A Descriptive Analysis of Good Teaching and Good Teachers from the Perspective of Preservice Teachers

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Abstract

The primary purpose of the present study was to examine what good teaching is and what characteristics good teachers carry for preservice teachers who were registered in an introductory teaching class at a land-grant university in Midwest, USA. Participants included 18 teacher candidates. I collected the data by conducting semi-structured interviews with the participants. The findings of the study indicate that good teaching is (1) creative, (2) student-centered, (3) stimulative, (4) relevant, (5) adaptable, and (6) challenging. Similarly, the findings also reveal that good teachers (1) build personal relationships with their students, (2) mentor their students, (3) are enthusiastic, (4) respect their students, and (5) are experts in their field. Based on the findings of the study, I argue that the conception of good teaching and good teachers that emerged from this study is congruent with other teaching frameworks such as culturally relevant teaching.

Keywords: Good teaching, Good teachers, Preservice teachers.

Introduction

Almost all research on teaching is done with the latent purpose of gaining insight into what good teaching is (de Vries & Beijaard, 1999) so that educators are able to provide quality education to their students. In addition, teachers' crucial role in delivering good teaching has been manifested by the fact that teacher effectiveness is the most crucial factor in student learning in terms of school-related variables (Harris & Sass, 2009). As a result, it is no surprise that research on good teaching and good teachers has a long history and tradition (Beishuizen, Hof, von Putten, Bouwmeester & Asscher, 2001). However, despite numerous studies on these significant concepts, the field of education is still far from uncovering the essence of good teaching and good teachers in a complete manner (Bakx, Koopman, de Kruijf & den Brok, 2015; Raufelder, Nitsche, Breitmeyer, Keßler, Herrmann & Regner, 2015). Therefore, this study aims to examine what good teaching is and what characteristics good teachers carry.

Review of the Literature

The Essence of Good Teaching

Despite the literature's close attention to the question "what is good teaching," it is an arduous task to find a definitive answer to it (Goodwin & Stevens, 1993). Hence, the literature is prosperous to provide details on what characteristics good teaching entails from a variety of perspectives rather than a singular point of approach. For instance, Griffith Institute for Higher Education (1994, p. 67) stated that "Good teaching is teaching that helps students to learn. It promotes active engagement with the subject matter, motivation to learn, desire to understand, independence, confidence and sustained effort" (also cited in Carpenter and Tait, 2001, p. 193). Good teaching is probable to occur at schools if teachers accept responsibility for students' achievement (Porter, 1989). One has to pay specific attention to results of teaching acts in discussing the nature good teaching for it only occurs when students are learning (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005). In this milieu, one can conclude that teachers must be familiar with the characteristics of good teachers in order to align themselves accordingly.

The Characteristics of Good Teachers

One common way in which the previous scholarship has discussed the characteristics of good teachers is to distinguish teachers' personal and professional characteristics (Arnon & Reichel, 2007; Beishuizen et al., 2001). The former includes the idea that teachers' personality traits are fundamentally related to whether they are good teachers or not. In contrast, the latter argues that good teachers need to have some professional characteristics to provide good teaching.

McEwan (2001) mentioned that good teachers are passionate and positive (see also Leibowitz, van Schalkwyk, Ruiters, Farmer & Adendorff, 2012). Moreover, research has suggested that good teachers care about their students (Arnon & Reichel, 2009; Azer, 2005; Beishuizen et al. 2001; Brown, Morehead & Smith, 2008; Läänemets, Kalamees-Ruubel & Sepp, 2012; Mageehon, 2006; Stronge, Ward & Grant, 2011; Walls, Nardi, von Minden & Hoffman, 2002; Weinstein, 1989). In addition to being caring, good teachers have humor in that they design the learning environment in a way that students learn while also having fun (Mullock, 2003; Leibowitz et al., 2012). What is more, Brown, Morehead and Smith (2008) have elucidated that preservice teachers have a strong belief that good teachers like children. Apart from all the qualities I mentioned so far, such personal characteristics as being compassionate, understanding, enthusiastic, patient, kind, empathetic (Brown, Morehead & Smith, 2008); warmth, considerate, (Arnon & Reichel, 2009); dynamic, creative, fair, respectful, (Weinstein, 1989); friendly, calm, joyful (Läänemets, Kalamees-Ruubel & Sepp, 2012); empathic attentive (Arnon & Reichel, 2007) have also been noted.

