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Excellent Teaching as Viewed by International Teaching Elites¹

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Abstract: Despite its importance, there is no universally accepted definition of excellent teaching, yet excellent teaching is expected across educational settings. Uncovering the structures of communication around excellent teaching can provide teacher training programs with perspectives for programming and curriculum design. The purpose of the study was to explore perspectives on excellent teaching among a cohort of international teachers during their engagement in a selective teacher training program in the United States. Fifteen teachers were invited to share their perspectives on excellent teaching practice during two focus group encounters. The group generated 31 statements, which were Q sorted and factor analyzed. Three distinct perspectives on excellent teaching practice were revealed: the Facilitator, the Manager, and the Intellectual Provider. The factors are discussed, while acknowledging that international teachers assume multiple roles and demands in their respective school settings. Implications for factor-informed teacher training and future research are presented.

Keywords: excellent teaching, international secondary teachers, teacher leadership, teaching practices, teacher training

What is Excellent Teaching?

Excellent teaching has been discussed in the literature as a combination of authenticity, credibility and commitment to quality (Brookfield, 1987, 2006; Kreber, 2002; Palmer, 1998). Brookfield (1987, 2006) stresses the importance of authenticity as a preferred characteristic of excellent teachers. Teaching excellence emanates from real, in-the-flesh human beings who do not hide behind their jargon, degrees or learned professional behaviors (Brookfield, 2006). Palmer's (1998) views parallel Brookfield's, suggesting that excellent teachers *teach who they are*, emphasizing the importance of the person-as-the-teacher over teaching techniques or strategies. Both Brookfield and Palmer suggest that teachers who model authenticity are perceived as caring, approachable and genuinely concerned about students' learning, which leads to emotionally satisfying learning experiences for students and teachers. Some scholars suggest that students associate emotionally satisfying experiences in the classroom with quality teaching (Moore & Kuol, 2007; Pekrun, Goetz, Titz & Perry, 2002).

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A commitment to quality teaching practice implies a commitment to continuous improvement. It is through an understanding of our teaching beliefs (e.g., who you are and what you know) that we can reflect upon and communicate with colleagues about our teaching practice, evaluate our teaching efforts and improve our teaching practice (Brookfield, 2006; West, Bubbenzer & Gimenez Hinkle, 2013). When considering how to communicate about teaching beliefs, we are reminded that there is power in the way we use language to describe teaching. Concepts can assume new meanings with the addition or subtraction of a word. For example, the adjective *excellent* when combined with the noun *teaching* changes the meaning of teaching. Who would you prefer to teach your children: a *good* teacher, an *average* teacher or an *excellent* teacher? The term *excellent* by implication suggests a higher level of quality and successful performance in practice (Kreber, 2002b). It is tempting to attribute meaning, by definition, to the concept of excellent teaching as it relates to a set of “objective” evaluation criteria. This is reminiscent of an evidence-based perspective, which suggests that some approaches, components or characteristics of teaching are better (i.e., more excellent) than others.

In their examination of the literature, West et al. (2013) pose a more plausible perspective: there is no one right or true answer to the question, What is excellent teaching? Instead, these authors suggest that when considering one’s teaching beliefs, taking a “reflective stance can serve to bring understanding to one’s actions” (p. 6). We agree with West et al. as well as Hammer et al. (2010) that there is no single definition of excellent teaching. According to Hammer et al., there are a host of variables that influence excellent teaching, including “who is defining it, the learners, subject matter, methods used, and many other factors” (p. 2). From this perspective, multiple variables intersect and inform excellent teaching practice, such as (1) combinations of individual (teacher) and contextual (school, classroom, community) factors; (2) the relationships between teachers and students; (3) the interactions among teachers, peers and students; and (4) the influence of teachers’ beliefs on what they believe to be quality teaching practice. It is point number 4 that influences our thinking and guided the development of this study.

From Where Does Excellent Teaching Originate?

