the room and discourages interaction amongst students. This is where flexible seating and creative classroom layout come into play. I encourage new teachers to explore layouts in other teacher’s classrooms and much like a new seating arrangement can freshen up the feel of a living space, consider moving things around each term to freshen up the feel of the learning and teaching space as well.

On a much more emotional level, proximity is a necessary and powerful element of the human condition. More than ever in this generation, this has become very apparent and painfully real as social distancing became the primary defense against the COVID-19 pandemic. The very act of meeting face-to-face, making natural eye contact, and sitting in physical proximity to each other nourishes our emotional well-being. One need only to refer to studies of infant mortality research that shows babies deprived of physical touch to see the overwhelming evidence that human crave and need proximity to other individuals.

Teachers are just now starting to realize the mental health epidemic that has been precipitated by lack of engagement and interaction. Interaction within in physical proximity has an energy and validity to it that cannot be produced through a screen. For students from dysfunctional homes where comforting touch and a supportive atmosphere is missing, the classroom can be one of their only conduits of positive proximity. Similar to the earlier
discussion on loving students, educators need to find a safe and healthy way to use proximity in the classroom.

There is power in a supportive pat on the back, high-five, or much-needed hug. Exemplary teachers not only know this, but they also crave it themselves. One element of education this pandemic has uncovered is that although students can be taught online, they more often thrive with in-person connection, movement, and proximity (Kamenetz, 2020). For most students, and absolutely the exemplary teachers interviewed, the human condition of teaching and learning cannot be replaced by a screen. Engagement thrives in close proximity with genuine emotion where all the verbal and non-verbal information on full display.

**Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research**

The most obvious limitation to my study is also the most exciting area for further research. The COVID-19 pandemic eliminated the use of classroom observation from this study. Even if I had been able to get into some classrooms by video, the use of face masks and shields by students and teachers, the inability to move, and the social distancing requirements would have severely impacted the movement and data available. As such, I am excited and even more inspired to return to many of these exemplary teachers in the future to observe and document their teaching “live.” The addition of photographic documentation will be a powerful area for additional study and research. Particularly in the arena of movement and non-verbal communication, observational data will be a very persuasive tool for implementing some of the recommendations already given in my study.

This study was also limited to secondary teachers and the upper Midwest. Although I do not believe geographical location within the US would have any significant impact on the findings for publicly funded education, I do think research amongst different cultures and in
different educational environments (alternative education, boarding schools, military schools, single gender, etc.) could be very informative for comparison and contrast. I would also encourage mixed-methods studies to support the qualitative results with more numerical and statistically significant data.

A compelling area for further research would be consideration of the same or similar elements of affective behavior and performance techniques by exemplary professors in higher education. In my work with preservice teachers, they are often surprised to learn that most professors, not including those in schools of education, have little or very limited training in educational pedagogy. They are clearly highly educated in their field of study but may have very little knowledge of best practices in teaching. This may be the reason why lecture is still the dominant method of delivery at this level. While K-12 educators are required to complete focused and standardized training and assessment in effective teaching methods and practices, the expertise in the content is of upmost concern in most university hiring practices. Students coming into universities, however, have come from schools where learning and participation may look very different than it did for their professors. More research is needed in how some of the most effective and engaging practices of educators in the secondary classrooms might also be adapted and applied in higher education.

**Concluding Thoughts**

After so many months of research and writing it feels bittersweet and momentous to be writing the final paragraphs of this dissertation. There is still so much more do and now that the findings are compiled, I realize more than ever that it cannot stop here. These exemplary teachers shared their hearts and minds, and the “secret sauce” is no longer secret—it is confirmed and defined. Just as the Teachers of the Year have freely shared their wisdom, now that wisdom must
be fully welcomed in the education community and disseminated to the educators who will put it to use. That is, after all, what exemplary teachers do; they share their gifts, and they inspire others to push harder and become their very best.