In terms of professional characteristics of teachers, Nicoll and Harrison (2003) have stated that in doing their job, good teachers are informed by: (a) how students learn, (b) a concern for students' progress, (c) a commitment to work with other teachers, (d) a tendency to approach students fairly and (e) reflection on their practice. Trigwell (2001) has also underlined the importance of reflection since he suggested that teachers should be willing to learn from their practice to make it better. In general, good teachers explain well while they teach, have firm control of the content as well as manage the classroom effectively (Kutnick & Jules, 1993). Azer (2005) also mentioned such good teacher characteristics as a

commitment to work, appreciation of diversity in the classroom, motivating students to do better, demonstrating leadership, focusing on critical thinking, and encouraging teamwork. Finally, Reynolds and Teddlie (2000) have identified aspects of good teaching processes that include time management, utilization of effective teaching practices, organization, and adapting lessons to the needs and expectations of learners.

Frameworks for Teaching

In addition to defining good teaching and identifying characteristics of good teachers, another direction that the literature on teaching took is to create frameworks on good teaching. Based on empirical data, such constructs aim to illuminate effective teaching and aid practitioners, i.e., the teachers. They outline various components of good teaching, and hence, create a conceptual map for teachers to improve their teaching. As an example, Danielson (2007) identified four domains for teaching: (1) planning and preparation, (2) the classroom environment, (3) instruction and (4) professional responsibilities. Each of these domains includes a number components that delineates different aspects of that domain. The first one, planning and preparation, explains how teachers need to take necessary steps before actual teaching—how they design instruction. The second one relates to general aura of the learning environment that would be conducive to learning. The third one deals with the actual engagement of students with the content where the learning takes place. Finally, the fourth domain is about the professional responsibilities of teachers (Danielson, 2007).

Another influential teaching framework is culturally relevant teaching—the idea that teaching must "empower students to maintain cultural integrity, while succeeding academically" (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 476). The framework revolves around three concepts: academic success, cultural competence, critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Firstly, academic success refers to the necessity that all students in formal learning institutions must gain mastery in school subjects such as literacy, numeracy, social skills, etc. Secondly, cultural competence is the idea that students are not being alienated as they progress in the school, i.e., their original culture is not marginalized as a result of engagement with the school's activities. Thirdly, critical consciousness means that students, as a result of culturally relevant teaching, require skills in criticizing the social norms, values and institutions so that they are productive members of a democratic society that aims to better itself continuously. In order to provide culturally relevant teaching to their students, teachers need to show enthusiasm in their work, care about their students, have high expectations of their students, among other things. (Byrd, 2016; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995b).

Purpose of the Study

Despite the numerous attempts to uncover the essence of good teaching and good teachers, the literature has not yet reached a general agreement on the essence of these concepts (Bakx, Koopman, de Kruijf & den Brok, 2015). Similarly, Raufelder et. al. (2015) echo this point when they argue that the characteristics of good teachers are yet to be defined in detail. In this context, it can be deduced that an inquiry on characteristics of good teaching and good teachers can be valuable to the field of education since there is a further need for studies where these concepts are taken into further investigation.

In striving to shed light on the characteristics of good teaching and good teachers, the literature examined these concepts from the perspective of students from various levels (Bakx, Koopman, de Kruijf & den Brok, 2015; Läänemets, Kalamees-Ruubel & Sepp, 2012),

of teachers (Leibowitz et al., 2012; Stronge, Ward & Grant, 2011), or, of parents (Plavšić & Diković, 2016). Research has also indicated that prospective teachers' beliefs about their profession during their preparation in colleges of education influence their teaching practices in the future (Devine, Fahie & McGillicuddy, 2013). When they begin their education at a college for teacher preparation, preservice teachers already have strong beliefs on good teaching and good teachers (Lortie, 1975 as cited in Walls, Nardi, von Minden & Hoff, 2002). Thus, an exploration of good teaching and good teacher from the perspective of preservice teachers might be valuable to the discussion on these concepts since their thinking have the potential to influence their professional performance in the future. Consequently, a multitude of research has investigated this issue by studying the views of preservice teachers.

Brown, Morehead and Smith (2008), in their study where they aimed to investigate the changes that occur in preservice teachers' conceptions of qualities of an effective teacher during a term of coursework, interpreted views of 123 prospective teachers that were enrolled to two different courses for an academic semester. Similarly, Mullock (2003) examined the views of 42 post graduate TESOL students about what constitutes a good teacher in three different universities in Sydney. Moreover, Walls, Nardi, von Minden and Hoff (2002) conducted a study to see if there were any differences in the conceptions of prospective teachers, novice teachers as well as experienced teachers on characteristics of effective and ineffective teachers. Additionally, Weinstein (1989) examined future teachers' description of good teaching with a sample of 113 prospective teachers who were enrolled in sophomore-level introductory education courses. An analysis of these studies yields that they generally adopted a general approach where researchers recruited preservice teachers from various grade levels, programs or courses into their study and utilized a macro level analysis rather than providing a micro level analysis to shed light on characteristics of good teaching and good teachers in a more focused approach. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study is to examine what good teaching is and what characteristics good teachers carry from the views of preservice teachers in the context of their education by focusing on an introductory teaching class.

