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**What is the Profile of an Outstanding Teacher?**

**A thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Education  
In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
Masters of Education  
University of Prince Edward Island**

**We accept this thesis as conforming  
to the required standards**

**July 2001**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This is a report of a qualitative study that profiles 3 outstanding educators from the Province of Prince Edward Island who have been recognized provincially or nationally for their teaching excellence. A total of 3 teachers participated in this study. Each teacher was also asked to nominate 5 of their past or present students with whom they felt they had developed a positive rapport. From each list of nominations 2 students were invited to participate in this study making the total number of student participants 6. Both teachers and students were interviewed to generate the data from which the profiles were composed. Interviews for teachers lasted between 1-2 hours while student interviews varied between 15-25 minutes. The aim of this research was to describe these outstanding educators and find out how and what they do so well. Based on teacher and student findings a profile of an outstanding teacher was generated. Some characteristics and qualities of outstanding teachers discovered in this research were: caring, enthusiastic, interesting, sense of humor, deep subject matter knowledge, effective communicator, makes learning easy and real, and has a positive rapport with students.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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# CHAPTER I

## Introduction

### *Overview*

The following thesis is a report of a qualitative study that profiles 3 outstanding educators from the Province of Prince Edward Island who have been recognized provincially or nationally for their teaching excellence.

There is an appreciable amount of research on teacher effectiveness and the characteristics of outstanding teachers, but there are few studies that use in-depth interviews as a method of data collection with participants who are deemed “outstanding,” and limited information given in narrative form about what they do, how they do it, and why they do it so well. By generating a profile based upon such interviews, this research should help other educators learn from those who have been recognized for their outstanding teaching practices.

Easterly’s (1983) study involved interviewing participants to discover their perceptions about their professions and themselves. Her discoveries allowed a view into the real lives of outstanding teachers. Easterly’s dynamic investigation has helped shape this research study. Although I have not replicated her work, I have hopefully added to her findings by profiling 3 outstanding teachers from a different geographic location.

My study looked at 3 teachers’ personal and educational backgrounds as well as their teaching practices and experiences. My aim was to examine, through in-depth interviews, the characteristics and practices of these outstanding teachers and

to learn how they have reached the top of their careers.

The focal questions that were explored in the research were:

1. How do outstanding teachers view themselves, their profession, and their students?
2. What are some of the motivational techniques and classroom practices used by outstanding teachers to encourage students to achieve?
3. How do these teacher participants describe characteristics of an outstanding teacher?
4. How do students describe an outstanding teacher?
5. How is a positive teacher-student relationship fostered?

This investigation also involved interviews with past and/or present students of the 3 participants. It was essential to the study that the student participants shared their insights about these teachers as it allowed for a deeper understanding of what makes them outstanding educators. To introduce some of the work that has been done in this field I have included these two quotations:

When referring to teacher-student relationships, Jacobson (1982) states that “Students’ own relationships with teachers were valued higher than a teacher’s actual performance in the classroom, either with technique or content.” (p. 2) She also concluded, “An outstanding teacher establishes a relationship with students that motivates and excites them about the subject matter and encourages intellectual thinking and academic discipline.” (p. 3) This supports the other literature I reviewed which suggested a strong teacher-student relationship was an essential part of an

effective classroom; thus, this construct has been further explored throughout the investigation. Jacobson (1982) states:

If a mold was made to produce an outstanding teacher from the list of characteristics they described, we would have a teacher that genuinely loves students and is concerned for their academic, intellectual and personal growth; has a vast knowledge and love for the subject matter, which are communicated to students; organizes courses with current methods that stimulate learning, produce intellectual growth and evaluate accurately; is concerned and interested in education, learning and teaching as a whole; and has a personality containing likeable and enjoyable qualities. These characteristics outline a job more than well done. In students' view a teacher that fits this mold is truly an outstanding teacher, deserving recognition and reward.(p. 2)

My study included 3 Prince Edward Island teachers who were considered to be outstanding and have been the recipients of provincial or national awards or have received special recognition for their outstanding educational practices. McKay's (1991) case study supports my quest for outstanding teachers as participants. In her study she notes that teachers who have been deemed "outstanding" have not been recognized as participants in a lot of research about teacher effectiveness. I consulted with the Prince Edward Island Teachers' Federation and colleagues in the teaching profession for names of potential candidates who had been recognized for their teaching excellence and created a list. I met with a few individuals, and for confidentiality reasons they shall remain unnamed, who reviewed the list of potential candidates and helped choose those who best met the selection criteria (see Appendix A) of the study. The unidentified individuals who helped compose this list of participants were chosen based on the position they presently held in the

educational field, their years of experience, and the knowledge they had about educators on Prince Edward Island. From these newly generated lists, I looked for names that overlapped. From these, I invited 3 people to participate in the study. Had any of these participants declined, candidates on the reserve list would have been contacted. I have not considered any people on the list who have retired from the profession. I felt that it was important to restrict my study to those actively engaged in teaching.

My aim was to invite participants of different ages, gender, and those teaching at various grade levels. I hoped that they would represent elementary and secondary levels with specialty areas. Two females and one male were chosen as participants for this study. They represented both the elementary and secondary levels and specialized in different areas of instruction. Due to the small population of teachers that were considered for this research, no further information will be provided about their teaching histories. Participants were invited to take part in a 1-2 hour in-depth interview. "Interviews allow the researcher to understand the meanings that people hold for their everyday activities." (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 110)

The teacher participants were each asked to nominate 5 students whom they felt they had influenced, or with whom they had shared a positive teacher-student relationship, in past or present years. Past students were defined as those who had had instruction from the participating teacher not more than 5 years ago. Two of the 5 nominees were randomly selected and invited to participate in a 15-25 minute in-depth interview. This selection process has ensured the anonymity of the students

selected for interviewing purposes. If the selected students had declined to participate, other nominees would have been invited.

The backbone of my study comes from the knowledge and descriptive information collected from both the outstanding educators and their past or present students. I have answered the questions stated in my introduction, and created a profile of an outstanding teacher. This “profile” represents the character sketch that I was searching to create. It has evolved from the life narratives and stories the participants offered with regards to how and why they do their jobs so well. I felt it was important to have a document that shared the ideals and teaching strategies of those who have been recognized for their excellence. The information I have discovered through this research should be helpful to teacher educators and teachers in the school system. This research should add to the present groundwork already established for teacher education programs and facilitate the development of effective teaching strategies. However, the findings in this study are applicable in many different settings and they have significance for any individual who wishes to apply them.

### ***SIGNIFICANCE AND POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION***

The research question that I have chosen, “What is the profile of an outstanding teacher?”, has generated new ideas and concepts for Prince Edward Island educators. It has also aided in providing a model that will explicate the qualities and practices of an outstanding teacher. On a personal level, this research has also “quenched my thirst” for knowledge in an interest area that inspires and

motivates me as an educator searching for excellence. My research findings may contribute to the literature on effective teaching so that other educators can incorporate these new insights into their own daily academic and non-academic practices. By analyzing effective teachers I have explored the phenomenon of why they are considered to be outstanding in their profession (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In addition, this research has celebrated some of the wonderful events happening in Prince Edward Island classrooms.

By hearing the real voices of both the teachers and their students by means of in-depth interviewing, and by analyzing the grassroots of outstanding teaching from both points of view, we have two perspectives on outstanding teachers. The statements and narratives from teachers and their students have provided rich and valuable description for this study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

The potential significance of this investigation is to broaden knowledge and further understanding in this area. As a researcher, I hoped to bridge some of the gaps that I had found while reviewing the literature. For example, there was little information that I could find in past research literature that documented outstanding teachers' own accounts of teaching excellence. There were studies about effective teachers that incorporated both teachers' and students' perspectives, however, there were few studies that included teacher participants who had been deemed "outstanding." Also, I discovered that there was evidence from related literature and professional conferences that supported a genuine interest in this phenomenon. Easterly (1983) states, "In short, the data base about outstanding teachers must be

expanded so that a solid foundation of knowledge can be shared."( p. 97)

This study has significance for research methodology as the design has provided a somewhat new dimension to research traditions that have already been established in previous investigations about teachers who have been considered "outstanding." For example, Jacobson (1982) reported on outstanding faculty at the University of North Dakota that were nominated by their students for outstanding teacher awards. Students' descriptions of these educators were used as her method of data collection. However, these outstanding teachers did not participate in in-depth interviews to share their views, opinions or experiences.

Aksoy (1998) used surveys and open-ended questions to collect information from 170 Turkish elementary students. The data Aksoy collected were students' opinions of what made a good teacher. However, Aksoy did not interview teachers for this study.

McKay (1991), along with other methods, interviewed "Teacher of the Year" award winners, principals, students, and members of the community for her case study.

My study has asked both outstanding teachers and students for their perspectives about what makes an outstanding teacher. At the same time, this study described and profiled teachers who have been recognized for their teaching excellence.

There was also potential significance for teaching practice in this research as the findings may aid in improving professional practice. Paoni (1989) formulated

a collection of instructional methods and characteristics of effective teachers to share with other educators. This collection of resources included among other items, a summary of research findings in the area of outstanding teaching.

A mountain climber aspires to reach the summit of the mountain. He or she may stumble along the journey, make it only half way, or admire Earth's beauty from its snow capped top. We can learn a lot from those who have found the determination and used their skills to reach for the sky. We can also learn a lot from teachers who have persevered to reach for the stars and have become effective teachers. This passage describes my own personal interest in learning more about effective teachers.

### ***FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH QUESTION***

In reviewing related literature various themes have emerged about what made an effective teacher. Some of these themes were: knowledge for the subject area they were teaching, excellent communication skills, and love of children (Jacobson, 1982; Easterly, 1983; Shanoski & Hranitz, 1991) organization (Jacobson, 1982; Easterly, 1983) and teacher-student relationship variables (Jacobson, 1982; Aksoy, 1998; Burke and Nierenberg, 1998). These outstanding teachers appeared to be effective because of their rapport with students and their knowledge in the subjects they were teaching. One teacher, who was highlighted in a case study, was a self-esteem builder, had a positive attitude, and hoped that students felt good in her class (Nowacek & Saunders, 1989). My study continued to search for categories and patterns relating to effective teachers (Marshall & Rossman, 1999); additionally, it

focused on the profiles of effective teachers and the practices they employed on a day-to-day basis. My research questions directed the study while at the same time allowed for flexibility.

### ***LIMITATIONS***

As Patton (cited in Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 42) says, "There are no perfect research designs. There are always trade-offs." The following discusses the possible limitations of this study.