To the teachers who participated in this study, you are my heroes. You touch lives in such powerful and meaningful ways every year and you never stop getting better. Most people are blessed to touch certain lives within their reach—you have impacted thousands and you will impact thousands more. What you do unequivocally makes a real difference. I began this study to demystify what makes great teachers so memorable and engaging. You have shown me that Shakespeare only had it partially right when he said, “Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them” (Twelfth Night). This quote implies these are three different groups of people. However, I see all three in you. You all have a deeply rooted desire to love and inspire people. You all have worked continuously to become the remarkable teachers your students never forget. And finally, you all have had this honor and greatness thrust upon you by the recognition and respect you so humbly eschew. What you have shared here is just another part of your legacy. I promise to pay forward your wisdom and together we will spread far and wide the “secret sauce.”

This study was guided by the research question: How do the final round candidates for the honor of “Teacher of the Year” in the Midwest region describe and exhibit the use of affective behaviors and performance skills to engage students in learning? This study concluded with powerful answers and insights to the research question. The six tenets of exemplary teachers: student expertise, relationship development, teaching valued above content, engagement and energy, teacher humility and transparency, and teacher movement now need to be put to use to create a fresh revival of teacher passion and influence.
I am a teacher. I am committed to this work and to the students I know it will impact. I am dedicated to continuing to strive every day to get better, be better, and do better. I am convinced that myself and others in education can inspire teachers to like what they teach, but more importantly really love whom they teach. I am humbled by the responsibility but inspired by the results. I am, and this is, a work in progress. Docendo discimus.
REFERENCES