Method

In order to examine the characteristics of good teaching and good teachers, I adopted a qualitative approach in this study. The research site was an introductory teaching class that was offered at the College of Education of a land-grant state university in the Midwest region of the USA that preservice teachers were enrolled as a part of their curriculum. The primary purpose of the aforementioned course was to prepare preservice teachers to teach English in different school settings. Specifically, it aimed to equip preprofessional teachers with the necessary theoretical background as well as required experience so that they would be able to teach English to racially and culturally diverse students in the middle- or senior-high-school settings. The syllabus of the course explains four preparatory functions that this class aimed to serve:

> One function is to introduce college students at [Midwest University] to the complexities of working with secondary students whose social, cultural, and economic backgrounds may differ from their own. A second function is to introduce course participants to the diverse literacy experiences, needs, and interests of these secondary students. A third function is to introduce students to the discourse of English education as a profession; and a fourth function is to provide preparatory theory/practice in methods of teaching reading, writing, and conducting discussions about a broad range of literary texts.

Throughout the semester, the class included three parts. In the first, the aim was to discuss several issues such as what teaching is, what it requires to teach in diverse environments, what roles teachers have in classrooms. In the second part of the class, students mainly worked in groups on their assignments and projects for the course. In the third and last part, students wrapped up their projects and presented them to their classmates.

The first part of the class included various activities to elaborate good teaching mostly via group discussions. For instance, students were asked to think about and comment on the best classes they had during their formal education. Students' comments indicated that good teaching is, above everything, creative. In another activity, students were asked to answer the question "What is a teacher?" Students responded that a good teacher has high expectations, develops a lot of teaching materials, sets up an environment where students feel comfortable, designs the curriculum according to students' needs. A different activity required students to read Cooper (2014) who relates student engagement to engaging teaching practices: connective instruction, academic rigor and lively teaching. For connective instruction, students in the class mentioned that connective instruction occurs if the instruction is relevant and the instructor understands students, is humorous, allows students to express themselves and cares about students. For academic rigor, students argued that challenging students, having realistically high expectations of students and consistency are main factors for ensuring academic rigor. For lively teaching, students referred to fun activities, collaborative work, and project experiences.

As this course was an introduction to teaching in diverse school settings, it included detailed discussions about the nature of teaching and role of teachers in the process. It is for this reason that I chose this course as an optimal research site for this study. Stake's suggestion that a qualitative researcher needs to have a connoisseur's appetite to find places, participants and occasions for research was also influential on this decision (Stake, 1995).

Participants

The course included 26 students at the beginning semester. A total of 19 students out of 26 agreed to participate in the study. After a couple of weeks into the semester, one student from 19 who decided to participate dropped the course. Therefore, 18 preservice teachers from the class participated in the study. The participants majored in English and minored in secondary education to become a teacher of English upon their graduation. Twelve of the participants were female whereas the remaining six were male.

Data Collection

The data source for this study is the individual interviews that I conducted with the participants. To uncover what my participants thought about the concepts of good teaching and good teachers, I arranged a semi-structured interview with each one of them. After agreeing to participate in the study, participants chose a place and time for the interview. Each interview took around half an hour, which, upon transcription, amounted to approximately 10 pages of data. At total, interviews yielded around 200 pages of participants' conception of good teaching and good teachers. During the interviews, I asked questions about participants' individual educational stories where I aimed to uncover what their inspirations were to choose teaching, which one of their teachers influenced them the most and what type of a teacher they aim to become in future. After that, I inquired about how they conceptualized good teaching and good teachers. My approach to the interview process has

been informed by the understanding that "natural" interviews should keep an eye for the particular (Alshenqeeti, 2014; Dörnyei, 2007) to result in a deeper understanding of phenomenon that other static data collection ways would fail to generate.