Some scholars believe that the concept of excellent teaching has its origins in the *scholarship of teaching* (see Boyer, 1990), a concept intended to elevate the credibility of teaching related to the tenure and promotion process at research-intensive institutions (Herteis, 2002). Accordingly, scholarly teachers conduct themselves with a high level of rigor and contribute to the disciplinary field in ways that can be peer reviewed (Boyer, 1990; Kreber, 2002a, 2002b). The credibility of teaching is elevated by the acts of scholarly teachers, who practice in ways that advance teaching from mere acts of “transmitting knowledge” to the systematic and intentional acts of “transforming and extending knowledge” (Boyer, 1990, p. 24). However, some believe that scholarly teachers are not necessarily excellent teachers (Kreber, 2002b; Healey, 2000).

For scholarly teachers, knowledge about teaching is thought to be constructed and vetted through formal methods (e.g., research, coursework, collaborative inquiry, the literature). Kreber (2002a) suggests that excellent teachers may derive their excellence from a combination of active experimentation, personal experience and reflection as opposed to formal sources such as the literature, research and so forth. Regardless of how “excellence” in teaching is derived, we believe that obtaining teachers’ perceptions of what excellent teaching is and how it is implemented will increase our understanding of those factors (e.g., individual, relational, interpersonal and contextual) that contribute to excellent teaching practices.

Excellent Teaching and the Power of Perception

When considering the concept of excellent teaching, a common factor is the teacher; that is, excellent teaching emanates from authentic and credible teachers who are likely to have well-defined beliefs about teaching (Brookfield, 2006; Palmer, 1998; West et al., 2013). We concur with these scholars and add that it is the *perceptions* that teachers hold about excellent teaching that run parallel with their practice (Kreber, 2002a; Lam & Kember, 2007). In other words, excellent teaching practices are necessarily in sync with conceptions, or one's beliefs, about teaching (Lam & Kember, 2007), suggesting a direct correspondence between the awareness of teaching beliefs and the enactment of teaching practices. It would seem that from this point of view, putting teaching beliefs into practice, over time, serves as one possible basis for establishing excellence in teaching practice.

In addition to teachers' beliefs, viewpoints on excellent teaching practice—by way of perspective or appraisal—come from other sources, including students, families, members of the community and professionals. McMillan (2007) suggests that perspectives on excellent teaching practices are formed in educational contexts and, once formed, are not easily amenable to change. This suggests that external or contextual factors such as job demands, the school culture and performance standards can have a more indelible influence on teacher's beliefs. Skelton (2009a, 2009b) contests the concept of excellent teaching and views excellent teaching in the larger sociopolitical climate, particularly as it pertains to the government and economy-driven emphasis on the performative aspects of education and learning outcomes. Here, excellent teaching can be construed as a smokescreen for masking educational policies that are driven by employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship and not necessarily a practice intended to benefit students' learning experiences.

Why is Excellent Teaching Important?

We have acknowledged that there is no one true answer to the question, What is excellent teaching? Yet, we do know that excellent teaching emanates from the person-as-the-teacher (Brookfield, 2006; Palmer, 1998; West et al., 2013) and can be recognized in practice (Hope King & Watson, 2010; Kember, 1997, 2009; Kreber, 2002a; MacDonald Grieve, 2010). Further, excellent teachers endeavor to practice (i.e., enact their teaching beliefs) in ways that motivate students to learn (Kreber, 2002), build quality teacher-student relationships (MacDonald Grieve, 2010) and enhance students' learning experiences in the classroom (McMillan, 2007). Excellent teaching practices are believed to empower students and their families by connecting with their lived experiences (Hope King & Watson, 2010) through "relationships in action" (MacDonald Grieve, 2010, p. 265). Kember believes that excellent teaching practices can improve students' and teachers' learning experiences and outcomes (Kember, 1997, 2009). Improved learning outcomes are thought to be the result of excellent teaching practices conducted by teachers who are committed to continuous professional growth, have a "strong and coherent" teaching viewpoint and possess the personal and interpersonal characteristics to build quality relationships with their students (MacDonald Grieve, 2010, p. 267). We agree with Kreber and other scholars that excellent teaching practices can lead to positive learning experiences and outcomes (e.g., improved grades, satisfaction with the learning experience and positive views of teaching). Acknowledging the benefits of excellent teaching, and the importance of increasing our understanding of what excellent teaching means, we examined the individual and shared viewpoints on excellent teaching among a cohort of international secondary teachers.