Firstly, the sample size was small and was taken from one of the three school districts in Prince Edward Island. The study excluded teachers from the other two school districts in the province and also those who had retired from the profession. Only outstanding teachers who had won provincial or national awards or had been recognized in some way for their outstanding educational practices were considered for this study. Therefore, the sample pool from which I chose my participants was limited to a small number of educators. This facilitated participant selection, however, it made maintaining anonymity an even more arduous task. It was vital that no one recognized the candidates that I was profiling.

Due to the sample size, this study yielded results that are not generalizable. This means that if teachers followed the routines, beliefs and classroom practices that had worked for the profiled outstanding educators, it does not guarantee that they too would become outstanding educators. The reason for this is the human element that is so important in teaching. However, my profiles of these outstanding teachers and their practices has offered insight into effective teaching even though

the specific results will not be generalizable.

The criteria for participant selection is also a limitation: there are many outstanding teachers who have not been recognized for their teaching excellence and therefore do not meet the criteria for this inquiry.

Participating students' age differences may be considered a limitation as it may affect the quality of the responses they give about an outstanding teacher participant. Students' academic pursuits ranged from the intermediate grades to the university level.

A final limitation is that the outstanding teachers in this study have only been interviewed for data collection; observation of their practice has not taken place largely due to time and financial constraints.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This literature review provides a broader view of past research designs, data collection methods, and findings that have been discovered in previous studies.

The preliminary search that was conducted used the ERIC, Psyc. Info., Academic Elite Search, and EBSCOHOST databases as a means of gathering primary and secondary literature.

To facilitate a productive search, the following descriptors were selected: teacher-student relationship, outstanding teacher profiles, classroom practices, teacher effectiveness, teacher impact on student achievement, how teachers motivate students, instructional variables for effective teaching, effective teacher characteristics, outstanding teachers, student motivation, student achievement, and student evaluation of teacher performance. The searches were conducted by both author and subject fields, and the pertinent literature spread between the years 1982 and 2001.

To commence, I searched the topic “effective/outstanding teacher” and defined a clear understanding of the term and what it had meant in earlier studies. In some studies an effective teacher was someone whose students showed the most academic gains. In my study I focused on describing 3 teachers who had been recognized for their teaching excellence. Academic gains of their students were not studied. The next step connected the data I had found with an approach that profiled the outstanding teacher participants in my study who inspired and motivated their

students to achieve.

In Shanoski and Hranitz (1991) elementary and secondary “Teachers of the Year” award winners answered questionnaires considering such elements as teacher characteristics, educational background and experience of outstanding teachers, important teacher tasks, evaluations of their teacher education program, reactions to educational trends and evaluation of schools at the local and national level. This was a continuation of their 1989 research which profiled “Teacher of the Year” award winners in Pennsylvania. The study was aimed at creating a profile at the national level about outstanding teachers. Both elementary and secondary teachers agreed that subject matter knowledge, caring/love of children, and excellent communication skills, were the key characteristics of a teacher. Once again certain themes that had been identified in other research findings about important teacher characteristics emerged from this investigation. Close to 70% of the award winning participants in this study considered themselves to be risk takers, and nearly 94% stated they would choose the same profession again. The participants also ranked teacher tasks in this study and elementary teacher participants chose “curriculum selection that met students’ needs” the most frequently. Secondary teachers chose the “ability to challenge and motivate students in their learning” the most often. Similarly, Ploghoft and Moden (1989) discovered in their inquiry that a key part of effective teaching was motivating and challenging students.

Easterly’s (1983) study involved interviewing outstanding elementary school teachers to discover their values, attitudes, and perceptions of themselves and their

work. A pilot study was conducted before beginning her research and graduate students were asked to invite to class an outstanding teacher from their past. The graduate students helped devise the criteria for choosing the outstanding teachers and also helped select potential interview questions. The graduate students chose their outstanding teacher, based on the selection criteria, and invited this individual to their class. They used the questions that were selected to conduct in-depth interviews. After the pilot study, potential participant lists were generated for the actual study by approaching various staffs and asking for peer nominations using the established criteria. Easterly presented her work in narrative form and provided findings, quotations, examples, and summaries for the responses to each question by teacher participants.

Easterly (1983) referred to the stage development theory of Watts (1982). This theory suggests that teachers go through three different stages of development. The stages are survival, middle and mastery. Watts suggests that the first stage may begin with the student teaching experience and remain as one begins the teaching career. This stage, according to Watts, may continue for some time or may reappear throughout one's career. The second stage occurs when teachers gain more comfort with their teaching. The final stage is characterized as one who "is working smoothly within the context of the school and of his/her own personality" (Watts, as cited in Easterly, p. 2).

Easterly (1983) stated, "More descriptive research, however, is needed about outstanding teachers." (p. 110) This statement supported my pursuit of creating a

profile of outstanding teachers in Prince Edward Island.

Easterly's (1983) study discovered, among other things, the teaching strategies that educators felt were important. In one summary she noted that these participants felt there was a need to vary the presentation of lessons and that planning was very important.

One interesting fact presented in Easterly (1983) was that when teachers were asked to describe themselves, they all had different descriptions. However, five similar characteristics were stated a few times each including: caring/loving, organized, open to listening to other view points, enthusiastic, and a friend. The assumption is present that the human element plays a role and many different people can be considered outstanding teachers. This discovery suggests that there is no one particular combination of characteristics that make an outstanding teacher and many variations are possible.

Easterly (1983) did not interview students as a method of data collection but she did ask the teacher participants to share how they thought their students might describe them. Some of the phrases that were given were: "comfortable to be with," "caring," "did special things," "sense of humor," and "expects a lot." One teacher in the study shared how she did a lot of cooking with her class.

The teachers in Easterly (1983) were also asked to explain what they thought were the characteristics of an outstanding teacher. Some of the characteristics mentioned were: "caring," "innovative," "organized," and "feel good about themselves." According to Easterly, a teacher who cares "is one who is kind, child-

oriented, humanistic, cares about the job, puts students first, carries work home if she needs to, is dedicated and committed.”(p. 97) One surprising finding was that, “Maintain good relationships with students and staff” was mentioned by only 2 participants.(p. 100) I found this surprising as the importance of teacher- student relationships has been evident in both my study and others such as Jacobson (1982). However, other responses given by the participants did suggest the importance of the teacher-student rapport.

When Easterly (1983) asked the teachers about their instructional techniques 8 of the 20 teachers responded that a variety of teaching techniques were required. One teacher responded, “I can’t expect them all to learn the same way so I try to do as many different methods, techniques as possible, so I can reach them all.”(p. 28) Other teachers noted the importance of organization, planning, rewards, structure and good explanations. Easterly also includes in her study a summary that states:

A profile of an outstanding teacher can be formulated from the responses of the teachers in this study. The teacher would be a caring, innovative, and organized person. In addition, teachers who matched this profile would feel good about themselves, like their students, know their subject matter and how to get it across, be effective communicators, have a sense of humor and be continual learners. (p. 102)

Kesner (1994) discussed among other things, teacher-child relationships in his study. As teacher-student relationships have been explored in this study, two relevant quotes are taken from his work. He states:

Research on children’s social development suggests that the adult-child relationship is an important context for children’s development. Data indicates that the quality of children’s intimate relationships

with parents is predicated of their social adjustment and academic achievement in school.(e.g., Cohn, 1990 as cited in Kesner, 1994, p. 3)

In addition to parents, children's teachers often become a significant figure in a young child's life. The teacher spends a substantial amount of time with the child each day, assuming many of the same roles as parents. Yet, little is known about the effects of this relationship on children's development. However, the research that has been done in this area indicates that teacher-child relationships may have their own unique influences on children's development. (Howes, Matheson & Hamilton 1994 as cited in Kesner, 1994, p. 3)

In a 1994-95 Laboratory Fellows Teacher Recognition Program, four rural educators were recognized for work they did utilizing classroom technology. One of the recognized teachers states:

Children and learning have always been a priority for me. I teach because I love children and am filled with joy when students become actively involved and excited about their learning. My teaching philosophy is very simple: Each child is a unique individual. (Outstanding Teaching Practices Series, 1994-1995, p. 6)

Burke and Nierenberg (1998) researched inspirational teaching from the student's point of view. They concur that there is not a lot of research literature about inspirational teaching. They included a powerful quote in their work that encapsulates the importance of inspirational, outstanding teachers. They state, "The basic idea of inspirational teaching is of such merit that it, quite literally, is carved in limestone at the entrance to the School of Education on the Indiana University campus: 'Teachers must inspire as well as instruct.'"( p. 2)

Burke and Nierenberg (1998) also made reference to Noddings (1992) and her work toward caring schools. They note that Noddings suggests that children will

only achieve academically if they believe they are truly cared for by their teachers. Similarly, from the students' perspectives, inspirational teachers were considered to be ones who cared, had a positive attitude, and were dedicated to students. One student spoke about one of her teachers stating, "What was her secret, you may ask? How did she earn every child's admiration and respect? It is simple, . . . She gave children the safety, respect, and most of all the LOVE that all children need."(p. 8)

In McKay's (1991) case study of outstanding Iowa "Teachers of the Year" she found that these teachers felt that their students would identify them as caring no-nonsense individuals who were enthusiastic. Similarly, one parent who was interviewed for the study stated the following about one of the teacher participants, "She individualizes a great deal. I think she grades on potential. I've never heard her belittle a child; she never makes a negative comment about her students."(p. 9) In addition, teachers in this same study were seen by others to be life-long learners; they were also perceived by the researcher as those who were polite and offered much respect to their students.

Bain and Others [sic] (1989), examined the effective teaching practices of 50 female first grade teachers whose students had achieved academic gains in math and reading. This study was aimed at discovering how teacher participants promoted learning in math and reading. Thirty percent of these participants had decided that they wanted to become educators when they were in elementary school. The study found among other things that:

These teachers consistently displayed similar affective qualities.