Data Analysis

I employed ATLAS.ti software for analyzing the data that I gathered from participants as a result of interviews with the participants. As Saldana (2009) explains, data analysis in qualitative research does not begin when the data collection ends; rather, it starts when data collection starts. Moreover, data analysis is the omnipresent effort of qualitative researchers to make sense of the things that they investigate (Stake, 1995). With these points in mind, I utilized an analysis framework that included four stages, as conceptualized by Bryman (2008). First, I read through my data while also taking notes. Second, I reread the data, but this time highlighting and underlining parts of it. Third, I coded the data by systematically marking the text as well as reviewed the codes to come up with the themes. Fourth and last, I interpreted my codes in terms of their relation to my research questions. The whole process of data analysis I utilized for the study is an inductive one. In presenting the data, I assigned a pseudonym to each participant and made references to their points in the writing.

Credibility

To ensure the credibility of the findings, I employed two techniques. The first is prolonged engagement that refers to the idea that the researcher should immerse herself into the participants' world to understand their reality in regard to phenomena of interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For prolonged engagement, I participated in the introductory teaching class (research site) for an entire academic semester as I was conducting the interviews. The second technique, peer debriefing, is a process in which researchers presents their data and findings to disinterested peers in an analytical manner so that the peers could help to eliminate bias or other shortcomings that might decrease the credibility of the data. For peer debriefing, I organized a session with four peers who were, at the time of analysis, Ph.D. candidates in the field of curriculum and instruction and who had qualitative research experiences themselves. I presented my data and findings to my peers before the briefing session. During the actual session, my peers gave me corrections and suggestions on the analysis as well as on presentation of findings. As a result of the meeting, I made the necessary corrections to my analysis and writing. For example, one of my peers noted that my findings were a bit too wordy and that it would help the reader if I presented a more concise version of my results.

Findings

In this section, I provide my main findings of the study in regard to my research questions. First, I strive to uncover what good teaching entails from the perspective of the participants. Then, I present the views of the participants in terms of what characteristics good teachers carry.

Good Teaching

Creativeness

The first point that emanated from the data analysis is that good teaching is creative in that it does not include a traditional environment where the teacher is the conveyor of knowledge

and students are the receivers. Participants have strong opinions that good teaching should employ innovative and inventive ways of creating learning environments in which students are not taken to be blank slates that need to be filled with knowledge and skills. Rather, they believe that good teaching engages students by utilizing progressive approaches. Regarding the point that teaching should be creative, Leslie mentioned a class she took as a high schooler:

> *It was basically a history of philosophy class, and he did a lot of really interactive, creative things and also provided a lot of opportunities for independent projects… Our first essay assignment in that class, the only prompt was why ask why. He challenged us to think very deeply, but the fact that we had a lot of independent projects allowed him to assess us as individuals and have a more growth-oriented mindset towards how we were learning rather than a performance-oriented mindset. He also provided a lot of opportunities to interact and engage. He set up an enlightenment style coffee house for us in one class period. That class, I learned a lot in. I think everybody did and everybody loved it.*

Furthermore, Leslie compared the creative class she mentioned to a class where her teacher employed a more traditional approach to teaching:

> *What was not effective was my English class actually, interestingly enough since I want to be an English teacher. It did not really inspire me. It more motivated me to come up with a better and more relevant way to teach English because the way that English class worked was we would read a book, we would read it at home, we would fill out a study guide with questions. Everybody knew that our teacher had very specific ways that she wanted the questions to be answered. We would put the right answer down even if we did not think that they were our perception of what the literature was.*

As Leslie's remarks suggest, good teaching is not a formulaic act where teachers expect answers from students in a predefined fashion. Instead of such an approach, students expect a learning environment similar to Leslie's philosophy class in which teachers utilize creative ways that would allow interaction and engagement both between students, and between the content and students. Creative teaching refers to a learning experience that moves beyond the boundaries of lecturing and, in a positive way, surprises students with its delivery of content that motivates students to engage with it.

Student Centeredness
The main problem that Leslie mentioned regarding her English teacher, who employed a traditional approach to teaching can be analyzed from different perspectives. On the one hand, it is obvious that her English teacher did not provide creative teaching to her students. On the other hand, it seems that her teaching was also teacher-centered. For participants, good teaching is an understanding that teachers are in schools for students in that teachers have to provide a teaching environment where students can be actively involved in the learning process. In relation to good teaching as being student-centered, Lisa mentioned one of her classes that she enjoyed:

> *It was very self-guided. For a sixteen-year-old, it was a new thing that we got to set our own due dates for all our assignments. We did not have assigned readings. It was just read this entire book within the next two weeks and then come back. It was not like read this chapter tonight, this chapter tonight. It was very independent, which I*

> *thought was very exciting and gave me a lot of control over what I was doing in that class.*

As Lisa's arguments point out, student-centered teaching requires a philosophical acceptance that students are independent human beings who are capable of taking responsibility for their learning. It gives students control over how the classroom is run by making them an active part of the learning process. Such an approach, according to participants, tremendously increase the quality of teaching.