https://doi.org/10.1080/09243450512331383262


https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.00406


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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Literature Review Studies Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Author &amp; Date of Study</th>
<th>Abbreviated Title of Study</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Roorda, Koomen, Split, &amp; Oort (2011)</td>
<td>Influence of Affective TSRs on Students</td>
<td>What are the links b/t affective qualities of TSRs &amp; student engagement/achievement?</td>
<td>Meta-analytic approach of 99 studies from PreK-high school</td>
<td>129, 423 students and 2,825 teachers</td>
<td>ALL analysis showed strong correlation b/t TSRs and student engagement. More in secondary, less w/achievement</td>
<td>Affective, warmth, empathy, TSRs, secondary, engagement</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Allan, Witt, &amp; Wheeles (2006)</td>
<td>The Role of Teacher Immediacy in Motivation</td>
<td>Can application of teacher immediacy reduce perceived distance b/t teacher and student=better learning?</td>
<td>Meta-analysis to test a causal model</td>
<td>8 studies averaged for correlation between cognitive and affective learning.</td>
<td>Causal model test showed an indirect impact of teacher immediacy on cognitive learning. Key: higher teacher immediacy=higer levels of affective= increased cognitive learning</td>
<td>Affective, teacher immediacy, motivation, cognitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Krathwohl, Bloom, &amp; Masia</td>
<td>Taxonomy: Affective Domain</td>
<td>Foundational work on the taxonomy of the affective domain</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Affective, development, education</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Oconner &amp; Pope</td>
<td>Not Just Robo Students</td>
<td>4Qs about-How often are students fully engaged in school</td>
<td>Online student survey</td>
<td>6294 students</td>
<td>“The more of their teachers that the students believe care about them, the more affective, behavior, and cognitive engagement they report” (p. 1436)</td>
<td>Affective, cognitive, secondary, affective engagement, teacher support of students</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Hargreaves</td>
<td>Mixed Emotions: Teacher’s Percep. of interaction w/ students</td>
<td>What is the importance of emotions in T/S interactions</td>
<td>Interviews and discussion group sessions</td>
<td>53 elem &amp; sec teachers from 15 schools</td>
<td>Secondary teachers’ classrooms lack emotional intensity, new focus needed on affective standards</td>
<td>Affective, emotional intelligence, emotional labor, secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Thorton</td>
<td>The It Factor: What makes a teacher great?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Book recommended by Dr.</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>7 Identified dispositions: Assessment</td>
<td>Teacher efficacy, dispositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>What role does trust plan for faculty in schools?</td>
<td>Method</td>
<td>What role is trust plan for faculty in schools?</td>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>Themes</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Hoy &amp; Tchannen-Moran</td>
<td>Five Faces of Trust</td>
<td>Empirical Confirmation Study</td>
<td>Developed the 5 faces of trust=benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness</td>
<td>Trust, urban elementary, teacher efficacy</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Klem &amp; Connell</td>
<td>Relationships Matter</td>
<td>Survey and student records data</td>
<td>MS students with high levels of teacher support were almost 3xs more likely to have high levels of engagement.</td>
<td>Engagement, middle school, relationship, teacher support</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Hallinan</td>
<td>Teacher Influences on Students’ Attachment to School</td>
<td>Survey of 6th, 8th, and 10th graders in Chicago</td>
<td>2 ways teachers affect student’s feeling about school=teacher’s support of students socially and emotionally, and teacher expectations with the former having much more significant impact.</td>
<td>Teacher impact, engagement, social/emotional, achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Kelly &amp; Zhang</td>
<td>Teacher Support and Engagement (HS)</td>
<td>Survey &amp; longitudinal study (HSLS)</td>
<td>“A wide array of students from across the academic course-taking spectrum have developed a positive relation with a particular teacher and report being engaged in those particular classrooms” (p.158)</td>
<td>TSRs, secondary, engagement, achievement</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, &amp; Salovey</td>
<td>Classroom Emotional Climate</td>
<td>Multimethod observational &amp;</td>
<td>CEC is pivotal to engagement which leads to Classroom emotional climate</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Emotional climate (CEC) and achievement including engagement?</td>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td>Students in 5th &amp; 6th grades NE US</td>
<td>Achievement. High teacher sensitivity and responsiveness increases engagement.</td>
<td>(CEC), middle school, engagement, achievement</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Mundy &amp; Consoli</td>
<td>Here BeDragons: Choose Your Adventure Lectures</td>
<td>Participation in 6 CYOA lectures and then interviewed/ coded</td>
<td>10 undergraduates</td>
<td>Students are more engaged when they experience ownership of content</td>
<td>Engagement, innovation, social constructivism, teaching</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Shoffner</td>
<td>The Place of the Personal: Exploring the Affective Domain in teacher prep</td>
<td>What are the affective concerns preservice teacher express in reflection?</td>
<td>2 qualitative case studies using online discussion boards</td>
<td>Case study 1=18 preservice teachers; case 2=9 preservice teachers</td>
<td>Embrace the affective domain in teacher preparation which leads do better emotional teacher support</td>
<td>Affective domain, teacher education, reflection, emotion</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Bergmark &amp; Kostenius</td>
<td>Student Visual Narratives and positive learning exp.</td>
<td>How can students’ positive learning experiences be explored through visual narratives?</td>
<td>Phenomenological study using observations, picture analysis, and documentation</td>
<td>2 classes in Sweden (1 6th and 1 7th grade)</td>
<td>Finding connected to my research= “Good teachers were portrayed as happy, funny, supportive, positive, and encouraging, which had positive effects on the ability of students to do a satisfactory job” (p. 8)</td>
<td>Student voice, visual research, student engagement, teacher support</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Mueller</td>
<td>The role of caring in TSR for at risk students</td>
<td>What are the conditions and academic consequences of students’ investment in the relationship with teachers and school?</td>
<td>Quantitative analysis of National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) 88-92</td>
<td>24, 599 public school students surveyed in 8th, 10th, and 12th grade</td>