The purpose of this study was to obtain perspectives on excellent teaching practices from a cohort of international secondary teachers studying abroad in an American teacher-training program. Our intentions were twofold. First, we wanted to gain perspectives on excellent teaching from teachers known to practice with a high level of quality as determined by (1) their leadership status and level of experience in their respective teaching communities and (2) their nomination to participate in a selective teacher training program funded by the U.S. Department of State. Second, we wanted to provide the cohort with a collegial space for discussing their beliefs about teaching while participating in a collaborative research project. We believed it was important to obtain the perspectives and voices of these respected (excellent) international teachers, all of whom navigated numerous challenges (e.g., travelling abroad, living distant from their families for a year, living with other international teachers, adjusting to American culture and pedagogy) to advance their teaching practices. To gather teachers' perspectives and to examine their shared communicability around excellent teaching practices, a Q methodology design was used.

Methods

Participants

The participants for this study were a cohort of international secondary teachers engaged in the International Leaders in Education Program (ILEP), a semester-long training program of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The ILEP program is administered by the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX). Annually, outstanding secondary teachers from around the world attend one of four U.S. universities to (1) further develop their expertise in teaching, (2) increase their application of technology to instruction and (3) develop cultural knowledge and collaborative partnerships with secondary teachers in the United States. The ILEP program is highly competitive, selecting about 70 participants among hundreds of applicants who are then spread among the four host universities. Host universities provide classes for ILEP participants on teaching pedagogy, instructional technology, cross-cultural understanding and U.S. educational systems. The ILEP participants are required to attend their instruction, engage in cultural activities and complete a supervised teaching internship in a local U.S. school. The ILEP program runs during the spring semester in the academic calendar.

The sample of 15 consisted of teachers from six different countries: Bangladesh (2), Brazil (3), Indonesia (3), Kenya (3), Philippines (2) and Uganda (2). This group was placed at a public university in the Midwestern United States and consisted of 10 men and 5 women ranging in age from 28 to 55 years old ($M = 39.6$ years). Identified specialty teaching areas included English (11) and math/science (4), with the average number of years teaching being 9.6 years. In addition to their teaching roles, 6 of the participants indicated that they functioned as counselors and liaisons for students' families and community members. Three participants indicated that they were matriculating into administrative roles in their respective schools. All participants self-identified as teacher-leaders, which minimally meant they were viewed by their peers and other school personnel as "go-to" teachers due to their knowledge of teaching strategies, technology and Western pedagogical practices.

Concourse and Q Sample

The concourse was generated by instructing the teachers to respond to the research question, "What do you consider to be excellent teaching practice?" The participants were seated around a table and provided with a sheet of paper on which to record their

thoughts. To facilitate their responses, they were provided with a few illustrative prompts—for example, “Excellent teachers are knowledgeable of the subject material,” “Developing relationships with students is a routine practice,” “Parents are regularly consulted on the student’s progress,” and “The curriculum includes current events”—to which they were invited to add their own ideas during a silent idea-writing phase. Once participants had exhausted their ideas, they placed the paper containing their anonymously written contributions in the center of the table and drew another participant’s anonymous comments, which then stimulated additional ideas that were added to the page. This phase lasted approximately 30 minutes, the end result being 15 sheets of paper on each of which many students had contributed ideas, the total of all ideas constituting the concourse.

In the second phase, participants were invited (in round-robin fashion) to nominate one statement from the page in their possession that they regarded as the best example of excellent teaching practice. These nominated statements were projected on an overhead screen and each participant wrote the statements on 3×5 cards. Examples are as follows:

- Promotes interaction, sharing, cooperative and collaborative processes among students.
- Makes teaching instructions simple and interesting to learners.
- Uses available up-to-date technology tools to make the lesson more interesting.
- Selects appropriate strategies and materials for teaching and learning.

Eventually, 31 statements were agreed on in two round-robin sessions as constituting major features of what would be considered excellent teaching practices, and these statements constitute the Q sample. A copy of the Q sample and factor scores are found in the Appendix.