Stimulative Instruction

It is not an unlikely scenario in schools that students sit at their desks, constantly check their watch to see how many more minutes remain, try to talk to their friends on stuff that is unrelated to class, in general, just sit in class and wait for the bell to ring. It can be said that students usually behave that way because they find teaching boring. Instead of participating in whatever activity at hand, they find more joy engaging in other things. Good teaching, however, keeps students interested in the subject. Reflecting on his teaching in the future, Cameron said:

> *I hope that I am going to be a teacher that students want to go to his class. I hope that I am a teacher where the student comes in and knows it is not going to be boring, "I am not just going to have to sit here and get through this." I want them to be excited to come to my classes.*

In regard to good teaching being stimulative, Connie talked about a Spanish teacher she had in her previous educational life who would always add games to his teaching, which made that class exciting for her. Likewise, Eva indicated that her favorite teacher back in school would always include fun activities in her teaching.

Stimulative teaching, as conceptualized by participants, keeps students interested in the content and classroom's activities in a regular fashion. In one sense, it is an encouragement that invites students to be psychologically ready for a deeper type of learning. In another sense, it is a way for teachers to ensure that students enjoy the act of learning.

Relevance of The Content

The participants argued that teaching that they encountered in their prior educational experiences at schools did not validate what was being taught. They stated that good teaching ensures that students learn something that is going to be valuable to them later in their life. Making the content relevant to students is a way to increase the chances that students want to come to class and be attentive every day. Otherwise, students do not see much value in attending schools, which, in turn, causes behavioral problems, and consecutively makes classroom management harder for teachers. Diana stated: *I want to make sure that the content is relative to the students' lives*. Similarly, Leonard commented: *It all has to do with making sure the content is relevant to the students*.

Adaptability

Good teaching ensures that teachers accommodate students with varying and different needs. Therefore, it is an essential aspect of teaching for each class is a cosmos in itself full of students with diverse individualities and backgrounds. Thus, it is necessary that teachers are confident to have backup plans and to modify their plans as many times as needed. In the final analysis, it is the responsibility of teachers as professionals to make an informed judgment on whether they need to make adaptations to their plans, activities and material

when they suspect that initial plans do not work. Commenting on how she would incorporate good teaching to her classrooms, Leslie stated: *I think having a lot of student-driven assignments and adjusting syllabus on what they want to do would be something that you would see in my classroom.*

Challenging Instruction

According to the participants, good teaching expects more from students. The point here is pushing students so that they can achieve their potential. Setting the bar high and showing to the students that the teacher expects them to at least reach that bar and possibly exceed it strengthens the quality of teaching. Otherwise, students know that they do not have to try that hard.

Good Teachers

Building Personal Relationships with Students

The participants stated that good teachers have the ability to create personal relationships with their students. For participants, it is imperative that teachers know what goes on outside of the school because students can have a lot of situations at their home that affect how they work. If the teacher knows what is going on at students' home, it helps to design better plans that would be the best for that specific student group. Therefore, paying attention to students' achievement level is inherently related to being attentive to what goes on in their life outside the school. As simple as it may seem, learning the names of the students as quick as possible or genuinely asking them how they are doing can be a significant sign that teacher is at least striving to build a personal relationship with students, which, at the end, motivates them. Regarding the point that good teachers develop personal relationships with their students, Malena stated: *I never wanted to listen to somebody who I did not understand first as a person, and I felt the same way back and forth between the students and teachers*. Patrick adds:

> *[A good teacher is] someone who connects with you, someone who cares about you outside the class too. I think those little things like just asking "Oh, tell me about your weekend, tell me about your day," just making that personal connection outside of the class because students and teachers are something more than outside of the classroom.*

Connie, talking about her favorite teachers from high school, said:

> *She was very attentive. I could always visit her during my lunch hours. I would take my lunch to this small math study group she would hold during the lunch hours and I would go there, eat my lunch, do math and talk to her. And then my PE teacher, whenever I had personal problems, I could always go to her and she would tell me how it really was even if I did not want to hear it, she would always tell me what I needed to know and that was amazing.*

Personal connection with students—willingness to learn their personal history, their culture, their aspirations among many other things—takes teachers one step closer to provide good teaching. Besides, it is only logical that such positive experiences with their previous teachers affect the type of the teacher that the participants aim to become. Matilda stated:

> *I want to be friends or close with students, not have a high distance. I want to make myself to be approachable so that whenever the students have any question, they will*

> *not feel nervous to ask me. Also, I hope that I can build a friendly relationship with them.*

Malena:

> *Not only do I love the subject of English, but I want to be able to connect with students and help them in any way that I can—getting to know them. I hope that I will be able to listen to students and kind of maintain a conversational atmosphere; I do not want to lecture.*

Regarding the point that good teachers establish a personal relationship with their students, the participants have also noted that it is of utmost importance that good teachers care about their students since it is not probable that they could establish healthy relationships with their students if they do not care about them. Said another way, developing a personal relationship with the students is a result. It can be said that its process requires that teachers care about their students, for it is after that they care about them; they are able to build rapport with them.

