

## **Personality Traits of Effective Teachers Represented in the Narratives of American and Chinese Preservice Teachers: A Cross-Cultural Comparison**

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### **Abstract**

*This study explored personality traits of effective teachers represented in the narratives of American and Chinese preservice teachers. Narrative data were collected from 80 American and 75 Chinese teacher candidates. Coding and content analysis of the data generated twelve salient personality traits of effective teachers in America and China, including: adaptability, enthusiasm, fairness, high expectations, good humor, patience, responsibility, agreeableness, caring, friendliness, honesty, and respectfulness. MANOVAs and ANOVAs revealed that American preservice teachers attached greater importance to teachers' adaptability, sense of humor, and responsibility while the Chinese attached greater importance to teachers' patience, agreeableness, caring, and friendliness. Cross-culturally, females show greater concern than males about teacher expectations, while within each culture, American females are more concerned than males about teacher honesty, and Chinese females are more concerned than males about teacher adaptability and respectfulness. Findings were discussed by referring to American and Chinese cultures.*

**Key words:** personality trait, effective teacher, America, China, teacher candidate

### **1. Introduction**

In a recent cross-cultural study, we found that effective teachers in America and China possess six common categories of attributes: teacher knowledge, professional attitude, classroom performance, rapport establishing, student motivating, and personality (Gao & Liu, 2012). As far as the category of personality is concerned, the study suggests that cross-cultural difference exists between American and Chinese participants, with American preservice teachers showing significantly less concern with teacher personality compared to their Chinese counterparts. Since personality, like other categories in the study, is a composite variable composed of various personality traits, we were wondering and thus determined to look closely into whether the cross-cultural difference still holds true with individual, componential personality traits. This article documented this cross-cultural investigation of personality traits of effective teachers as represented in the narratives of American and Chinese preservice teachers.

Personality traits of effective teachers have been an important area of investigation. A personality trait is a relatively stable characteristic that causes individuals to behave in certain ways. The word "effective" stems from the Latin word *effectīvus* which means creative or productive. Effective teachers, in the sense of being able to produce a desired result, can be thought of as those who are able to engage students in the learning process and maximize student academic achievement and other school outcomes. Since the 1920s, educational researchers worldwide have explored personality traits that make a teacher effective in the classroom.

During the last several decades, more than 1000 articles have been published that concentrate upon some aspect of teacher personality (Nussbaum, 1992). Some researchers (e.g., Erdle, Murray, and Rushton, 1985) have suggested that the personality traits of a teacher are important but have not been seen to invalidate or bias student ratings. They argue that if personality traits affect student ratings, it may be caused more by what instructors do in their teaching than who they are as a person. Other researchers have reported that personality traits have significant effects on teacher effectiveness. Effective teachers demonstrate a common wealth of personality traits, such as adaptability, agreeableness, caring, collegiality, enthusiasm, fairness, friendliness, good humor, high expectations, honesty, patience, respectfulness, and responsibility, to name a few. The researchers believe that these and other personality traits, when used appropriately, become catalysts for optimal student learning, and thus are indispensable to teacher's classroom operation and teacher-student interaction. Teachers' personality traits are reflected not only in their classroom performance, especially in their selection of instructional activities, materials, strategies, and classroom management techniques but their interaction with students as well (Henson & Chambers, 2002).

### **1.1 Major Personality Traits Enhancing Teacher Effectiveness**

The literature reveals that some personality traits have significant effects on teachers' classroom operation or performance. Adaptability is one of them. An adaptation is an instructional interaction where teachers adjust their instruction in response to student needs (Mascarenhas, Parsons, & Burrowbridge, 2010), and adaptations promote student engagement, processing, and critical thinking (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Because classrooms are dynamic, adaptations are sometimes more desirable than a well-written lesson plan (Stronge, 2007). Teachers develop adaptability through experience and awareness, and experienced teachers are more likely to demonstrate adaptability compared to beginners. Effective teachers are able to improvise with ease, capitalizing on a teachable moment or accommodating a schedule change. Effective teachers are adaptable in providing variety in their teaching activities, aiming to match their manipulation of the teaching and learning environment to the needs of the learner (Mohanna, Chambers, & Wall, 2007).