Enthusiasm in the form of “acting”, demonstrating, and role-playing activities on the part of the teacher was prominent. Having positive attitudes toward children, emphasizing positive behavior and praising success were observed as common. Having and using a sense of humor to promote learning and motivate students were often observed. Finally, “a love of children” seemed to permeate the entire professional repertoire in nearly all of the observations.(p. 18)

“Research suggests that when teachers plan instruction well and treat lessons as meaningful and worthwhile learning experiences, students will view the class as more valuable and interesting.” (Marshall, 1987; Newman, 1988; Stevenson, 1990; Stodolsky, 1988 as cited in Phillips, Fuchs, and Hamlett, 1996, p. 25)

Deiro (1994), looked at 2 effective secondary teachers and the bonds they formed with their students. She administered four 90 minute interviews with these teachers and recorded 3 days of observation. She also interviewed 4 students and 4 parents in her research for one hour each. One of the reasons these teachers were selected as participants for her study was because of their reputation for making healthy bonds with their students. Deiro found that both these teachers cared a great deal about their students, “These teachers view teaching as an opportunity to be of service to other human beings in a meaningful way.”( p. 12)

Both teachers who participated in Diero’s (1994) study were not people pleasers and viewed themselves as risk takers. They were both considered to be genuine people who loved their work and were respectful to their students. Real life experiences used to make analogies while teaching were used by one of the participants to foster teacher-student bonding, while the other participant found that

mingling and talking with students was key. Diero notes, “Teaching students who come to school emotionally and socially depleted is one of the primary challenges that faces today’s educators. Developing close and trusting relationships between students and teachers may be an important technique to allay this challenge.”(p. 24)

Willems and Clifford (1999) analyzed the characteristics of effective middle school teachers and found among other things that a positive environment, organization, planned lessons, caring, dedicated, risk takers, flexible, and creative presentation of subject matter were the characteristics that emerged along with the idea that these teachers “use hands-on, experientially based, real life activities to present new ideas.”(p. 2)

Pearl and Campbell (1999) commence their investigation about the perceptions of at-risk students and teacher effectiveness by stating that “Researchers have examined the role of teacher perspectives in students’ academic trajectories, but students own voices concerning experiences with teachers seldom have been heard.”(p. 1) This quote supports the need for interviewing students for studies relating to teacher effectiveness. The African American students in this study highlighted characteristics of effective teachers. “Four characteristics consistently emerged as critical for effective teachers: good interpersonal skills, the ability to communicate subject matter well through good instructional methods, the ability to motivate students, and not allowing ethnicity to affect their treatment or expectations of students.”(p. 1) Again, the importance of caring is demonstrated in the literature, “Various research has shown that effective teaching must address not only the

cognitive but also the affective [i.e., feelings, attitudes, and values] dimensions of a student's life." ( McCabe, 1995 as cited in Peart & Campbell, 1999, p. 4)

"The interviewees were very clear that a major factor in determining how teachers were perceived by them was the extent to which the teacher was able to establish a positive, caring relationship with students." (Peart & Campbell, 1999, p. 4)

Demmon-Berger's (1986) booklet presents 15 years of observations made through research about effective teacher characteristics and techniques. Some of the characteristics of effective teachers that are listed include: good managers, uses systematic instruction techniques, have high expectations of students and themselves, caring, democratic in their approach, flexible and imaginative. This booklet was created as a practical guide for teachers.

In a Caribbean case study, which involved 220 students and 90 teachers, Richardson and Thomas (1989) identified the characteristics of effective teachers. The characteristics that were found by both teachers and students to be valuable were: subject matter knowledge, planned lessons, examples given, and the teacher's knowledge of student learning.

Prescott (1988) revealed in her investigation that students cherished any learning when performed by inspiring teachers and that the area of instruction did not play a role.

Throughout the literature there have been many emerging themes and categories about teacher effectiveness, but there is also a need for more authentic

narratives from outstanding teachers and their pupils as to what has really shaped them. There were some obvious gaps in the reviewed literature. Therefore, there was a need for further study in this topic area. With my investigations some new links have been created between outstanding teachers and their pupils and how and why they do what they do.

Some of the themes that I have established with this literature review are that effective teachers seem to be caring, organized, imaginative, innovative, flexible, and respectful individuals. They seem to have a good understanding of the subject matter they teach, are excellent communicators, give examples, have a positive teacher-student rapport, are risk takers, feel good about themselves and enjoy what they do.

## CHAPTER III

### DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### ***OVERALL APPROACH AND RATIONALE***

The purpose of this research was to understand, construct, and provide valuable meaning from the information received from the participants in this study. I have investigated the phenomenon of outstanding teaching (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) and the relationships these teachers had with their students that nurtured a real desire for student motivation and achievement. I have focused on the characteristics and teaching techniques of 3 outstanding teachers by creating a profile that includes their own personal narratives. This is somewhat unique as previous research tends to lack this type of in-depth description of those identified as outstanding teachers (McKay, 1991).

I have selected 3 teachers who have been recognized, in some manner, for their teaching excellence. The sample has both male and female participants with differing grade levels and teaching assignments. As I have alluded to, the Prince Edward Island Teachers' Federation and colleagues in the teaching profession were invited to create a list of teachers who had been recognized for their teaching excellence. Then I reviewed this list with 3 selected individuals to determine which teachers best matched the selection criteria (see Appendix A). These 3 individuals were invited to help select the final list of participants based on the position they presently held in the field of education, their years of experience, and their knowledge of educators on Prince Edward Island. This list created a number of

reserve candidates had any teachers declined to participate. A set of criteria (see Appendix A) for the candidates I sought facilitated the nomination procedure and helped define the term “outstanding” teacher.

In-depth interviewing is commonly used to obtain rich description and data (Kvale, 1996). Therefore, it was my primary avenue of data collection. I followed the informal conversational approach (Patton, as cited in Marshall and Rossman, 1999) and the general topics that were covered involved the discovery of participants’ views about teaching, fostering a teacher-student rapport, and approaches used to motivate or inspire students to achieve (see Appendix B ).

A key part of this research was to describe these effective teachers and how they inspired or motivated their students to achieve using their various classroom practices. This study also discovered characteristics of outstanding teachers.

In addition to interviewing 3 outstanding teachers, I have conducted in-depth interviews with past and/or present students of teacher participants. The data collected from past and present students has contributed to identifying instructional and personal variables needed for outstanding teaching and student motivation (see Appendix C).

Each teacher participant was asked to nominate 5 past or present students whom they felt they had motivated to achieve or with whom they had shared a special rapport (see Appendix D). I asked teachers to nominate these student participants using the selection criteria largely because I wanted to explore the construct of teacher-student rapport as it had seemed to be an important element in

other studies such as Jacobson (1982). I randomly chose 2 students from each list of nominations with whom I have conducted interviews. These past and/or present students were invited for interviews to discuss the personal characteristics and instructional approaches of the nominated teachers. These students could have declined to participate in the study. However, by asking each teacher for 5 student nominees, a reserve list of possible participants was in place had any students declined to take part in the study.

When the data collection was completed, I transcribed and coded my findings in search of patterns or themes (Kvale, 1996). I looked for similarities in the data in regard to characteristics given for outstanding teachers and effective classroom practices. To do this I compared and analyzed teacher and student interviews. I also integrated my findings with those of other studies that I had reviewed in the related literature.

Nominations for teachers were drawn from one of the three school districts in Prince Edward Island. Those teachers who were considered for the study had been previously recognized for their teaching excellence. This enabled a specific population of teachers to be considered and did not allow the study to become too broad.

Both teachers and students were interviewed in a locale that they chose. It was very important that the participants were as comfortable as possible, and that the surroundings were as warm and inviting as they could be. I assumed that this would facilitate the interviewing process. Each participant was only interviewed once with

the actual length of interviews lasting between 1-2 hours for teacher participants and 15-25 minutes for student participants.

This study spanned an 8 month period from start to finish. I began in December 2001 and interviewed participants in March. The study was completed at the end of July 2001.

### **TRUSTWORTHINESS**

An integral part of all research is trustworthiness (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). A researcher's log was kept throughout the study. It was very important that the study's progress was recorded in detail. If such items were not written in the log, they may have been forgotten at a later date. This aided memory and made the information about the study more reliable. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed with the permission of participants. The responses were voluntary and any of the sections of the transcripts could have been amended if participants had so desired. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) state:

Time-honored procedures such as triangulation and negative case analysis and newer procedures such as member checks, peer debriefers, and audits are all utilized by interpretivist evaluators to enhance credibility of their inferences. This work can make no contributions unless it is perceived as credible and trustworthy. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1999 as cited in Wood, 2001, p. 48)

Trustworthiness was exercised in the form of member-checking, peer debriefing, and the creation of an audit trail. I member-checked by providing participants with a copy of the interview questions before the actual interview, and a copy of transcripts which they could have amended, as well, I offered them a

summary of the findings. Peer debriefing was done by consulting with my professors to discuss the progress of this research and checking for any evolving bias. I have also kept an audit trail should anyone wish to re-construct this study. This was done by keeping a researcher's log, audiotaped and transcribed in-depth interviews, and all abstracts and articles used in the literature review. All tape recorded data has been kept locked to ensure confidentiality. This raw data will be kept for 3 years to allow for the possible reconstruction of research conclusions. When this time has elapsed, the data will be destroyed. A dictaphone has been used to transcribe all of the interviews. As I alluded to, all participants received a transcript of their interview to confirm their responses and to add or omit data if they wished; this procedure helped to increase validity. Also, the codes and findings in my study that were found for each interview question were double checked. This was done by means of a lengthy procedure of reading each question in the findings section of the thesis and cross checking the responses with the actual interview transcripts question by question. These methods should ensure the trustworthiness of this study.

### ***BIAS***

My primary assumption for this study was that I felt outstanding teachers motivated and inspired their students to achieve. This bias should not hinder the findings of the study as I was not measuring the academic achievement of the participants' students. I sought to describe the teacher and create a profile of an outstanding teacher. Secondly, I have consulted with my research advisor to discuss the progress of the thesis work and watch for evolving bias.

## ***ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS***

I received ethical approval the Research Ethics Board of the University of Prince Edward Island. The school district, superintendent, and principals of participating schools were contacted and permission was requested and granted before any potential participants on the nominee's list were approached or contacted for their possible involvement in this study.

Written consent forms were signed by all teacher participants (see Appendix E), as well as all student participants and the parents or guardians of any participants under the age of 18 (see Appendix F). Also, interview questions for teachers and past or present students were explained in simpler terms by the researcher if the participants required further explanation. Teacher and student participants were asked if they had any questions about any of the interview questions before the interviews began. Participants could pass on any questions they did not wish to answer. Participants were able to withdraw from the study at any time up to a specified date.

Confidentiality of all participants was ensured and pseudonyms were used in the draft documents. Additionally, no reference was made in the study to a particular area of the province or a specific school. A great deal of care and creativity was taken to ensure confidentiality for both teacher and student participants. Confidentiality in the sample selection was fostered by generating a list of more participants than were actually needed for interviewing purposes.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS: TEACHER PARTICIPANTS

The findings are presented question by question just as they were coded using the interview transcripts. Each interview question was also coded across questions; many codes were used for each question and when this was complete the codes were grouped into emerging themes. The codes that did not fit into any theme were put in a group of their own and titled “leftovers.” (McMillan and Schumacher, 1997)

*Why did you decide to become a teacher and did anyone influence this decision? (Easterly, 1983, p. 11)*

All 3 participants spoke about their families when asked the question about why they had decided to become a teacher. Therefore, family is the first theme that developed. One participant mentioned that he had developed certain traits while being raised in a large family. A second participant noted that she had helped parent and teach her younger sister. The third participant’s mother was a teacher.