For the participants, another aspect of having personal relationships with students on the part of good teachers is being relatable or friendly—both in terms of personality on an individualistic level and of the classroom environment since a friendly classroom and school environment are driving forces for students to feel like a part of the school's community. Participants have argued that it is preferable to be the teacher in the school that students can approach when they walk in the hall rather than being the teacher that students dread to see and ignore when they do. Finally, participants have also mentioned that a good teacher keeps the personal relationship with their students at a professional level: a good teacher knows the limits of what to share in the class and what not to share. Diana, talking about her favorite teacher from high school, said:

> *I think you could definitely tell that she had a line with students that was very clear in terms of what parts of her personal life she was willing to share, and you could definitely tell in a way she was almost going into persona when she was in a class.*

Mentoring Students

Teachers have to convey many roles when they perform their duties. One is, from the perspective of my participants, is being a mentor. A mentor is someone who has the necessary knowledge and experience to advise people when they need to make personal and/or professional decisions. In a school setting, that mentor is usually the teacher. Teachers as mentors behave as advisors who share their knowledge that emanates from their lived experiences on matters both academic and professional. Especially in high-schools, in addition to academic matters, students experience many challenges in becoming a person on their own. Due to the nature coming-of-age struggles, families usually cannot take an active role in aiding students to shape their personality. For participants of this study, good teachers can be quite helpful to their students if they advise students on issues that they need personal help in addition to maintaining their teaching duties.

On his conception of good teaching and teachers, Cameron stated that he hopes to be a role model to his students through his actions and suggestions. Malena, too, argued: *I have found that teachers are not only teachers but mentors*. Similarly, Connie, explaining his connection to a teacher in his school, stated: *I ended up talking to him and him being like a mentor type. Even though I never had him as a teacher, I would visit him after school all the time in senior year and talk to him*.

Enthusiasm

According to participants, in classrooms where good teaching occurs, one can most probably observe lively teachers who express their enthusiasm through their actions, words and manners as they teach. In other words, enthusiastic teachers create a vivid and entertaining learning environment where students enjoy being a part of the learning act. In such classrooms, students can sense the passion and enthusiasm of the teacher, which affects their motivation and attitude toward the lesson. Being able to recognize the passion of the teacher is of great importance because the participants made the point that the courses that they feel the most motivated themselves are the ones where they can see the teacher's heart for the idea. Explaining the teaching persona that she wants to embrace when she teaches in schools, Cher said: *I want to be enthusiastic in the classroom*.

Respecting students

The participants have stated that good teachers never look down on their students and make them feel as if they lack the necessary intellectual powers to do well in class. Whatever the overlying reason is for such a situation in class, one thing is for sure that it is detrimental to students' performance and their well-being in class. In relation to this matter, Connie shared an experience where she went to math tutoring after school because she was struggling with math. When she asked her questions to a math teacher, she made her feel unintelligent by saying that the questions she had were related to basic math, and she should already know it. She stated she never went back to math tutoring. In terms of not looking down on students, when I asked what type of a teacher she wants to become, she explicitly explained that she does not want to be a teacher that looks down on her students.

Expertise in Subject

The participants of the study have argued that no one could be a good teacher without being an expert in the field. Also, teachers who know their subject well would be the ones to be able to incorporate all the qualities and characteristics of good teaching in their classes. It is not reasonable to expect that a teacher who is not confident in her mastery of the subject could ever be creative. Rosemary, on one of her favorite teachers, argued: *She was a good role model because she all knew her stuff really well and her subject really well*.

In short, according to participants of this study, good teaching requires more than traditional approaches to teaching in that it should be creative, student-centered, stimulative, relevant, adaptable and challenging. Similarly, good teachers build personal relationships with students, mentor them, are enthusiastic to teach, respect students and have expertise in their field. Figure 1 summarizes characteristics of good teaching and good teachers.