High expectation for student success is a common descriptor of effective teachers. Teachers who have high expectations for student success are able to challenge students to achieve (Gill & Reynolds, 1999) and are often cited as effective teachers (Malikow, 2005-2006). Teachers' expectations can positively influence both the quantity and quality of a student's learning experience (Baumann, 2006-2007; Brophy, 1983; Good, 1981; Jussim & Eccles, 1992). Effective teachers usually are remembered as "[holding] high expectations, [pushing] students to achieve" (Irvine, 2001, p. 7), and consistently challenging them to do their best (Thompson, Greer, & Greer, 2004).

Humor is a top personality trait that contributes to teacher effectiveness (James, 2007). Humor plays a significant role in conveying course content, particularly abstract, challenging content (Downs, Javidi, & Nussbaum, 1988; Kher, Mostad, & Donahue, 1999). It enhances student pleasure in learning and reducing anxiety (Garner, 2005) and establishes a classroom climate conducive to optimal student learning (Gorham & Christophe, 1990). In addition, the use of humor facilitates attention and motivation (Lorenzi, 1996). However, the literature reported gender difference, although controversial, with regard to the use of humor. Bryant, Comisky, Crane, and Zillman (1980) observed that male instructors who frequently used humor were rated as better teachers compared to those who did not use humor, whereas female instructors who frequently used humor were rated as less effective compared to those who did not use humor. By contrast, Gorham and Christophe (1990) did not find the association between humor use and the evaluations of female instructors.

Effective teachers demonstrate professional responsibility. They come to class well prepared (Aranas, 1985), are readily accessible outside of class (Zhang, 2004), and are dedicated to and accountable for student academic performance (Liu & Meng, 2009). They provide fair assessment, conduct ongoing reflection on their experiences, and are active members of learning communities, interested in continuing their own professional development (Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, & James, 2002).

Effective teachers show enthusiasm or intensity (Cruickshank, Jenkins, & Metcalf, 2003). There exists a relationship between the intensity (or enthusiasm) component of personality and effective teaching (Madsen, Standley, & Cassidy, 1989). A teacher who demonstrates enthusiasm is more likely to motivate students (Lowman, 1994).

Moreover, the literature is replete with evidence of the effects of teacher personality on teacher-student interaction. Recently, the notion of “rapport” has been used to explain the nature of effective teacher-student interaction. Establishing effective rapport enables students to operate at levels of cognitive and affective functioning that are higher compared to those they could otherwise achieve (Wray, Medwell, Fox, & Poulson, 2000). Effective rapport requires that teachers be friendly, respectful, connected with students, and trustworthy (Garcia, 1991; Zhang, 2004). A few personality traits are reported to facilitate the establishment of rapport between teacher and student.

Agreeableness, in the sense of getting along with others in pleasant, satisfying relationships (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002), characterizes effective teachers. Teachers high in agreeableness tend to be compassionate, altruistic, cooperative, compliant, modest, forgiving, and trusting (Costa & McCrae, 1992). According to Aranas (1985), students tended to rate highly the personality trait of agreeableness. Of the Big Five personality characteristics (namely, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness, and neuroticism), agreeableness was the only factor that significantly correlated with student ratings of instructional quality (Kneipp, Kelly, Biscoe, & Richard, 2010). In addition, Simonton (2003) also reported that behaviors related to the Big Five personality traits were the key to success, and agreeableness was associated with great teaching.

Caring is another major personality trait of effective teachers. Caring is a special kind of relationship between the carer and the one cared for (Noddings, 1984), and it is a type of moral reasoning whereby decisions are made in response to the contemporary situation based on empathetic understanding of other people's needs (Gilligan, 1982). In the educational setting, this trait makes the distinction between discipline, which is done for the benefit of the students, and control, which exhibits an uncaring teacher attitude (Baumann, 2006-2007). Caring teachers not only believe that all students can learn but also communicate this belief to students. They demonstrate “an authentic interest in their students as people and not just as members of their class”; students sense that they mean more to the teacher than the grade they earn or the behaviors they demonstrate, and “students feel a connectedness with the teacher that transcends the classroom and the material to be learned” (Baumann, 2006-2007, p. 11). A caring teacher is attentive and receptive to the needs and feelings of students and “[demonstrates] that she can establish, more or less regularly, relations of care in a wide variety of situations” (Noddings, 2001, pp. 100-101). A caring teacher practices pedagogical nurturing and creates caring environments in which students are nurtured to care for their learning and for one another (Norlander-Case, Reagan, & Case, 1999).