<td>Students who perceive that teachers care expend more effort at school and at-risk students show a substantial link b/t achievement and TSRs</td>
<td>Teacher-student relationship (TSR), caring, at risk, caring, engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Cooper (*top art.)</td>
<td>Eliciting Engagement in the HS Classroom</td>
<td>What is the impact of connective instruction, academic rigor, and lively teaching in</td>
<td>Mixed-methods Case Study (survey, interviews, observations)</td>
<td>1, 132 grades 9-12 in HS in TX</td>
<td>F1)Connective instruction has the biggest impact on engagement F2) Rigor and lively teaching’s impact is only a fraction compared</td>
<td>Engagement, high school, instruction, student connections</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Findings</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Patrick, Ryan, &amp; Kaplan</td>
<td>Early Adol. Perception of the Classroom Environment, Motivation, and Engagement</td>
<td>How do students perceive the various aspects of classroom social environment as it relates to engagement?</td>
<td>Survey (Likert-scale)</td>
<td>“Students’ perceptions of their environment are a critical link in understanding how the environment influences motivation and engagement” (87)</td>
<td>Middle school, engagement, emotion, teacher support, motivation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Furrer, Skinner, &amp; Pitzer</td>
<td>The Influence of Teacher &amp; Peer Relationships on Classroom Engagement</td>
<td>How can relationships in the classroom be improved</td>
<td>Expert analysis</td>
<td>3 pathways to relationships that work: 1) relatedness through warmth, 2) competence through structure, and 3) autonomy through support</td>
<td>TSRs, warmth, engagement, motivation, warmth</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Shernoff, Tonks, &amp; Anderson</td>
<td>Impact of Learning Environment on Student Engagement in HS Classrooms</td>
<td>What is the influence of research-based dimensions of the learning environment on students’ engagement?</td>
<td>Constructivist approach to survey analysis and coded video observations</td>
<td>5 teachers and 140 students in 2 schools</td>
<td>Optimal learning marked by environmental complexity and structured tasks with teacher monitoring</td>
<td>High school, engagement, learning environment, teacher instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Breault</td>
<td>“She was Great, but”: Fav. Teachers</td>
<td>How do you describe your favorite and most effective h.s. teachers?</td>
<td>Student paper reviews from teacher education program</td>
<td>38 secondary education majors</td>
<td>3 dominant themes: passion for teaching, concern for students, knowledge of subject matter</td>
<td>Teacher efficacy, teacher preparation,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Wentzel</td>
<td>Are effective teachers like good parents?</td>
<td>Are the models of effective parenting generalizable to the context of effective teaching?</td>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>2 schools of 6th graders. 1 = 230 students, 8 teachers 2 = 222 student, 10 teachers</td>
<td>There is a complex relation b/t effective parenting and adolescents' adjustment to school with high expectations being the most consistent.</td>
<td>Teacher influence, parenting, middle school, adjustment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Wilkins</td>
<td>Good TSRs in Urban High Schools</td>
<td>What are the student behaviors most important for</td>
<td>Mixed method= online survey and follow up</td>
<td>Student behaviors that lead to good TSRs: 1) engagement/interest in school work, 2)</td>
<td>Student behaviors, TSRs, engagement, high</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>good TSRs?</td>
<td>interviews w/select group based on results</td>
<td>being respectful, 3) maturity and positive personality</td>
<td>school, urban</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Brok, Breklemans, &amp; Wubbels</td>
<td>Interpersonal Teacher Behavior &amp; Student Outcomes</td>
<td>Q1) What variance dist. b/t students, classes and teachers is present is students’ cognitive and affective outcomes? Q2) How much variance can be explained by teacher interpersonal behavior?</td>
<td>Dutch study using instrument-Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI) w/77 items</td>
<td>826 hs Physics students &amp; 941 hs EFL students</td>
<td>Important associations b/t interpersonal teacher behavior and student outcomes</td>
<td>Secondary, affective, cognitive, interpersonal, teacher behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Marzano</td>
<td>Are Your Students Engaged</td>
<td>How much is student engagement impacted by what teachers do in class?</td>
<td>N/A Professional article by key expert from ASCD.org</td>
<td>Teachers need to ask themselves 4 key questions: 1) Do I provide a safe, caring, energetic environ? 2) Do I make things interesting? 3) Do I demonstrate why content is important? 4) Do I help student realize that personal effort is key to success?</td>
<td>Engagement, teacher behavior, emotional, cognitive, situational</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Umbach &amp; Wawrzynski</td>
<td>Faculty Do Matter: Student Learning &amp; Engagement</td>
<td>R1) What faculty behaviors and attitudes (B&amp;A) are related to student behavior linked w/positive outcomes? R2) Do B&amp;A of faculty create a cultural context for learning that encourages engagement?</td>
<td>Data analysis of two national data sets= National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) &amp; Parallel study of faculty participating in NSSE</td>
<td>20, 226 seniors, 22, 033 freshmen, 14, 336 faculty</td>
<td>Student report higher levels of engagement at institutions where faculty members use active and collaborative learning techniques, engage students in experiences, emphasize higher-order cognitive activities, interact w/students, challenge students academically, value enriching education</td>
<td>College, engagement, teacher behavior, cognitive, active learning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>Further Qualification</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>Skinner, Kindermann, Furrer</td>
<td>Conceptualization and Assessment of Children’s Emotional Part. In the Classroom</td>
<td>What are the key indicators of engagement in the classroom?</td>
<td>4-year study w/interviews, questionnaires, and observations</td>
<td>1,018 students (grades 3-6), 53 teachers</td>
<td>Further qualifies engagement as behavioral vs. emotional and engagement vs. disaffection</td>
<td>Engagement, emotion, disaffection, motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Korthagen</td>
<td>Situated Learning Theory and the pedagogy of teacher educ.</td>
<td>What is the friction b/t teacher behavior in practice and the wish to ground teacher practices in theory?</td>
<td>An analysis of teacher education practices using situated learning theory</td>
<td>Review of the work by Lave and Wanger</td>
<td>Current teacher education programs are ineffective in practice. Realistic teacher education needs to utilize situated learning theory models</td>
<td>Teacher education, teacher behavior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: IRB Approval