The participants Q sorted the statements along a continuum from “most important for excellent teaching (+4)” to “least important... (–4).” The usual preference would be to have the statements sorted from most important to most unimportant (i.e., from most to most rather than from most to least) so as to anchor the “distensive zero” in the center (from which salience distends in both directions), but all items were nominated by participants as positive examples of the hypothetical excellent teacher, so “least important” was employed in deference to the sensitivities of the participants. For ease of presentation, however, the factor scores reported below are reported in the +4/–4 format, with 0 as the midpoint. Participants were also invited to reflect on statements at the +4 and –4 poles and to express in writing why these statements were so important to them. The Q sorts were then entered into the PQMethod program (Schmolck & Atkinson, 2012) and the 15×15 correlation matrix that resulted was factor analyzed, with the three principal components being rotated using varimax criteria. Our general preference would have been to analyze the data using centroid analysis with theoretical or varimax rotation (Brown & Robyn, 2004). In this particular instance, however, the two factor outcomes revealed little difference, with the principal components/varimax solution being slightly clearer. Factor scores (from +4 to –4) were estimated for the 31 statements in each of the three factors. The data analysis revealed the existence of three separate understandings of excellent teaching practice: (A) the Facilitator, (B) the Manager and (C) the Intellectual Provider.

Three Views of Excellent Teaching

Factor A: The Facilitator

The participants comprising factor A view teachers at their best (i.e., excellent teachers) as complements to self-motivated students, hence less as authority figures and more as advisors or resources. The worn dichotomy between “sage on the stage vs. guide on the side” applies to the Facilitators. The following statements are among those that distinguish the Facilitators from the other two roles (factor scores to the left for factors A, B and C, respectively):

- +4** -3 -1 11. Puts teachers in different roles—as facilitator, counselor, teacher, friend, and so forth.
- +3** 0 -4 10. Dynamically engages students with the changing world.
- +3** -4 0 12. Sees students as active learners, not as recipients.

The Facilitators are adaptive and expect to take different roles as circumstances warrant (#11, +4), a position not embraced by factors B (-3) and C (-1). Statements to this effect were to be found in the freely expressed comments in the post-sorting interviews. One of the Facilitators explained:

To be an excellent teacher one should be able to act in different roles. Classrooms, in this case, students are very dynamic. We need to be flexible in our approach. We don't just teach our content. We need to be their friend, too. We also need to be their facilitator, counselor when they need someone to talk to, etc.

Students are active (#12) and the classroom is dynamic and fluid (#10); the excellent teacher must therefore be prepared to go with the flow.

Statements with which a factor is in disagreement are as important (albeit in a negative way) as those of which the factor approves, and the following casts a bright light on factor A's disagreements (in the first column) when contrasted with those of factors B and C:

- 4** 0 -1 14. Employs proper communication processes.
- 4** +4 0 31. Has good managerial skills.
- 4** -2 0 27. Is interdisciplinary.
- 3** -1 +1 15. Has all materials ready and tested prior to the teaching exercise.

At first blush, it is difficult to understand how a group of outstanding teachers would regard interdisciplinarity as contrary to excellence, but when the student-centeredness of the statements at the positive pole is taken into account, then rejection of the above four statements falls into place: all of these are teacher-centered—communicability, managerial skills, assuring that materials are ready to distribute and being interdisciplinary—whereas these participants wish to focus on the students, not on the teacher. What is central to the Facilitator is assisting students, not being interdisciplinary

or managerial. The latter may be the flower of the process, but the former constitute its roots.

Factor B: The Manager

The statements that distinguish factor B from the others reveal a different kind of excellent teacher, one who might be referred to as the Manager. As the statements and their scores show, this group of participants are of the view that the excellent teacher should have good managerial skills (#31), promote good classroom assessment (#19) and balance curriculum, syllabus and lesson plans (#6), all of which are of little importance or even negative importance from the standpoints of factors A and C:

-4 **+4** 0 31. Has good managerial skills.

-2 **+4** -3 19. Promotes authentic classroom assessment.

0 **+3** -1 6. Balances among the curriculum, syllabus and lesson plan.

These sentiments were affirmed in the post-sorting interviews. For example, one participant reflected the factor B perspective by suggesting that “it is very important that the teacher has good managerial skills. One has to ensure that learning is not only a provision of knowledge and info but organization of tools needed for learning.”