The list above certainly does not exhaust personality traits that affect teacher effectiveness. Nonetheless, important questions remain unanswered: Are personality traits of effective teachers universal or culturally specific? To what extent would personality traits that contribute to teacher effectiveness in one culture still hold true in another culture? The answers to these questions rely on cross-cultural studies.

## 1.2 American and Chinese Culture and Teacher

While the existing studies have been conducted by researchers across the globe, only few have been done from a comparative perspective. In one of them, Liu and Meng (2009) first explored Chinese perceptions of effective teacher personality traits, and then went on to check whether these traits were consistent with those that other researchers had reported of effective teachers in America. The researchers concluded that high consistency exists between Chinese and American perceptions of effective teacher personalities.

However, we believe that consistency is no equivalent of homogeneity and commonality. Differences exist between American culture and Chinese culture. The United States generally is considered an individualistic, low-context society, at the core of which is the belief in the freedom of the individual (Rosenberg, 2004). Within this society, individual rights supersede “blind duty” to one’s family, clan, ethnic group, or nation, and it is individual, personal guilt that serves as “a moral compass” (Cohen, 1997; see also Rosenberg, 2004). In contrast, China generally is considered a collectivistic, or interdependent, high-context society. Quite often, this high-context society is characteristically a hierarchical and traditional culture, in which group honor and interpersonal harmony are of utmost importance. In an interdependent society, the concepts of shame and honor are much more important than they are in low-context, individualized societies; being humiliated or losing face before the group can be a fate worse than death in some cases (Cohen, 1997, p. 133). Both American culture and Chinese culture may emphasize the importance of certain personality traits for teacher effectiveness; however, their emphases may differ in magnitude and in different personality trait.

Actually, many differences exist in American and Chinese teachers' classroom operation and teacher-student interaction. American classrooms, for instance, incorporate multiple instructional models, valuing primarily student-centered instruction (Minor et al., 2002). American teachers and students are equal participants in teaching-learning processes, and students are encouraged to be critical thinkers and to question the authority of teachers. In contrast, in Chinese classrooms, teacher-centered instruction is dominant, and lecture is the major form of content delivery. Chinese teacher-student interaction is hierarchical, with teachers overseeing the students (Chan & Chan, 2005). Chinese students seldom question their teachers' authority (Biggs, 1996; Bond, 1991). Apparently, the previous literature has not accounted for these differences fully. It is necessary to explore this area further to deepen our understanding of the cross-cultural intricacies in personality traits of effective teachers.

### **1.3 The Current Research**

This study took a narrative approach to generate data based on real-life stories of effective teachers. According to Wei, den Brok, and Zhou (2009), a discrepancy exists between ideal and actual effective teachers. A narrative approach would produce a true picture of actual—rather than ideal—effective teachers. Narrative ascribes a meaningful and coherent order to discrete activities and events in the classroom and exists in the recollection of life events and other forms of communication between teacher and students. Narrative research involves representation of the multiple constructions of events (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A narrative approach provides a lens to understand the “subjective mapping of experience, the working out of a culture, and a social system” (Behar, 1990, p. 225).

This study focused on the lived experiences of preservice teachers. Before entering teacher education programs, preservice teachers have acquired a set of beliefs about teaching based on their own schooling experiences (Kagan, 1992). This situation challenges educators who are striving to improve the training of prospective teachers. This challenge occurs because, in human learning, it is more difficult to unlearn existing beliefs than it is to learn new beliefs (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). Novice teachers may teach the way they were taught rather than using strategies and skills learned in teacher education programs (Ginsburg & Newman, 1985). To assess what preservice teachers need to learn, it is important to understand their pre-existing knowledge and beliefs (Decker & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008).

### **1.4 Research Questions**

We hypothesized that effective teachers in America and China, while differing in many aspects, share a variety of personality traits. We also hypothesized that culture has an effect on personality traits in that it shapes and models the way individuals living in it behave and act in specific situations. In addition, since previous literature has reported gender difference in the effects of personality traits on ratings of teachers and their classroom performance, we hypothesized that gender has an effect on personality traits of effective teachers. To test the hypotheses, we sought to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What, if any, common personality traits of effective teachers are represented in the narratives of American and Chinese preservice teachers?
- 2) Does culture have an effect on preservice teachers' perceptions of personality traits of effective teachers? If yes, what specific trait(s) does it affect?
- 3) Does gender have an effect on preservice teachers' perceptions of personality traits of effective teacher? If yes, what specific trait(s) does it affect?