Discussion

The primary purpose of the study was to examine the characteristics of good teaching and good teachers from the perspective of preservice teachers that were registered to an introductory teaching class at a land-grant university in Mid-west region. The analysis yields that good teaching is, first and foremost, creative. It is not acceptable for teachers to employ conventional learning environments while teaching where the interaction between learners and the teacher commonly occurs as a one-way communication; rather, it is a must that teachers construct creative learning spaces where students have a better chance to acquire skills or knowledge (Samples & Copeland, 2013). In accordance, good teaching requires that teachers employ strategies and methods that allow students to have an active role in their learning rather than assuming a passive one and do as they are told. It is of utmost importance

that students take responsibility for their learning and be actively involved in the learning process (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Good teaching occurs when teachers create such environments. In addition, good teaching is exciting where students are willing and enthusiastic to attend to the learning process both physically and psychologically (Murphy, Delli & Edwards, 2004).

Figure 1

A visual representation of findings.
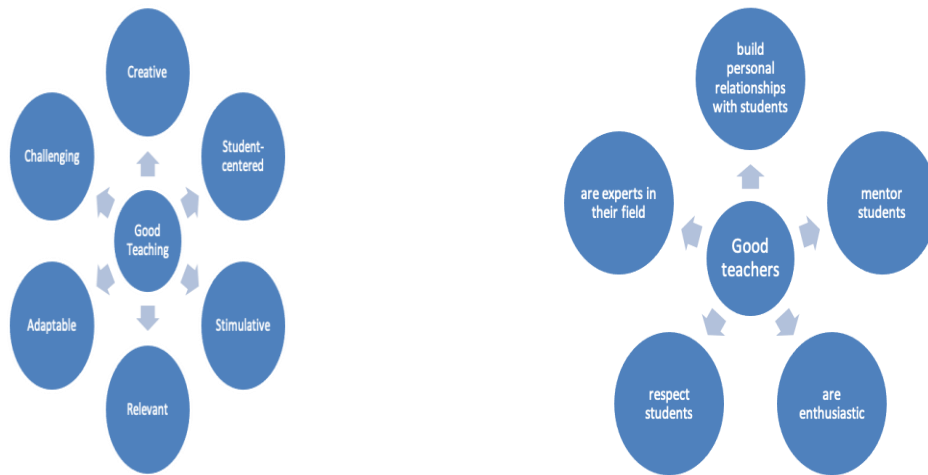
Good teaching ensures that content is significant to students in that they see a value in it. The significance of the content has two connotations. First, students should see a value in what they are being taught in schools. Otherwise, they would not participate in the learning process wholeheartedly. Second, the content that students learn at schools should have the potential to be useful to students in their adult life. What's more, good teaching has the quality of being flexible. The flexibility of teaching is inherently student-centered teaching. It is only in a student-centered environment that teachers can attend to the changing needs of students and unexpected modifications over a semester. For this reason, good teaching requires making necessary adjustments during teaching if the need arises (Bang-Jensen, 2003; Beishuizen et al., 2001). Finally, good teaching is a type of teaching that challenges students to do better. Good teaching is neither too-hard nor too-easy; it has an optimal level of difficulty where it is a given that the teacher would accept more from students without pushing them too much.

The essential characteristic of good teachers is that they establish personal relationships with students. Students are human beings, first and foremost. Thus, they want to be in an environment where they feel safe and valued. In this sense, a good teacher is someone that a student feels comfortable enough to come to talk to. In order to be able to do that, teachers need to take time to get to know their students better (Corbett & Wilson, 2002; Murphy, Delli & Edwards, 2004; Weinstein, 1989). It is equally important that teachers care about their students (Arnon & Reichel, 2009; Brown, Morehead & Smith, 2008; Goodwin & Stevens, 1993; Läänemets, Kalamees-Ruubel & Sepp, 2012; Mageehon, 2006; Murphy, Delli & Edward, 2004; Walls, Nardi, von Minden & Hoff, 2002; Weinstein, 1989) in order to be able

to build fruitful personal relationships with their students. In relation to having personal relationships with students, good teachers create a friendly classroom environment (Läänemets, Kalamees-Ruubel & Sepp, 2012; Weinstein, 1989). Finally, establishing personal relationships with students is a core quality of good teachers, yet, it is substantial to keep that relationship within the limits of professionalism.