A second emergent theme that was mentioned by all 3 participants was a relationship with others. One participant mentioned that he had been told he had a “special way with kids” when he was young. A second participant had worked with a lot of children and the third participant used to play school with friends.

Personal reasons was the third emerging theme. One participant had decided he wanted to teach after 2 or 3 years into his Bachelor of Arts Degree. Another participant felt that she did not have enough science related courses for the nursing program and decided to try teaching. This participant also mentioned that she had

had a special interest in a dental hygienist program also. A third participant said that as a child she wanted to be a teacher and that teaching attracted her.

In the leftover category 2 participants mentioned that they had enjoyed their year spent earning their Bachelor of Education Degrees. One participant had applied to the Bachelor of Education Degree program, and was not accepted the first time. This participant was “heartbroken” but decided to apply again and was successful the second time.

***Do you have any role models or mentors in your life? If so who are they and why have you chosen them?***

Participants responded to this category stating that they all had more than one role model or mentor in their lives. One participant mentioned two teachers that she had had as educators in her schooling. Two mentioned peers that they worked with, while 2 also mentioned family members.

Special traits and characteristics of these role models or mentors emerged through discussion. Some of the words used to describe these people were: “someone you learned from,” “thirst for knowledge,” “wide range of abilities,” “highly skilled,” “good work ethic,” “pushes for excellence,” “perfectionist,” “gentle spirit,” “kind,” “interested in people,” “dressed nice,” “nurturer,” and “took a personal interest.”

Finally, 2 participants stated that these role models or mentors were helpful individuals from whom you learned. One participant felt that a certain peer had greatly helped her with new curriculum and described this individual saying, “She

really took me under her wing, she didn't have to but she did."

***What do you enjoy most about your job and why?***

One of the first themes to emerge from the responses given by all 3 participants was working with students. One participant thought his job offered him an opportunity to help students. Also, this participant mentioned that his job allowed for an opportunity to observe growth and learning. He mentioned that he enjoyed seeing the growth and observing the light going on. This same participant mentioned that teaching offered him an opportunity to see "kids just enjoying life." He also felt that he played a part in making their learning real in a way that could excite them.

"We'll talk about oral hygiene, or we'll talk about somebody who had a tooth pulled, or you know, whatever, that makes it real and makes it fun."

This second budding theme related to how students added to their lives. It was mentioned by participants as an important factor relating to the enjoyment of their jobs. Ways that students added to their lives were mentioned as: "keeps me young," "keeps me connected," and "enjoy working with young people." One participant stated, "Here I am wracked with arthritis and I'll go into work and I'll be totally pain free, you know."

The responses that did not fit into any theme were as follows: one participant enjoyed the curriculum, and one mentioned that she enjoyed her job because of the people she worked with.

***How would you describe yourself? (Easterly, 1983, p. 43)***

When participants were asked to describe themselves 2 mentioned that they

had a high energy level. One of these responses came at the end of an interview when the participant was asked to add any additional comments. One participant mentioned that she was active.

Secondly, 2 participants said that they were dedicated. Two mentioned that they worked long hours for success, and 2 mentioned that they worked on Sundays; one of the 2 participants mentioned working on Sundays in another question area. One teacher said she was caring while one stated that she liked to do things well and enjoyed helping people. “Motivated” was used by another participant to describe herself.

Another category that developed was that these teachers had many interests. One participant stated that he was involved in many things. Another participant stated that she liked to be part of something while another mentioned that she had a variety of interests.

These teachers also felt that they were people-oriented. “Interested in people,” “outgoing,” and “challenge students,” were all mentioned once. “Sense of humor,” “fun,” “inquisitive,” “serious to a point,” and “takes on challenges” were also mentioned once as ways these individuals described themselves.

### ***What do you think makes an outstanding teacher?***

The first theme that emerged here was knowledge of subject area. One participant mentioned that an outstanding teacher has a deep knowledge of the subject they are teaching and a desire to learn more. Two participants thought that an outstanding teacher loved the subject they were teaching. Two participants

mentioned that these teachers had an expertise in the subject area. One participant referred to the concept of master teacher. Also, one participant stated this about a particular outstanding teacher, "What made him outstanding was, I guess, you know, he had an insatiable desire to learn more . . . he has a broad deep knowledge of what he was doing."

A second theme was presentation of the lesson. One participant said that an outstanding teacher, "lit a spark, was a performer, appealed to the senses, made learning real, had excitement about learning, and could be a little crazy." Another participant mentioned that an outstanding teacher, "had good lessons, was up to date with the curriculum, and was flexible."

A third theme was a rapport with students. One participant mentioned that an outstanding teacher was caring while 2 also mentioned that they were understanding. One participant noted that an outstanding teacher shared things about themselves with students and "let them know you're a real person too." Another stated, "I think a teacher has to have an interest in the students and be able to relate to kids who come from different backgrounds and have different challenges to work with, be it home life, or learning difficulties in certain areas, and so on." Other notables mentioned once in this theme were: has a good rapport with students, sense of humor, role model, involved in school life and very demanding.

Codes that did not fit any theme were: enjoy what they do, and proud of their school.

***Have you ever been the student of an outstanding teacher? If so, what do you remember most about them?***

To begin, I must note that some participants felt that they had answered this question earlier in the interview and these findings will be used in this question. All 3 participants responded “yes” to this question. Other themes emerged from this question. The first one was teaching style and subject matter knowledge. One participant felt that the outstanding teacher personalized lessons, was a performer and made lessons real. Two participants felt that these outstanding teachers had a deep knowledge of the subject they were teaching.

Personal characteristics formed the second theme. Two participants mentioned that these outstanding teachers had a sense of humor. Other characteristics that were mentioned once were: laughs a lot, interesting, gentle, kind, and enthusiastic.

A third theme was formed by memories these participants still recalled about these outstanding teachers. These memories were all mentioned once and were as follows: “went beyond the norm,” “lit a spark,” “interested in people,” “their subject interested me,” and “students felt comfortable.”

***How would you describe your classroom environment?***

The first theme that emerged here was visual. One participant mentioned that it was difficult to find space in the classroom to hang an 8 1/2 by 11 sheet. All 3 participants said that you would find things hanging in their classrooms such as posters. The third participant also specified that the posters that would be around her

classroom would be linked to the curriculum. Student work was also mentioned once as something on display in their classroom.

A second theme that evolved as participants described their classrooms was homelike environment. Two participants even used “homelike environment” to describe their classrooms. Two participants mentioned relaxed students. One participant mentioned having such things as a CD player and microwave in the classroom. This same participant added comments about the benefits music added to the classroom environment. This participant felt that playing music helped set the tone and stated, “And so it’s worthwhile, I would not teach without music now. . . the most powerful under-utilized in education medium that exists.” Another participant mentioned that she has Kleenex and candy on her desk. One participant mentioned having small pets in the classroom; this gives some students the first experience of having a pet. Students having certain responsibilities or duties in the classroom and developing a sense of family was also mentioned by this participant.

One code that was left over was explained as a “floating classroom.” One participant did not have her own classroom, thus, making this particular question a bit difficult for her to answer .

***What do you expect from your students in the classroom?***

This question evoked the same response from 2 participants - they had high expectations. One participant stated, “You know, as I mentioned earlier, my challenge is to try to motivate kids to reach their full potential, whatever that may be.” Two participants mentioned that students were expected to show respect. Other

responses that were mentioned once were as follows: “treat school as a job,” “be to class on time,” “be prepared,” and “expect the best.” One participant also mentioned that there were different expectations for different students in the classroom and that the student’s potential should be celebrated.

***What techniques do you use to motivate your students to learn and achieve?***

Extrinsic rewards was a strong theme in motivating students for these participants. One teacher used trivia as a class activity and awarded prizes based on the accuracy of responses. Another participant mentioned the use of stickers as a form of reward. One participant offered a money prize to the first student who contacted an author whose work they were reading in class. In this particular case the student would ask the author to write a letter back to them or their teacher and this letter would be read to the class. The author could also contact the teacher by phone and confirm that contact had been made by the student. The participant who used this method of motivation felt it really challenged her students.

Building a positive rapport with students emerged as another strong theme. One participant considered the class as one big family, therefore, they spent time bonding as a family. This participant hoped that the classroom would offer some sense of fun for everyone. All 3 participants mentioned the importance of one-to-one talks with students. One participant mentioned a sense of caring, stating, “I do care deeply about each child in the classroom.” Another participant used personal journals as a form of dialogue between teacher and student. The students could write in these journals about their own lives. This participant would sit among students

and journal with them. Each Friday she would collect the journals to read and share feedback. She always left her own journal on her desk for students to read and respond to and encouraged them to do so. She also made it clear that whoever wanted to read her journal could, but she would be the only one who would read their journals. Encouragement was also mentioned as a way of motivating students. This could be in the form of positive verbal or written comments. This same participant felt that encouragement was the technique she used for motivating students the most.

***What do you feel is the most important part of your job as a teacher?***

The participants in this study felt students were the most important part of their job. Some of the responses that were mentioned once under this particular theme were: “ensuring the student’s safety,” “challenging students,” “exciting students about learning,” “helping students,” and “making a difference in the lives of each student.”

A second theme was encouragement. One participant cited, “I think one of the most important parts of the job as a teacher is to motivate the kids to do their best and to try to encourage them to believe in themselves, take pride in their work, and to try to build up characteristics that will be life long for them.” The same participant stated, “At the same time, teaching them the curriculum is probably the utmost but you have to have the other concepts built up in order to get the kids ready to learn.”

***How did you feel when you were recognized for your excellence in teaching?***

This question yielded quite similar responses from the majority of

participants. Two of the 3 participants felt embarrassed, honored, and humbled when they found out they were being recognized for their teaching excellence. Two participants also felt that what they were doing in the classroom was just part of the job. The statements that were mentioned once were “shocked” and “excited.” All 3 participants felt that there were many outstanding teachers in the profession. One participant expressed, “And I felt that when I got the award that it wasn’t just me, it was a whole school community that adds to the ability to be able to function, to build up the rapport with your students, and that kind of thing.”

***What do you find to be the most frustrating part of your job?***

The most common answer among all three participants was that students did not work to their potential. “Bureaucracy, lack of funding, large class sizes and a lack of parental support” were areas of frustration for one participant. This same participant mentioned that more resources were needed to help save students and make them literate, while at the same time gifted students need to be challenged. Another participant found it frustrating when certain teachers did not get to know the student as an individual. This participant felt that teachers need to look at the student’s circumstances. The third participant found it frustrating when students came to school and were not ready to learn. This participant found it frustrating when she tried unsuccessfully to reach these students and inform them about the importance of an education.