Date: March 5, 2020

To: Gail Weinhold

From: Sarah Muenster-Blakley, Institutional Review Board

Project Title: [1216051-1] A Case of Affective Teaching Behaviors and Performance Techniques by Exemplary Teachers

Reference: New Project  Action: Project Approved
Approval Date: March 5, 2020  Expiration: March 4, 2021

Dear Gail:

I have reviewed your protocol and approved your project as reflected in the application that you submitted. Please note that all research conducted with this project title must be done in accordance with this approved submission.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and assurance that the project is understood by the participants and their signing of the approved consent form. The informed consent process must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between you and your research participants. Federal law requires that each person participating in this study receive a copy of the consent form. All original records relating to participant consent must be retained for a minimum of three years upon completion of the project.

Amendments to targeted participants, risk level, recruitment, research procedures, or the consent process as approved by the IRB must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementing changes to the research study. No changes may be made without IRB approval except to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the participant.

Any problems involving project participants or others must be reported to the IRB within one (1) business day of the principal investigator's knowledge of the problem. A problem reporting form is available in the IRBNet Document Library or on the IRB website and should be submitted to muen0526@stthomas.edu. Any non-compliance or complaints relating to the project must be reported immediately.

Approval to work with human participants with this project will expire on March 4, 2021. Please direct questions at any time to Sarah Muenster-Blakley at (651) 962-6035 or muen0526@stthomas.edu. I wish you success with your project!

Sincerely,

Sarah Muenster-Blakley, M.A., CIP
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Appendix C: CITI Certificate

This is to certify that:

Gail Weinhold

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

- Human Subjects Research (HSR)
- Human Subjects Research Training: Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers
  1 - Basic Course

Under requirements set by:

University of St. Thomas - Minnesota

Completion Date: 30 Jan 2018
Expiration Date: 29 Jan 2022
Record ID: 25612835

Appendix D: Initial Recruitment Letter

Dear [insert name],

Hello fellow teacher and congratulations on being honored as a finalist or winner for Teacher of the Year! I am reaching out to you with a very important request and this is not junk mail so please keep reading! My name is Gail Weinhold and I am a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I also work as a professor in teacher education after teaching high school English in public schools for 14 years. I know how hard you work and I want to thank you for all the extra hours, sweat, and tears I know it requires to be a truly exemplary teacher. You are truly special and that is why I need your input.

Everyone talks about great teachers and the “it factor” that seems to make them so great, but what are we really doing to prepare new teachers for those special skills? What are those techniques and skills that make some teachers unforgettable and truly remarkable? Can we teach these skills? I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about the impact of affective (emotive) teacher behaviors and performance techniques on student engagement. This study could have a significant impact on our profession and how we approach teacher preparation, but I can’t do it without teachers like you. I got your contact information from the state because of your award finalist status and my study is limited to secondary teachers in the upper Midwest.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will complete a Zoom interview with me that will take approximately 45-60 minutes. As a result of COVID 19, my plans for observation in the classroom have had to change. As such, just an interview would be needed but I may ask if I can visit if/when your school opens or provide you with the recording equipment (for photographic still without students) if your school is in session but guests are not allowed. This will be determined in the fall months, but I would like to schedule the interviews as soon as possible. I will provide detailed consent forms and answer any questions you have at any time through the process. Your time and input are extremely valuable and in this time of changing classroom environments and delivery methods my research on the impact of a teacher in a physical classroom is more important than ever to our field.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. However, the timeliness of this study and the quality of the information it can provide is vital to providing credible evidence of the impact classroom teachers have. I want to learn from the best and that means I need you. If you’d like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at: wein0002@stthomases.edu.