The second characteristic of good teachers is that they mentor their students (Mageehon, 2006). Considering the fact that the participants of the study are expected to work in high school settings, it is not surprising that they highlight that a good teacher is a mentor guiding students for making life decisions in addition to academic matters since high school is a place where students shape majority of their personality while also making important decisions regarding their future. The third characteristic of good teachers is that they are passionate and enthusiastic about teaching (Bang-Jensen, 2003; Beishuizen et al., 2001; Devine, Fahie & McGillicuddy, 2013; Leibowitz et al., 2012; Walls, Nardi, von Minden & Hoff, 2002). Although passion and enthusiasm are two core qualities for any profession, they have more importance when it comes to teaching since teachers' passion significantly affect students' motivation. The fourth characteristic of good teachers is that they do not disdain their students. Whatever the overlying reason is for such a situation in class, one thing is for sure that it is detrimental for students' performance and their well-being in class (Läänemets, Kalamees-Ruubel & Sepp, 2012). The fifth and final characteristic of good teachers is that they are experts in their field in that they know their subject well and are influential helping students to acquire it (Arnon & Reichel, 2009; Mullock, 2003).

Findings of the study indicate several connections between existing frameworks for good teaching and the one that emerged as a result of analysis here. Firstly, the qualities of good teaching such as adaptability of the content is comparable Danielson's Framework, Domain 3, Component 3e, Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness (Danielson, 2007). Both refer to the quality of good teaching that requires adjusting the lesson to students' needs. It is obvious that the characteristics of good teaching and qualities of good teachers as conceptualized in this study is congruent with Instruction domain of Danielson Framework, which deals with the issues that relate to the actual learning experiences rather than what happens before and after the learning occurs. This might be due to the fact that participants of the study are preservice teachers who are not yet engaged with the teaching as a profession; they might spontaneously focus on the actual teaching without being cognizant of the processes that take place before and after actual teaching.

A more evident affinity can be said to exist between culturally relevant teaching and findings of this study. In fact, the literature notes that culturally relevant teaching is in fact good teaching (Byrd, 2016). In this milieu, several analogies can be made between culturally relevant teaching and conceptualization of good teaching as findings of the study yielded. Ladson-Billings (1995b) discusses that the teachers she acquired for her study on culturally relevant teaching were selected by parents because their children exhibited a great deal of enthusiasm toward these teachers' classes. Students' excitement toward these teachers can stem from many reasons. It might be that these teachers equip their teaching with creativeness as Ladson-Billings (1995b) notes that she could not observe patterns or similarities in their teaching since learning occurred as a result of students' initiation. As Howard (2001) suggests, caring for students is a vital part of any good teacher's method of working. Also, creative and stimulative teaching can include varied teaching practices that are associated with academic success (Byrd, 2016). Good teaching as being relevant,

adaptable and challenging might indicate that teachers need to be aware that knowledge is not static; rather, it is constantly recycled and recreated (Ladson-Billings, 1995b).

The core idea of culturally relevant teaching, cultural competence, is strongly interlinked with building personal relationships with students—the inclination for regarding students as distinct individuals (Byrd, 2016; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995b). As a result of this personal relationship, good teachers incorporate students' cultural background into the process of teaching. Moreover, Rychly and Graves (2012) argues that teachers need to be reflective about their thoughts of individuals from other cultures. As classrooms get more and more cosmopolitan including students from various cultural origin, it is a must for good teachers to respect students so that they are inclusive and their teaching is effective.
It is noteworthy that although during the course of an entire semester the introductory English class (research site) did not make a single reference to culturally good teaching in its sessions and my interviews with participants included no main or sub questions about culturally relevant teaching or any direct mention of it by participants in their responses, their discussion of good teaching and good teachers as a part of this study still yielded a conception of good teaching and teachers that is quite similar to the theory of culturally responsive teaching. Consequently, it could be worthwhile to incorporate culturally relevant teaching in teacher education programs as this study sustains that it is good teaching. The importance of such an inclusion can also be comprehended by the fact teacher preparation at the colleges of education is a crucial time for preservice teachers since it is during that time that their beliefs about the profession influence their teaching practices in the future (Devine, Fahie & McGillicuddy, 2013).

Conclusion

Since research has shown that teacher quality is the most significant determiner of student achievement both at the individual level (Darling-Hammond, 2000) and at the country level (Akiba, LeTendre & Scribner, 2007), it is of great importance that research pays close attention to preprofessional teachers' views on what constitutes good teaching and what characteristics good teachers carry. Majority of the efforts in that regard have been macro-level analyses where researchers examined good teaching and good teachers with a large number of students from different programs. This study, however presents a novel approach to the discussion by focusing on a single classroom with preservice teachers from the same program in a micro-level analysis.

The present study's qualitative nature prevents the findings from being generalized. The future scholarship on these concepts might find it useful to investigate to uncover whether preservice teachers' perspectives on good teaching and good teachers change when they become professional teachers after they graduate. Or, the literature should examine whether preservice teachers' views on good teaching and good teachers inform their actual teaching practices. A longitudinal study might be called to investigate these issues.

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