***If your past or present students could remember three things about you, what would they be?***

Each of the 3 participants had different responses for this question except “being approachable” which was specified by 2 participants. All responses that were mentioned once are as follows: “interesting,” “fun,” “caring,” “crazy,” “someone who accepted them,” “someone who expected their best,” “someone who liked and knew their subject,” “someone who loved teaching,” and “someone who was efficient getting back assignments and was prepared for class.”

***How do you deal with the everyday stress of being a teacher? (Easterly, 1983, p. 62)***

One of the first themes that emerged here was entertainment. One participant mentioned that he liked to listen to music. The same participant mentioned going away on March Break as a way to handle stress. A second participant mentioned the importance of taking holidays and getting away.

A second theme was sports and activities. One participant enjoyed swimming and mentioned that skiing used to be a winter activity. This same participant mentioned a love for the garden and expressed that it was therapeutic. Other responses that were part of this theme were going to the beach, working out, and spending time with family and friends.

Prevention was the third theme which evolved from this question. Two participants said that they really enjoy the summers. One participant noted that meditation helped deal with stress. One participant tried not to take home the stress

from the workplace. One participant mentioned the importance of taking care of both your physical and mental health. The final element mentioned here was to make sure you do not overdo it.

One response that did not fit into any theme came from a participant who responded “not well” when discussing the topic of dealing with stress.

***If you could offer advice for beginning educators, what would that be?***

Firstly, a theme I labeled “choose wisely” emerged from participants’ responses. One participant said that beginning educators should “Think long and hard . . . really look at why you’re choosing this profession.” The same participant declared, “Teaching is a very high stressed profession, no doubt about it . . . make sure you love kids, that you enjoy working with them . . . it can be the most rewarding profession.” A second participant commented, “teaching is not an easy job. If you’re going into teaching, you have to go into it because that’s what you want to do.”

Secondly, get involved. Two participants felt that you could never be too involved. Elements that were mentioned here include “volunteering” and “getting to know students.” One participant said, “Get to know them and what they’re like at noon hour, when you’re on duty, and when it’s not sort of a closed environment of a class . . . if they play basketball, go watch them.” The same participant said, “Teaching is getting into things and learning from them, so don’t be afraid to get involved -- volunteer.”

Finally, one participant mentioned the incredible joy received from having

an impact on students. “When you, at the end of the year, walk down the walkway to the buses and you’ve got two kids that have latched onto each arm and you look down and they’re watery-eyed and I’m looking down at them through watery eyes, you know that well, you know this is not [sic] too many people have the luxury of having that meaning in their lives, that they have impacted a child as positively as that degree.”

***How do you organize your lessons to meet the challenges of an inclusive classroom?***

The first theme that developed here was learning styles. One participant used various visual and auditory tools to reach students’ learning needs. This participant suggested “a broad range of stimuli in as many different sensory applications as you can possibly manage in a classroom.” At the same time this participant stated, “I think it’s making sure everything you do has incorporated all learning styles and that we’re constantly switching back and forth to appeal to every different style of learning.”

Secondly, personal contact emerged as a theme. One participant said it was important to make yourself available to students experiencing difficulties even if it meant giving up your noon hour. One-to-one help was also mentioned as an effective method for helping students grasp or reinforce a concept or skill.

A third theme was program adjustment. One participant mentioned modifying the program to meet the student’s learning needs. Two participants mentioned the importance of working with support staff, teacher assistants,

volunteers, and expecting the best from each student. One participant mentioned that advanced courses for gifted students were being offered at some schools while also citing the importance of offering students challenging questions and problems related to the subject they were studying. One participant felt that gifted students were not focused on as much as they should be. Two participants mentioned that they let gifted students participate quite freely in their classes. These gifted students could teach the rest of the class an area they were particularly knowledgeable in or they could speak from their seats about something they knew a lot about, e.g., an author's work.

One code that did not fit into any other themes was "encouraging students to write external exams."

***Could you explain the techniques you use for discipline in your classroom?***

In response to this question, 2 participants stated that talking to parents and one-to-one talks with students were techniques they utilized for disciplining students. One participant mentioned the wonderful benefits of using the program One-Two-Three Magic in the classroom. This program works on a tick and consequence approach. If a student forgets to complete homework he/she get one tick beside his/her name on a chart on the wall and when he/she gets a certain number of ticks it may mean a lost noon hour or a phone call home, etc. The ticks are erased at the end of each month allowing the student to have a fresh start with each new month. One participant found that a quiet whisper into the student's ear about changing a behavior worked well. One participant said that she treats all her students with

respect and expects the same in return. A final technique mentioned was to try and reason with the student.

***How do you foster a teacher-student rapport?***

Building a foundation for the rapport emerged as the first theme. One participant mentioned that teachers should let students realize that they are human beings. Starting off with clearly established guidelines as to what is expected in the classroom was viewed as being important as well as being consistent. “Do not start off trying to be their friend . . . but become their friend as you teach.” One participant mentioned that you should be a little crazy and have fun with the students. “Let your inhibitions, let your guards down, get up on that desk and do a step dance.” One participant took the approach that she expected everyone to get along well together. This participant thought that teachers should be open and share things about themselves with their students, such as their own writing. One participant mentioned the importance of having a positive attitude.

A second theme that materialized was to learn about students. One participant stated that it was important to take an interest in students and find out something about them. Something else that was mentioned was the importance of giving students a chance to start fresh. One participant mentioned the importance of taking an interest in students. An example of this would be to find out if they were on a school team, and by building a rapport in the corridors outside of the classroom. One code that did not fit into the above themes was captured in this statement, “Students that react well for me may not for the next person and vice versa. We

don't win them all."

***If you had the chance to do it over again, would you become an educator again?***

***Why or why not? (Easterly, 1983, p. 93)***

The first answer and theme that emerged from 2 of the 3 participants was "yes." One participant said that it would be a difficult yes or no answer. Also, this participant stated that if the present teaching conditions were the same as when entering the profession, the answer would be yes. This participant mentioned interests in other careers such as business and the hospitality industry; however, he felt that the youthful exuberance of the students kept him youthful. He also cited that there were "magical moments in teaching that you just can't put into words." Another participant said that she would be a teacher again "in a heartbeat." She said she could not think of anything else she would rather be. The third participant enjoyed her career choice up to this point and would be an educator again if she had the chance to do it over. Although, this participant did mention that teaching today is a much different career than she had started out with. She did state that, "I never get up in the morning and say, oh, goodness, do I have to go to work today? And I feel lucky for that."

## **FINDINGS: STUDENT PARTICIPANTS**

This next section will share the discoveries from students' perspectives. These responses were coded in the same fashion as teachers' findings, question by question.

***What do(did) you enjoy most about school?***

When 6 past or present students of the 3 outstanding teacher participants were asked this question, 4 of them responded that they enjoyed the social part of school. Therefore, the first theme that emerged from this question, was the social aspect of school. Three participants mentioned friends. Also, getting out, lunch hours, and meeting people were all stated once each.

The second theme that developed had to do with the academic part of school. The responses that were given were: “like the classroom,” “want to better myself,” and “school is getting me where I want to go.” Two participants said that they enjoyed learning.

Extracurricular events, such as sports and intramural programs, were also mentioned once.

***How would you describe an outstanding teacher?***

This question evoked a lot of discussion by student participants and “personal characteristics” became the first theme. Two participants said that an outstanding teacher had a sense of humor, while 2 also felt that an outstanding teacher was enthusiastic. Some of the other responses that were stated once were as follows: someone who is approachable, interesting, and communicates well.

Teaching style became a second theme and participants’ answers referred to the importance of the teacher’s performance in the classroom. The responses that were stated once about outstanding teachers were: “they use expression,” “answer questions,” “are willing to help,” “like what they are doing,” “enjoy working with

students,” “use art,” “understand students’ needs and they can reach all different types of students.” One participant stated this about outstanding teachers, “They use like expression . . . doesn’t just read out of the book..”

Classroom environment was also viewed by the students to be very important. Two participants said that these teachers made it fun to learn in their classroom. One teacher used trivia as a class activity for the students. One student said that an outstanding teacher is, “Someone who makes you feel important, that you can do it, and had a lot of faith in you.” One other response was that these teachers don’t bring their problems to class.

***What are the qualities or characteristics of teacher A, B, or C?***

Once again personal characteristics became an emergent theme. This question related specifically to the teacher participant whereas, the previous question related to participants’ thoughts about outstanding teachers in general. Three out of the 6 participants stated that they thought their teacher was funny and had a sense of humor. Two participants felt their teacher was enthusiastic. Other characteristics that were mentioned once by participants were: “interesting,” “a lot different than other teachers,” “fun person,” “hip,” “caring,” “personable,” “your friend,” “approachable” and “nice.”

As in the previous question, teaching style developed into an obvious theme. Two participants mentioned that their teacher told stories. One participant related the importance of stories by saying, “You’d learn a lot from it because Teacher A has been to, like a lot of places and like it was really interesting.” Some of the other

participant responses that described their teacher's teaching style were that they took on extra tasks such as teaching students to play music, showed that they loved to teach, could maintain a strict classroom, related well to students, knew and loved the subject they were teaching, and always answered questions. One student explained her teacher's teaching style like this, "She just, I mean I can still picture her like bouncing across the classroom and she'd get so excited like doing a problem on the board or something, it was just, she was completely enthusiastic." Regarding the same teacher, a second student said, "Well, you can just tell by the way she talks and the way, like, she writes on the board, she's jumping around class. You can tell she wants to be there." Another participant described his teacher this way, " She was my favorite teacher out of Grades 1 to 12 . . . she's a parent and she's hip!"

A third theme that was discovered was the teacher's impact on students. One participant said that for his teacher he wanted to do all his class work as he felt it was important not to let his teacher down. Another student said, "She always was there to give me an extra little kick in the butt to get you going. She really believed in me . . . she kept telling me I could do it and she kind of pushed me to do it and keep trying and stuff and I did." A third student participant said this when talking about her teacher, "You always loved her class and she, she was really approachable, really personable in class but yet she could still sort of maintain a strict classroom too. And everyone just loved her. I mean it was a common, common thing that you heard."

***Do you feel that teacher A, B, C, could be considered an outstanding teacher?***

***Explain why or why not.***

All 6 participants answered this question affirmatively stating “yes.” The reasons for these affirmative responses varied from student to student. Excerpts are taken from the transcripts to explain students’ responses as these answers play great importance in this thesis work. The teacher participants will be referred to as teacher A, B, or C.