Thank you for all you do,

Gail Weinhold
Ed.D. Candidate

Weinhold 2020
Appendix E: Interview Questions

Teacher of the Year Finalists Interview Questions

1) How would your students describe the way you teach when you’re in the classroom?

2) How are you different from other teachers when you teach?

3) Tell me about one of your favorite lessons. What do you do during this lesson?

4) What do you think causes students to become less engaged in class at the secondary level?

5) How do you monitor student engagement as you teach and what do you look for?

6) How do you move around the classroom and get/keep attention as you teach?

7) How do you get energized for class and how would you describe your teaching personality?

8) Describe how you connect with your students.

9) Tell me the story of a student who struggled in your class and what you did.

10) What do think are the biggest differences between a good teacher and a great one?

COVID ADDITIONS:

11) How have you seen or how do you anticipate distance learning may impact student engagement?

12) What will you miss most about teaching in the classroom if students cannot return this fall?

Revised 7/15/20
Appendix G: Informed Consent Form

Research Participation Key Information
A Case Study of Affective Teaching Behaviors and Performance Techniques by Exemplary Teachers

What you will be asked to do:
We ask participants complete an interview (questions provided) that will be audio recorded and be observed during one hour of teaching instruction which will be video (no audio) recorded.

The time commitment is about 2 hours and the study will take place at your school location.

Participating in this study has risks:
Although no names will be used in the dissertation, photographic stills may result in revelation of identity of subject and school location. The stills will NOT be used if results are negative in any way and any students in the shot will be fully blurred or removed.

Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.
You are invited to participate in a research study about how teacher’s affective behaviors and performance techniques impact student engagement. The title of this study is “A Case Study of Affective Teaching Behaviors and Performance Techniques by Exemplary Teachers.” You were selected as a possible participant and are eligible to participate in the study because you were selected as a finalist in the last ten years in your state for Teacher of the Year. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision whether you would like to participate or not.

What will you be asked to do?
If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
- Complete a one-on-one interview with the researcher in person or via Zoom which will be recorded and transcribed for the purpose of this study. The questions will be provided and the approximate time for this interview is 30-45 minutes.
- You will be observed by the researcher for 1 hour of class instruction. At that time, you will be video (no audio) recorded for the purpose of photographic stills and transcription if needed.
- Approximately 10-15 participants (teachers) will be included in this study.
- Although no follow-up is expected, you will be given the researcher’s contact information and may be contacted by the researcher via email if clarification of comments or content is needed during data analysis.

What are the risks of being in the study?
The study has risks:

- Although no student names will be used in the dissertation, photographic stills may result in revelation of identity of subject and school location. The stills will NOT be used if results are negative in any way and any students in the shot will be fully blurred or removed.

**Here is more information about why we are doing this study:**

This study is being conducted by Assistant Professor Gail Weinhold (doctoral student researcher) and advised by Dr. Sarah Noonan, Professor and Dissertation Chair for this study. Gail Weinhold is completing her doctoral program at the University of St. Thomas in the School of Education in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This study was reviewed for risks and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of St. Thomas.

The purpose of this study is to try to determine what are the key affective (i.e. Soft skills, emotional intelligence) behaviors and performance techniques (i.e. Movement, non-verbals, pitch, tone, eye contact) that impact the engagement level of students. If those key factors can be determined, then research can continue to determine how these elusive skills and techniques can be taught to improve teacher effectiveness. Some teachers call it the “it factor” but this study aims to clearly determine what “it” is.

The direct benefits you will receive for participating are: There are no direct benefits for participating in this study in order to maintain high ethical standards for educational research. However, this research is critical to not only the advancement of the field, but also the preparation of future generations of teachers and teacher preparation programs that may incorporate key finding from this research into their development. Your participation could have a significant impact on this research.

**We believe your privacy and confidentiality is important. Here is how we will protect your personal information:**

Your privacy will be protected while you participate in this study. All documents, files, and information will be stored on Gail Weinhold’s password protected laptop and backed up on Dropbox which is also password protected and has a two-step verification code required for an additional layer of security that only Weinhold can access. Due to the nature of the photographic documentation study procedures, privacy cannot be guaranteed, however no names will be used or accessible via online or database search in relationship to this study.