At the negative end of the distribution of scores, the Manager is in many respects the reverse of the Facilitator: motivating teachers and students (#18), viewing students as active learners (#12) and placing teachers in diverse roles (#11) are not traits that characterize the excellent teacher according to factor B. In addition, unlike factors A and C, the Managers are averse to taking risks (#30) and are not inclined to look at matters from the standpoint of students (#25):

+3 **-4** 0 12. Sees students as active learners, not as recipients.

+1 **-4** 0 18. Is motivating to teachers and students.

-3 **-4** -1 30. Is willing to take risks.

+4 **-3** -1 11. Puts teachers in different roles—as facilitator, counselor, teacher, friend, and so forth.

-1 **-3** +1 25. Has the ability to understand and accept students’ viewpoints.

These individuals are not interested in stimulating others so much as in coordinating their activities.

Factor C: The Intellectual Provider

Factor C represents an understanding of the excellent teacher that differs in important ways from the understandings of factors A and B, and we can get some sense of this difference by examining statements with scores that are distinctive for this group. Note, for example, C’s noncommittal stance vis-à-vis the following three statements, about which the Facilitators and the Managers feel strongly, either positively or negatively:

- +4 -3 -1 11. Puts teachers in different roles—as facilitator, counselor, teacher, friend, and so forth.
- +3 -4 0 12. Sees students as active learners, not as recipients.
- 4 +4 0 31. Has good managerial skills.

The Facilitators, as noted previously, emphasize placing teachers in diverse roles (#11) and see students as active learners (#12), statements that are rejected by the Managers, who emphasize managerial skills (#31). However, none of this is of much interest to the Intellectual Providers, factor C, who see the excellent teacher as neither a manager nor a motivator of students:

- +3 0 -4 10. Dynamically engages students with the changing world.
- +1 +1 -3 21. Gets students involved and committed to learning, thinking, and sharing globally.
- +2 +2 -2 29. Inspires students to strive for excellence.

Rather, factor C sees the excellent teacher first and foremost as a member of a team (with a division of responsibilities), as a teacher who strives for meaningfulness, who makes certain that students are aware of class objectives and expectations, and, to a lesser extent, who provides different points of view:

- 0 0 +3 7. Encourages teamwork and team building.
- 1 -1 +3 8. Strives for meaningfulness and not just for covering content.
- 2 -3 +3 17. Lets the students know the class objectives and expectations.
- 2 -2 +1 20. Provides opportunities for students to get different ideas from different points of view.

One participant illustrated this further in supportive comments related to her agreement with statement 20:

As a teacher, I look at teaching and learning as something that should benefit learners in life to make learning to be meaningful. Creativity and innovation is very important. Before I assume I know it all, I always want to get the student's perspective and then harmonize.

Close examination of the factor scores shows that the Intellectual Providers of factor C are not as subject to clear interpretation as are A and B. This version of the excellent teacher provides students with materials and opportunities to learn as well as different ideas and even meaningfulness. As valuable as these provisions are, however, they come from the teacher and not from students, and so in this respect factor C is similar to the Managers of factor B and unlike the student-centered Facilitators of factor A. The difference between A and C is most striking in the scores for the following statements:

- +3 0 -4 10. Dynamically engages students with the changing world.
- +1 +1 -3 21. Gets students involved and committed to learning, thinking, and sharing globally.
- +2 +1 -2 24. Promotes innovative and creative thinking for students and teachers.
- +2 +2 -2 29. Inspires students to strive for excellence.

Although factor C is more inclined to regard the excellent teacher as one who “provides opportunities for students to get different ideas from different points of view” (#20, *supra*), this provisioning apparently does not extend to the wider world, and so a degree of provincialism is suggested. In addition, this version of the excellent teacher does not see the promotion of creativity or the encouragement of excellence in students as part of the job description. Added to this are the following statements that distinguish the Intellectual Providers from the other two factors:

- +1 +1 -4 9. Uses creativity with limited teaching materials.
- +2 0 -3 13. Requires teachers to maintain and enhance their skills and knowledge.