“Teacher A has his own style really, it’s interesting . . . it really takes your attention and like he always has order in the classroom and like everyone always respected him and paid attention to him. And I think that like a lot of people looked up to him and they didn’t want to displease him. They always wanted to make him like, you know, proud of them.”

“I think Teacher A could because I can’t imagine what my Grade Z year would have been like if I had of had another teacher . . . I wouldn’t have rathered (sic) any other teacher than him that year.”

“First of all, as I said, you were very comfortable around Teacher B . . . she organized the dances, so she was definitely involved in the student life.”

“Teacher B, I think she absolutely could be considered an outstanding teacher.”

“Just because everyone liked Teacher C so much and she really made learning the concepts, she just made it easy . . . to be able to do that is outstanding.”

“Teacher C made it seem so much easier than it really was . . . she could

make it seem easy and she helped like the people that couldn't get along well . . . so, like, the whole class seemed to move at a pace that was good for everyone."

With these responses some themes are evident: students respected these teachers, learning was fun, interesting and made easy, and students felt comfortable.

***How would you describe Teacher A, B, or C's classroom?***

One of the first themes to develop from this question was that these classrooms appealed to the senses. One of the participants mentioned that in their classroom there were lots of drawings. Another participant noted that their classroom was really visual. Other answers that contributed to this theme were as follows: music was played, classroom was very colorful, and posters and pictures were on the walls.

A second theme to emerge was how students described the overall classroom atmosphere or environment. These students gave responses that were similar but not exactly the same with the exception of class trivia which was mentioned by 2 participants. When students spoke about these teachers' classrooms certain descriptions arose. There were class pets, posters, pictures, interactive bulletin boards for class trivia, newspapers and encyclopedias and other forms of information, and there were plants hanging. One participant described his classroom as having a "nice atmosphere." Another participant described her classroom like this, "It was always a fun environment, it was relaxed, her enthusiasm just made it a really warm classroom." Other answers that followed this question were: "you could say anything and there was no stupid answer or question," "there wasn't

tension," "people weren't frustrated," "she was helping people," and our teacher had a "messy desk."

Thirdly, some of the other responses given by students that did not fit into a certain theme were: she was a second mother, she was very open, and she liked what she was doing.

***How did you feel when you were in Teacher A, B, or C's classroom?***

Three of the 6 participants said that when they were in these teachers' classrooms they felt comfortable. One participant said that he felt accepted and that he could "Say a joke every now and then." Another participant said that she felt "More like an individual, I guess . . . he never had favorites, I don't think . . . he just treated everyone like as their own person. And so you kind of felt special." A third student described how he felt saying, "It was a good atmosphere, like you know, you could tell jokes. You could say something funny or kind of smart and she enjoyed a good laugh, that's for sure." Other responses that were stated once each were as follows: "sensitive to students' needs," "didn't make students nervous," and "made you feel welcome."

***Could you take a moment to share any special memories you have about teacher A, B, or C?***

With this question evolved the message that teachers are real people and students seemed to enjoy getting to know that person. The special memories that students shared were a teacher's storytelling ability, how one teacher acted like a kid when they were on a school trip, how one teacher teased people, and one teacher was

“just like an angel” in the ways she helped others. One student participant said this, “A lot of people think of teachers as, you know, they’re not humans or whatever, but she’s very, you know she’d be just like my mother or anybody else’s mother.”

Other responses that did not fall into the theme mentioned above were: gave students lots of jobs and responsibilities such as getting televisions for class, loved teaching, and a discipline technique that seemed strict but humorous to one student.

***Do you think Teacher A, B, or C was a strict, fair, or easy teacher? Did he/she have any special rules for the classroom?***

Four of the 6 participants said that their teachers were not easy. All 6 participants did feel that their teachers were fair. One student said that his teacher was strict with the students that needed the extra discipline. Another student said that the teacher participant handled the classroom in a democratic fashion. A third student said that the teacher participant was “strict with his rules,” but he did it in a way that you never really felt like he was being strict. One student mentioned that their teacher followed the One-Two-Three Magic Program using a tick system each month. If students did not receive any ticks the teacher would give them a treat and this seemed to motivate students to do well. Respect was mentioned by 2 students. One student said that their teacher expected that you “respect yourself,” while the other student participant said that it was necessary to “respect other people” in his teacher’s class.

***In what ways, if any, has Teacher A, B, or C influenced you or made a difference?***

As with many of the other questions, there were many original responses

given by student participants. These are the answers that students gave: “taught me how to be completely organized,” “learned how to keep my priorities straight,” “learned you should always respect your friends,” “gave me confidence,” “influenced my course selection,” “made my year enjoyable,” and “our teacher was always thinking of everyone else.”

Two other participants stated that their teacher keeps in touch with them. Another participant said this, “I just wish I could have Teacher A again as a teacher, that’s all. Like once I finished Grade Z, I thought I’m never going to have him again as a teacher.”

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

From reading the related literature about outstanding and effective teachers, I became eager to add to the database and include my discoveries from both teachers' and students' perspectives. These participants' viewpoints have generated the necessary data to answer my initial research question, "What is The Profile of an Outstanding Teacher?"

My decision to choose "outstanding" teacher participants has been supported in the literature by McKay (1991) who described a need for more in-depth descriptions of these educators. Also, Easterly (1983) states "More descriptive research, however, is needed about outstanding teachers." (p. 110) I realized that there were many effective teachers in the Province of Prince Edward Island who had not received official recognition for the tremendous jobs they performed daily and this was of particular concern for me when I was deciding how to choose my sample of educators for this study. How could I draw only from a pool of participants who had been recognized for their teaching excellence while there were so many other teachers in the province who were considered to be "outstanding?" I made my decision based on what I read in the literature and where I thought new information needed to be generated.

At the same time, this method of participant selection provided a smaller, more manageable sample pool from which to invite candidates to participate. Finally, teacher participants in this study have been recognized as being

“outstanding” in their field; they must be respected for this accomplishment. Many teachers receive this recognition based on the nominations and recommendations of colleagues, administrators, and students. Therefore, I make the assumption that these teachers have been admired and honored for what they have given to their profession.

As I ventured through the personal journey of conducting this research, I was reminded throughout my work of the analogy I had made earlier about the mountain climber. I had begun my study at the bottom of the mountain with little knowledge of what I would encounter as I traveled onward. There were times that the hike seemed laborious while at other points along the way the directions seemed easier to follow. There were many peaks and valleys to cover to discover the best course to take and words of support, wisdom, and guidance echoed from my mentors and advisors every step of the way.

The teacher participants involved in this study had become teachers for several different reasons and indicated that family had shaped some of their decisions as well as their ability to create a rapport with others. They indicated that they had all been the students of outstanding teachers at one time or another during their lives and all mentioned that they had more than one mentor they had admired. These role models or mentors had special traits or characteristics that these participants valued.

The student participants involved in this study were at different points in their academic pursuits ranging from the public school system to the university level.

They all believed that their past or present teacher, who was involved in this study, could be considered an outstanding teacher.

As the researcher who conducted the in-depth interviews with these 9 individuals, I must state that I made my own observations about these participants during the interview process. I found that the 3 teacher participants displayed positive attitudes while taking part in this study and at the same time showed a genuine professional interest in their jobs and towards the lives of their students.

The student participants seemed eager and content to share information about their past or present educators. They seemed to show a lot of admiration and respect for these teachers throughout the interviewing process.

I found that the teacher participants in this study described themselves in several different ways throughout the investigation. When I specifically asked the question, *How would you describe yourself?* various responses from the teachers emerged. Some responses were energetic, dedicated, people-oriented individuals who had a sense of humor and many different interests.

Responses students gave when they were asked, *What are the qualities or characteristics of Teacher A, B, or C?* were personal characteristics such as sense of humor, and enthusiasm. Students also commented on the impact these teachers had on students and the teaching style they employed. Comparatively, from both teachers' and students' perspectives, similar responses were identified. Teachers in this study seemed to have a sense of humor, were energetic and enthusiastic. Connecting my discoveries to the research literature, some similar responses were

noted by other researchers in their lists of characteristics and qualities of outstanding teachers. Easterly(1983) mentioned caring along with many other characteristics in her study; Easterly explained that teachers who were caring were: child-oriented, and dedicated. Bain and Others [sic] (1989) noted many effective teacher qualities some of which matched my findings including enthusiasm and a sense of humor that facilitated learning and increased student motivation.

When both teachers and student participants were asked how they would *describe an outstanding teacher* themes emerged from the findings. For teacher participants subject matter knowledge was important. Outstanding teachers knew and loved the materials they presented. One participant said that outstanding teachers were continual learners, performers and ones who demonstrated enthusiasm towards learning. Also, one participant noted that outstanding teachers made their lessons have meaning-- making the learning real. McKay (1991) discovered teachers were perceived by others in several different ways-- one being life-long learners. Easterly (1983) shared the perceptions of outstanding teachers in her study and included among other things that these teachers knew their subject matter and how to present it, communicated effectively, and were life-long learners. Shanoski and Hranitz (1991) also mentioned in their list of characteristics of “Teacher of the Year” award winners certain elements that were similar to those found in my study, two of which were subject matter knowledge and excellent communication skills. Some of the characteristics and qualities of effective middle school teachers in Willems and Clifford (1999) were similar to my study. Two such ones were creative lesson

presentation and using real life activities. Several common themes from my findings were consistent with what had already been generated by previous studies. With so many similarities, I made the assumption that there were indeed certain human characteristics that were demonstrated by effective educators. The relationship teachers shared with their students was also integral; Diero (1994) discussed the importance of the teacher-student relationship. Kesner (1994) has noted in his work that the relationships students share with their teachers may indeed influence the development of the student. Outstanding teachers in my study were perceived by both a teacher and student participant to be real people who were open and honest with their students. In general, they cared about their students and had a sense of humor. Once again Easterly (1983) supported this finding in the profile she created using descriptions given by teacher participants in her study about outstanding educators. She listed the characteristics caring and sense of humor in this profile along with others that represented her participants' views.

Using a compilation of student responses in my study, outstanding teachers were seen as those who made learning fun and were interesting, approachable individuals who demonstrated effective communication skills. These students also highlighted the importance of teaching style making this a theme that was mentioned by both teacher and student participants. Drawing from the treasury of student responses, I found that outstanding teachers used expression, answered questions, enjoyed working with students, and could meet the needs of different learners in the classroom. Similarly, Peart and Campbell (1999) noted that students specified good

interpersonal skills, and good instructional methods to communicate subject matter as two of the four consistent effective teacher characteristics in their study. The topic of effective teaching style and lesson presentation was supported by the literature, “Research suggests that when teachers plan instruction well and treat lessons as meaningful and worthwhile learning experiences, students will view the class as more valuable and interesting.” (Marshall, 1987; Newman, 1988; Stevenson, 1990; Stodolsky, 1988, as cited in Phillips, Fuchs & Hamlett, 1996, p. 25)

There was a correlation between what students perceived to be the qualities and characteristics of outstanding teachers and student responses about the teacher participants in this study. For example, one student participant stated that outstanding teachers “like what they are doing.” Similarly, when referring to the teacher participants in this study one student said that their teacher demonstrated that they loved to teacher. This quote from a student participant also supported this finding, “She’s jumping around class. . . . You can tell she wants to be there.”