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any reports I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you. The types of records I will create include:

- Interview recordings and transcripts will be secured via two-step security protection and in a locked location when not on Weinhold’s person for travel.
- Master subject contact list will be stored on Weinhold’s laptop along with six-digit codes that will replace any use of names in transcripts.
- Video recording will be transferred to photographic stills immediately following the observation. Any stills deemed pertinent to the research will be edited to remove any students (full blur). The original video and photographic stills will be permanently deleted. Only edited photo stills will remain and will be saved securing on UST One Drive.
- During travel to and from school sites, all data will be secured on Weinhold’s computer, phone (video recording), or voice recorder (interview recording) which will remain in her possession at all times until returned to the home office.
The primary researcher (Weinhold) will keep information about you for future research about affective teacher behaviors and performance techniques. There is no limit to the length of time she will store de-identified information, but if you choose to withdraw from the study your information will not be stored for future use.

All signed consent forms will be kept for a minimum of three years once the study is completed. Institutional Review Board officials at the University of St. Thomas have the right to inspect all research records for researcher compliance purposes.

**This study is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the research with no penalties of any kind.**
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether to participate or not will not affect your current or future relations with your school, your state department of education or the University of St. Thomas. There are no penalties or consequences if you choose not to participate. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will be destroyed unless it is already de-identified or published and I can no longer delete your data. You can withdraw by providing a written request sent directly to Gail Weinhold via the email provided upon your consent (see below). You are also free to skip any questions I may ask if you feel they will not be beneficial to the research or you are unwilling to answer.

**Who you should contact if you have a question:**
My name is Gail Weinhold. You may ask any questions you have now and at any time during or after the research procedures. If you have questions before or after we meet, you may contact me at 952-261-5572 or wein0002@stthomas.edu. You may also contact my advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. Sarah Noonan at sjnoonon@stthomas.edu. Information about study participant rights is available online at https://www.stthomas.edu/irb/policiesandprocedures/forstudyparticipants/. You may also contact Sarah Muenster-Blakley with the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-6035 or muen0526@stthomas.edu with any questions or concerns 1216051-1.

**STATEMENT OF CONSENT:**
I have had a conversation with the researcher about this study and have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age. I give permission to be video and audio recorded during this study.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of Study Participant</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Print Name of Study Participant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of Researcher</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Appendix F
Updated Name Use Consent

Note: Below is an email sent to all 17 study participants upon completion of the interviews asking for name use consent. Consent was given electronically by all participants and stored as documentation.

Hello [Name],

I am reaching back out to each teacher that participated in my study with an updated request. First, however, I’d like you to read one of the final paragraphs in the completed dissertation:

To the teachers that participated in this study, you are my heroes. You touch lives in such powerful and meaningful ways every year and you never stop getting better. Most people are blessed to touch certain lives within their reach—you have impacted thousands and you will impact thousands more. What you do unequivocally makes a real difference. I began this study to demystify what makes great teachers so memorable and engaging. You have shown me that Shakespeare only had it partially right when he said, “Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them” (*The Twelfth Night*). This quote implies that these are three different groups of people. However, I see all three in you. You all have a deeply rooted desire to love and inspire people. You all have worked continuously to become the remarkable teachers your students never forget. And finally, you all have had this honor and greatness thrust upon you by the recognition and respect you so humbly eschew. What you have shared here is just another part of your legacy. I promise to pay forward your wisdom and together we will spread far and wide the “secret sauce.”

With this promise in mind, I wanted to share that I will defend my dissertation on April 20th. Upon approval, I will send you a link to the full study. As I make the final
revisions, I realized how much more powerful it would be if I could use the names of the incredible teachers, like yourself, that have contributed to this research in our field. All quotes and observations shared in this study were very favorable as representations of your teaching and expertise. I don't want to keep your wisdom secret and I am very proud of what you have shared. **If you agree to my including your name rather than a pseudonym in the final draft, please respond to this email with "I agree."**

I would appreciate a response by the end of the month, or I will make sure your identity is sadly left anonymous. Thank you so much again for your participation and support in the educational research. As I plan to share with you in my dissertation, I have learned so much and there are important steps I will take to use this research to prepare and inspire many more talented teachers!

Respectfully

Gail Weinhold

Ed.D. Candidate