Not only does factor C not encourage a cosmopolitan identity, creativity or excellence, factor C also seems to resist expending energy in the creative use of materials and in renewing and enhancing knowledge. Of course, given the Intellectual Providers commitment to team building (#7, *supra*), it is possible they expect these initiatives to emerge from team interactions.

Consensus

The results reveal only a limited degree of agreement across all three groups, the strongest and most positive being in terms of the following:

- +4 +3 +4 1. Promotes interaction, sharing, cooperative, and collaborative processes among students.

We would expect the Facilitators of factor A to embrace this statement as a matter of course, but fitting this sentiment into the perspectives of factors B and C is more problematic. Given factor B’s more mechanical and teacher-centered conception of excellence, we can imagine that the promotion of interaction and cooperation among students would be in terms of goals and materials provided by the teacher; consequently, the sharing and collaboration that takes place in a factor A and factor B classroom would likely look quite different. Factor C is even more problematic and we cannot immediately see how the collaboration avowed in the above statement would square with the previously expressed resistance to creativity, enhanced skills and engagement with the global world—unless, again, the expectation is that the promotion of student collaboration is expected to emerge from the team itself. As a methodological point, consensus does not necessarily imply agreement across factors since what a particular statement means can vary from factor to factor. Similarly, distinguishing statements may

not imply disagreement, since the meaning of a statement with which factor A registers agreement may not be the same as the meaning that factor B rejects. Interpretation is inescapable.

Discussion

Whereas the literature is in general agreement that there is no one correct way to excel in teaching (e.g., Hammer et al., 2010; West et al., 2013), all is not anarchy with each person taking an idiosyncratic route; rather, teachers tend to follow a more finite number of paths. The Facilitators see excellent teaching as a function in which the teacher clears away underbrush so as to permit the flowering of naturally curious students. Rousseau's *Émile* and the Montessori approach come to mind as systems of education that follow this path. Facilitators embody the person-as-the-teacher characteristics described by Palmer (1998) and Brookfield (2006), favoring the process of authentic learning over the use of techniques or evaluation processes.

The Managers see the excellent teacher's role primarily in terms of planning and coordination—that is, of establishing institutional structures designed to guide learning and to maximize opportunities for learning. Managers approach teaching as a coordinated or systematic process of extending knowledge through intentional acts of excellent teaching, acts of teaching aligned with Boyer's (1990) conception of teaching scholarship. Coordinated and planned teaching efforts can be written down and vetted in scholarly ways as replicable curriculum units, conceptual articles or classroom-based research, among others that can be peer reviewed (Kreber, 2002a).

Finally, the Intellectual Providers emphasize the role of the teacher as a member of a team, from which, through team-member interactions, educational activities and guidance are expected to flow. Intellectual Providers operate as team members, acknowledging the multiple interactions that inform excellent teaching, specifically those interactions among teachers, students and parents that contribute to quality learning experiences (Hammer et al., 2010). Although factors A and B are relatively clear in their content and implications, factor C seems more obscure and deserving of further inspection. It is worth noting that this study has focused on pure cases (i.e., factors as orthogonal types) but that some of the participants in this study were factorially complex and associated with more than a single factor. In addition, one of the participants was associated with none of the three factors, suggesting yet another position not examined in this study. And of course there may be other points of view that are obscured in the concourse of communicability about excellent teaching.

The diverse teachers who participated in this study subsequently convened in a focus group to discuss their perspectives on teaching excellence. The inclusion of applied or action research activities as part of teacher education at all levels can provide a safe space for teachers to discuss their various perspectives. Providing an external mechanism (i.e., a focus group topic) can allow teachers to (1) struggle with articulating their teaching beliefs, (2) engage in reflective conversations with educators and supportive peers, and (3) experience multiple perspectives—where they may align or differ—in ways that increase cognitive complexity around the concept of excellent teaching practice. Educators working with teaching scholars can facilitate this collaboration by incorporating focus groups and other research activities in their training programs. Furthermore, educators can model the aspects of excellent teaching practices (e.g., authenticity, credibility) while engaging teacher scholars in training programs.