Secondly, 2 student participants said that an outstanding teacher had a sense of humor. When students spoke about the teachers in this study 3 said that their teacher was funny and had a sense of humor.

Thirdly, 2 student participants felt that an outstanding teacher was enthusiastic. When this was compared to the student responses given about the teachers in this study, 2 mentioned that their teacher was enthusiastic. This is supported by a student participant’s quote, “She’d get so excited like doing a problem on the board or something, it was just, she was completely enthusiastic.”

“Interesting,” was also mentioned by one student participant who was describing an outstanding teacher. Similarly, interesting was also a characteristic given by a student participant who was referring to a teacher in this study.

Therefore, there were similarities between the ways student participants described outstanding teachers in general and the way they described the actual participants in this study. There were also similarities, as I alluded to earlier, in the manner teacher participants described outstanding teachers in general. However, there were also differences. While students seemed to mention personal characteristics the most often, teachers seemed to mention subject matter knowledge. I made the assumption that different ages, roles and expectations of teacher and student participants influenced how they described the characteristics and qualities of outstanding teachers.

The next strand of the investigation that was linked to the descriptions of outstanding teachers evolved from the question posed to students, “*Do you feel Teacher A, B, C could be considered an outstanding teacher?*” Each student participant believed that their past or present teacher could be identified as an outstanding educator. The reasons they gave to support their affirmative responses were similar to responses previously stated. The compilation of student responses named such elements as teaching style, having a desire to please the teacher, teacher involvement in student life, and making learning easy. Although most of these elements have been discussed throughout the literature, I was particularly interested when 2 student participants in my study shared their need or desire to constantly

please the teacher with the overall student's goal being to make the teacher proud of them. I made the assumption that this relationship variable was similar to the desire certain students felt towards pleasing their parents. Thus, I referred back to the work of Kesner (1994) who discussed the influences on child development that the teacher- student relationship could possibly foster. I posed these questions: Do students feel a real need to please their teachers? If so how many students feel this way and what is the impact of this on their learning? Do the same students who hope to please their teachers also have the same aspiration to please parents? Further research needs to be carried out in this area.

From my perspective, the student participants seemed to respect their outstanding teachers and feel comfortable when they were around them. I made the assumption based on the findings that the outstanding teachers in this study fostered a positive teacher-student rapport. "The interviewees were very clear that a major factor in determining how teachers were perceived by them was the extent to which the teacher was able to establish a positive, caring relationship with students." (Peart & Campbell, 1999, p. 4)

Next, I compared the findings generated by students with the responses teacher participants contributed when they were asked the question, "*How do you foster a teacher-student rapport?*" and found that building a foundation from where a relationship could grow was important. Being real with the students and sharing parts of your life with them, letting them realize you were a real human being, and having a positive attitude seemed to be key factors. To foster a teacher-student

rapport it seemed important to learn about the students and have an interest in the things they did.

The concept of being real with the students that was mentioned by a teacher participant was also conveyed by a student participant who felt that sometimes teachers were not seen as humans. However, he noted that his teacher was very much a real person. Teachers are real people, was an actual theme that developed when students were asked to share special memories about teacher participants. Whether teachers portrayed their human qualities by recounting stories of personal trips or adventures or by letting their guards down to joke around with others, this quality seemed to be an essential characteristic an outstanding teacher. Diero's (1994) research supported these findings as she referred to two methods teachers used to build rapports with their students. These methods were using real life experiences to make analogies and mingling and talking with students. The 2 teachers in her study had reputations for developing healthy bonds with their students.

When teachers discussed what they loved most about their jobs 2 participants verbally stated that when they woke up in the morning they never regretted having to get up to go to work. This was an interesting find and I made the assumption that they truly loved the work they did. I also made the assumption that there would probably be other individuals that would feel the complete opposite about their jobs based on numerous variables. Truly, the teachers in this study enjoyed their jobs and most of all enjoyed working with students. A student participant confirmed this about his teacher saying, "Well you can just tell by the way she talks, and the way,

like, she writes on the board, she's jumping around class. You can tell she wants to be there."

These teachers also mentioned how their students added to their lives. In the 1994-1995 Laboratory Fellows Teacher Recognition Program one teacher said, "I teach because I love children and am filled with joy when students become actively involved and excited about their learning."( Outstanding Teaching Practices Series, 1994-1995, p. 6) However, on the flip side of things, I also discovered in the literature that teachers added to the lives of their students. Once again quoting the Laboratory Fellows teacher participant, "Children and learning have always been a priority for me . . . each child is a unique individual."(Outstanding Teacher Practices Series, 1994-1995, p. 6) Deiro (1994) also cited this about the teachers in her study, "These teachers view teaching as an opportunity to be of service to other human beings in a meaningful way."(p. 12) Diero's quotation is eloquently written and I keep a copy of it with me as a constant reminder of the possibilities we have as educators and human beings in society.

Referring now to classroom expectations and motivational techniques I have discovered that these outstanding educators have many. Firstly, two of their classrooms were home-like environments that appealed to the senses. This was supported by both teacher and student findings. I wondered to what extent this type of environment facilitated learning? Did this environment play a role in why students felt relaxed and comfortable around these teachers? These questions could be addressed in future studies.

High expectations were attributes 2 of these teacher participants shared. Similarly, these teacher participants felt frustrated when their students did not work to their potential. These teachers used extrinsic rewards and encouragement to motivate their students to learn and used a variety of methods to present lessons. Easterly (1983) found that 8 out of 20 participants in her study stated that they used a variety of teaching techniques when they were asked about instructional practices. She also discovered the importance of teachers using rewards in her study.

I made the assumption that students felt comfortable in these teachers' classrooms. The opportunity for students to laugh and joke around a bit with their teacher also seemed to be an integral part of an outstanding teacher's classroom. Connecting these findings to the work of Noddings (1992) you can see the foundation from which she builds her theory that children will only achieve academically if they believe they are truly cared for by their teachers.

Teachers also shared their frustrations in this study and, as I alluded to earlier, students not working to their potential was a major one. I did not find a lot of information relating to teacher frustrations in the literature that I reviewed about effective teachers, therefore I included this question for teacher participants in my study. There were however, many areas that teachers found stressful; therefore, taking Easterly's (1983) lead I have included some of her interview questions in this study, one being how teachers deal with stress. Taking time away from work to entertain oneself seemed important here. One interesting finding was that one participant did not deal with stress particularly well. I made the assumption that even

outstanding teachers have stress and are in search of ways for dealing with it.

Since the outstanding educators in my study had been recognized for their teaching excellence and had been considered to be outstanding by their students, I felt it was essential to the study and to teacher education programs to pose the question, *“If you could offer advice for beginning educators, what would that be?”* The themes that were generated were choose wisely and get involved. These participants gave honest accounts of why they felt you should or should not enter the profession. One participant said that you could never be too involved in areas of student life at the school. Similarly, when one student participant described the qualities of his teacher he referred to the numerous ways she was involved in the school.

Once again adapting a question from Easterly’s (1983) study, I learned that if participants had the chance to choose their professions over again 2 of the 3 participants stated in a positive manner that they would. The third participant said that it would be a difficult yes or no answer, however this participant did share the positives associated with the job.

One question that I did not ask student participants was, *If they could go through that particular school year again would they want to have the same teacher?* I made the assumption that they would based on the positive comments that were generated about these outstanding teachers. Also one participant stated that he could not have imagined having any other teacher that year and said, “I just wish I could have Teacher A again as a teacher, that’s all . . . I thought I’m never going to

have him again as a teacher.”

To conclude, I would like to offer a general *profile of an outstanding teacher* based on both teacher and student findings. An outstanding teacher would be someone who cared about their students, was interesting and had a sense of humor. This individual would be people-oriented, dedicated and enthusiastic towards their job, and demonstrate a positive attitude. An outstanding teacher would have a deep knowledge about their subject area and teach lessons in a manner that would reach all types of learners. This individual could convey his/her enthusiasm towards the subject to his/her students and have the ability to make learning easier and make learning real. This individual would have a teaching style that interested and entertained students and he/she would be involved in different areas of school life outside of the classroom. This individual would take on extra tasks and challenges and he/she would know that covering the curriculum was important. This individual would be able to build a positive rapport with students. He/she would be approachable and enjoy working with students. Students would feel comfortable in this teacher’s class and mutual respect would be evident. This individual would use both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards to motivate students to achieve. He/she would be considered fair and also described as a real person by his/her students.

Hopefully, this study has offered more insight into the lives of outstanding teachers and their students. I feel it has generated new information for the database about outstanding teachers and their practices as it has profiled 3 outstanding teachers from a different geographic location, Prince Edward Island, Canada. Also,

**this study has garnered both the perspectives of teacher and student participants and answered the original research question, “What is the profile of an outstanding teacher?”**

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## **Appendix A**

### **Criteria for Teacher Participant Selection**

1. Is considered by their peers to be at the top of their profession
2. Has a positive regard for their profession and their students
3. Has been recognized for their teaching excellence either provincially or nationally
4. Is a lifelong learner (Easterly, 1983)
5. Is a leader within the classroom, school, and teaching profession
6. Is an active participant in the school both academically and non-academically
7. Can be considered a role model for other teachers

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Questions for Teacher Participants**

1. Why did you decide to become a teacher and did anyone influence this decision? (Easterly, 1983, p. 11)
2. Do you have any role models or mentors in your life? If so who are they and why have you chosen them?
3. What do you enjoy most about your job and why?
4. How would you describe yourself? (Easterly, 1983, p. 43)
5. What do you think makes an outstanding teacher?
6. Have you ever been the student of an outstanding teacher? If so what do you remember most about them?
7. How would you describe your classroom environment?
8. What do you expect from your students in the classroom?
9. What techniques do you use to motivate your students to learn and achieve?
10. What do you feel is the most important part of your job as a teacher?
11. Describe how you felt when you were recognized for your excellence in teaching.
12. What do you find to be the most frustrating part of your job?
13. If your past or present students could remember three things about you what would they be?
14. How do you deal with the everyday stress of being a teacher? (Easterly, 1983, p. 62)
15. If you could offer advice for beginning educators, what would that be?

16. How do you organize your lessons to meet the challenges of an inclusive classroom?
17. Could you explain the techniques you use for discipline in your classroom?
18. How do you foster a teacher-student rapport?
19. If you had the chance to do it all over, would you become an educator again? Why or why not? (Easterly, 1983, p. 93)

## **Appendix C**

### **Interview Questions for Student Participants**

1. **What do (did) you enjoy most about school?**
2. **How would you describe an outstanding teacher? (What makes a great teacher?)**
3. **What are the qualities or characteristics of teacher A. (What do (did) you like best about your teacher?)**
4. **Do you feel that teacher A, could be considered an outstanding teacher. Explain why or why not.**
5. **How would you describe teacher A's classroom?**
6. **How do (did) you feel when you are (were) in teacher A's classroom?**
7. **Could you take a moment to share any special memories you have about teacher A?**
8. **Do you think teacher A was a strict, fair, or easy teacher? Did he/she have any special rules for the classroom? Explain.**
9. **In what ways, if any, has teacher A influenced you or made a difference?**

## **Appendix D**

### **Criteria for Student Participant Selection**

1. A student with whom you have developed a positive rapport
2. A student whom you feel you have motivated to learn
3. A student whom you feel you have inspired to achieve
4. A student you believe will offer an honest account of your time spent together as pupil and educator

## **Appendix E**

### **Informed Consent for Master of Education Research Study**

I agree to participate in the research study being conducted by Joanne MacKinley Curran who is a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Prince Edward Island. This study aims at discovering "What is the profile of an outstanding teacher?" and will create a sketch of these teachers.

I understand that the information gathered will be used for her Master of Education thesis.

I understand that this study involves a 1-2 hour in-depth interview and this interview will be audiotaped and transcribed. I understand that excerpts from the interviews may be used and published in the thesis.

I understand that I may view and edit the transcript.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I may withdraw from the study at any time up to a specified date. I am not responsible to give any reasons for doing so.

I understand that all information I give and all names of those involved in the study will be kept confidential.

I understand that the researcher, Joanne MacKinley Curran, is the only one that will have access to the information.

I understand that I may contact Joanne MacKinley Curran at 569-1919 or her research supervisor, Dr. Graham Pike, at 628-4304 at any time to discuss the research.

The researcher has agreed to answer any questions I have about the study and I may keep this form.

I have read and understood this information and agree to take part in this study.

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Name of participant (sign) \_\_\_\_\_, Date \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_ Please place a check mark on this line if you would like to be informed of the results.

## Appendix F

### **Informed Consent for Master of Education Research Study**

I agree to participate in the research study being conducted by Joanne MacKinley Curran who is a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Prince Edward Island. This study aims at discovering "What is the profile of an outstanding teacher?" and will create a sketch of these teachers.

I understand that the information gathered will be used for her Master of Education thesis.

I understand that this study involves a 15-25 minute in-depth interview and this interview will be audiotaped and transcribed. I understand that excerpts from the interviews may be used and published in the thesis.

I understand that I may view and edit the transcript.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I may withdraw from the study at any time up to a specified date. I am not responsible to give any reasons for doing so.

I understand that all information I give and all names of those involved in the study will be kept confidential.

I understand that the researcher, Joanne MacKinley Curran, is the only one that will have access to the information.

I understand that I may contact Joanne MacKinley Curran at 569-1919 or her research supervisor, Dr. Graham Pike, at 628-4304 at any time to discuss the research.

The researcher has agreed to answer any questions I have about the study and I may keep this form.

I have read and understood this information and agree to take part in this study.

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Name of participant (sign)

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Date

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Name of parent/guardian (sign)

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Date

If participant is under 18 years of age

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Please place a check mark on this line if you would like to be informed of the results.

**Appendix G**  
**Research Information Letters**

Dear Student:

My name is Joanne MacKinley Curran and I am a graduate student at the University of Prince Edward Island in the Faculty of Education. I am starting my research study for my Master of Education thesis entitled "What is the Profile of an Outstanding Teacher?"

A total of three Island teachers who have been recognized either provincially or nationally for their teaching excellence have been selected to participate in this study. My aim is to create a sketch about these outstanding teachers with the hopes of finding out how they do what they do so well. The outstanding teachers who consented to be part of the study have been asked to nominate five of their past or present students from whom two will be invited to participate in this research. The students who consent to participate will be interviewed for 15-25 minutes. The interview will involve responding to nine questions and students may review these questions before the interview takes place. This study will allow me to hear the opinions and comments of these students on the effectiveness of the outstanding teachers. It is important to note that pseudonyms will be used in published work and draft documents and confidentiality will be ensured for all participants. Also, no reference will be made in the study about a particular area of the province or a specific school.

One of the teachers who has been interviewed, has nominated you as a potential participant. I am writing this letter to invite you to participate in this study, but I must stress that your participation is entirely voluntary. Also, if you choose to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any date during the time the interviews are being conducted. Additionally, you will have the opportunity to view and edit the transcript of your statements. I will be contacting you in the next week, but should you have any questions please contact me at 569-1919 or my research advisor, Dr. Graham Pike, at 628-4304.

Sincerely,

Joanne MacKinley Curran

Dear Teacher:

My name is Joanne MacKinley Curran and I am a graduate student at the University of Prince Edward Island in the Faculty of Education. I am starting my research study for my Master of Education thesis entitled "What is the Profile of an Outstanding Teacher?"

A total of three Island teachers who have been recognized either provincially or nationally for their teaching excellence will be invited to participate in this study. My aim is to create a sketch about these outstanding teachers with the hopes of finding out how they do what they do so well. The outstanding teachers who consent to be part of the study will be interviewed for 1-2 hours. These teachers will also be asked to nominate five of their past or present students from whom two will be invited to participate in this research. The interview will involve responding to nineteen questions and participants may review these questions before the interview takes place. This study will allow me to hear teachers' points of view about their teaching as well as the opinions and comments of their students on the effectiveness of these outstanding teachers. It is important to note that pseudonyms will be used in published work and draft documents and confidentiality will be ensured for all participants. Also, no reference will be made in the study about a particular area of the province or a specific school.

As you are a teacher whose teaching excellence has been recognized, I am writing this letter to invite you to participate in this study, but I must stress that your participation is entirely voluntary. Also, if you choose to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any date during the time the interviews are being conducted. Additionally, you will have the opportunity to view and edit the transcript of your statements. I will be contacting you in the next week, but should you have any questions please contact me at 569-1919 or my research advisor, Dr. Graham Pike, at 628-4304.

Sincerely,

Joanne MacKinley Curran

Dear Principal:

My name is Joanne MacKinley Curran and I am a graduate student at the University of Prince Edward Island in the Faculty of Education. I am starting my research study for my Master of Education thesis entitled “What is the Profile of an Outstanding Teacher?”

A total of three Island teachers will be invited to participate in this study. My aim is to create a sketch about these outstanding teachers with the hopes of finding out how they do what they do so well. The outstanding teachers who consent to be part of the study will be interviewed for 1-2 hours. These teachers will also be asked to nominate five of their past or present students from whom two will be invited to participate in this research. These students will be interviewed for 15-25 minutes. Participants may review these interview questions before the actual interview takes place and have the opportunity to view and edit their transcripts. This study will allow me to hear teachers’ points of view about their teaching as well as the opinions and comments of their students on the effectiveness of these outstanding teachers. It is important to note that pseudonyms will be used in published work and draft documents and confidentiality will be ensured for all participants. Additionally, there will be no reference made in the study about a particular area of the province or a specific school.

One of the possible participants, whom I am interested in interviewing, is in your school. I am writing this letter to ask your permission to contact this person. I will be contacting you in the next week, but should you have any questions please contact me at 569-1919 or my research advisor, Dr. Graham Pike, at 628-4304.

Sincerely,

Joanne MacKinley Curran

Dear Superintendent:

My name is Joanne MacKinley Curran and I am a graduate student at the University of Prince Edward Island in the Faculty of Education. I am starting my research study for my Master of Education thesis entitled "What is the Profile of an Outstanding Teachers?"

A total of three Island teachers who have been recognized either provincially or nationally for their teaching excellence will be invited to participate in this study. My aim is to create a sketch about these outstanding teachers with the hopes of finding out how they do what they do so well. The outstanding teachers who consent to be part of the study will be interviewed for 1-2 hours. These teachers will also be asked to nominate five of their past or present students from whom two will be invited to participate in this research. These students will be interviewed for 15-25 minutes. Participants may review these interview questions before the actual interview takes place and have the opportunity to review and edit their transcripts. This study will allow me to hear teachers' points of view about their teaching as well as the opinions and comments of their students on the effectiveness of these outstanding teachers. It is important to note that pseudonyms will be used in published work and draft documents and confidentiality will be ensured for all participants. Additionally, no reference will be made in the study about a particular area of the province or a specific school.

If you grant permission to begin this study, I will first contact the principals of schools where potential participants teach or attend before any participants are contacted by letter. I have enclosed a copy of my research proposal, but should you have any questions please contact me at 569-1919 or my research advisor, Dr. Graham Pike, at 628-4304.

Sincerely,

Joanne MacKinley Curran

Dear parent and/or guardian:

My name is Joanne MacKinley Curran and I am a graduate student at the University of Prince Edward Island in the Faculty of Education. I am starting my research study for my Master of Education thesis entitled "What is the Profile of an Outstanding Teacher?"

A total of three Island teachers who have been recognized either provincially or nationally for their teaching excellence have been selected to participate in this study. My aim is to create a sketch about these outstanding teachers with the hopes of finding out how they do what they do so well. The outstanding teachers who consented to be part of the study have been asked to nominate five of their past or present students from whom two will be invited to participate in this research. The students who consent to participate will be interviewed for 15-25 minutes. The interview will involve responding to nine questions and students may review these questions before the interview takes place. Participants will also have the opportunity to view and edit their transcripts. This study will allow me to hear the opinions and comments of these students on the effectiveness of the outstanding teachers. It is important to note that pseudonyms will be used in published work and draft documents and confidentiality will be ensured for all participants. Additionally, no reference will be made in the study about a particular area of the province or a specific school.

One of the teachers who has been interviewed, has nominated your son/daughter as a potential participant. I am writing this letter to invite your son/daughter to participate in this study, but I must stress that your son's/daughter's participation is entirely voluntary. Also, if your son/daughter chooses to participate, he/she may withdraw from the study at any date during the time the interviews are being conducted. I will be contacting you in the next week, but should you have any questions please contact me at 569-1919 or my research advisor, Dr. Graham Pike, at 628-4304.

Sincerely,

Joanne MacKinley Curran