The participant teachers in this study function as counselors, liaisons and guides to students, peers and families in their respective school districts, in addition to their teaching roles. Results from this study suggest that teachers' views of excellent teaching

practices are informed by their experiences in these multiple roles. In fact, factor A endorses functioning in multiple roles as a key to excellent teaching practice (e.g., statement #11). Extending the notion of excellent teaching practice to include practices in and out of the classroom is recommended and supported by participants' comments during their post Q-sort discussions and reflective writing. Teachers functioning in multiple roles may be doing so out of necessity, as many are working in schools with limited resources, a fact that was validated by the participants in the current study.

Regardless of the similarities or differences among teachers' approaches or perspectives on excellent teaching practices, it is anticipated that bringing diverse groups of professionals together can increase understanding of how teachers strive for excellence globally. One of the advantages of this study is that the ILEP program had a built-in (convenience) sample of teacher leaders from different countries, a recruitment task that would have been difficult otherwise. By studying teachers from various countries, districts and practices placed in the same training program, we were able to obtain a greater understanding of the common struggles and idiosyncratic strengths of excellent teaching practice. It is plausible that the person-as-teacher perspective (Palmer, 1998) may at least partially explain the common perspectives and struggles among teachers from diverse backgrounds, a phenomenon that both celebrates difference and highlights the essence of excellence among teachers.

One may expect that the resulting factors may have clustered by country (i.e., teachers from similar countries expressing similar views); however, this was not the case. In fact, the viewpoints gained from this study can be conceived as more universal and not culture-bound. It is conceivable that the expressed perspectives on excellent teaching may also account for duties and roles above and beyond those expected in the classroom, such as counselor and liaison roles. Finally, while the resultant perspectives of excellent teaching may not represent those of all teachers, the participants in this study indicated that viewing the factors had a powerful impact on their perspectives on teaching practice, perspectives they will take back to their respective countries. The implementation of teaching practices guided by the resulting factors will be the subject of future research.

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Appendix: Q-Sample Statements and Factor Array

Q Statement	Factor		
	A	B	C
"An excellent teacher"			
1. Promotes interaction, sharing, cooperative, and collaborative processes among students.	4	3	4
2. Makes teaching instructions simple and interesting to learners.	3	-1	4
3. Uses available up-to-date technology tools to make the lesson more interesting.	0	3	2
4. Selects appropriate strategies and materials for teaching and learning.	4	2	4

Q Statement	Factor		
	A	B	C
“An excellent teacher”			
6. Balances among the curriculum, syllabus and lesson plan.	0	3	-1
7. Encourages team work and team building.	0	0	3
8. Strives for meaningfulness and not just for covering content.	-1	-1	3
9. Uses creativity with limited teaching materials	1	1	-4
10. Dynamically students with the changing world.	3	0	-4
11. Puts teachers in different roles—as facilitator, counselor, teacher, friend, and so forth	4	-3	-1
12. Sees students as active learners, not as recipients.	3	-4	0
13. Requires teachers to maintain and enhance their skills and knowledge.	2	0	-3
14. Employs proper communication processes.	-4	0	-1
15. Has all materials ready and tested prior to the teaching exercise.	-3	-1	1
16. Implies promoting good interrelationships among teachers, students, parents, and the community.	-1	-1	0
17. Lets the students know the class objectives and expectations.	-2	-3	3
18. Is motivating to teachers and students.	1	-4	0
19. Promotes authentic classroom assessment.	-2	4	-3
20. Provides opportunities for students to get different ideas from different points of view.	-2	-2	1
21. Gets students involved and committed to learning, thinking, and sharing globally.	1	1	-3
22. Considers the context of the learner.	-1	3	1
23. Design effective follow-up procedures for results gathered after student evaluations.	0	-2	-2
24. Promotes innovative and creative thinking for students and teachers.	2	1	-2
25. Has the ability to understand and accept students’ view-points.	-1	-3	1
26. Promotes the integration of content and life experience.	0	1	2
27. Is interdisciplinary.	-4	-2	0
28. Promotes social values and norms.	-3	0	-4
29. Inspires students to strive for excellence.	2	2	-2
30. Is willing to take risks.	-3	-4	-1
31. Has good managerial skills.	-4	4	0