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1 Participants**

Participants in the study were 155 secondary teacher candidates ( $N = 155$ ), including 80 Americans and 75 Chinese. American participants were 44 females and 36 males, and the gender difference was non-significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 80) = .80, p > .05$ . They were recruited from a four-year public university in the southern United States of America. They had completed such educational courses as Introduction to Secondary Education and Educational Psychology and were taking a pre-internship course entitled as Performance-based Instructional Design. The Chinese participants included 51 females and 24 males, and the gender difference was significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 75) = 9.72, p = .002$ . They were enrolled in two 4-year public universities located in Beijing.

They have studied English as a foreign language for years, completed such courses as Principles of Education and Educational Psychology, and were taking an advanced-level Teaching English as a Foreign Language course.

## 2.2 Procedures

To facilitate participants recalling real-life stories of effective teachers, we created an open-ended survey asking participants to write a two-scenario essay. Scenario 1 aimed to establish the mental imagery of an effective teacher. The participants recounted their own effective teacher following guiding questions including: (a) who the teacher was, (b) what kind of person he/she was, and (c) what the most impressive thing about him/her was. Scenario 2 sought to elicit a real-life classroom event that occurred to the teacher. Some guiding questions included: (a) what happened, (b) what the teacher did, (c) how he/she conducted him/herself as a teacher, and (d) what caused him/her to act the way he/she did. Apart from providing demographic information, both American and Chinese participants completed the survey in writing. Noteworthy is that the mandarin-speaking Chinese completed this task in English, as did their American counterparts. Although no time limit was set for this take-home survey, the participants turned in the completed survey in 48-72 hours.

## 2.3 Data Coding and Analysis

To code the data first involved the development of a codebook by consulting the body of past work (e.g., Kher et al., 1999; Malikow, 2005-2006; Polk, 2006; Thompson et al., 2004; Zhang, 2004, 2007) on personality traits of effective teachers in America and China. Following the codebook, we coded all the essays independently. The inter-rater reliability was high ( $r = .92$ ). We also discussed and resolved our disagreements. To find salient personality traits of effective teachers, we conducted content analysis on the coded narrative segments by “systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages” (Holsti, 1969, p. 608). A total of 12 salient attributes were identified, including 7 traits that help enhancing teachers’ classroom operation and 5 traits that facilitate teacher-student interaction. The theme, that is, a single assertion about a given attribute, was employed as the recording unit (Holsti, 1969). Each trait was coded by counting the number of occurrences of its related themes across all the stories. Table 1 shows the coded traits and their themes.

**Table 1:Coded Personality Traits and Componential Themes**

Trait	Theme
Adaptability	Reflecting on personal experiences and making necessary adjustment to teaching based on emerging situations
Agreeableness	Pleasant to communicate with and willing to interact with students
Caring	Being sensitive to individual needs and understanding students’ differences in learning styles and other personal background issues
Enthusiasm	Showing passion or interest in teaching and students
Expectations	Challenging students to achieve high
Fairness	Maintaining consistent standards, rewarding or punishing students based on policy and behaviors
Friendliness	Easy-going, outgoing, like friends, friendship
Honesty	Telling students the truth about their strengths and weaknesses, and admitting mistakes and correcting them
Humor	Interesting, funny, making class enjoyable, joking
Patience	Showing patience to students of different learning speed, being responsive to student questions, and responding to student request of slowing down.
Respectfulness	Respecting students of different achievement levels and backgrounds
Responsibility	Coming to class well prepared, good organization of materials and activities, and being available to students after class

The data were analyzed using SPSS. The analyses focused on examining whether participants’ perceptions of personality traits of effective teachers were a function of culture and gender and how the magnitudes of the effects varied across different population groups and gender. To do so, we relied on comparing mean scores, examining  $F$  values and  $t$ -tests, and looking at power statistics and effect sizes across cultural and gender groups. We used an alpha level of .05 for all statistical tests and an 80% power ( $1-\beta \geq .80$ ) to detect a significant effect.

### 3. Results

Participants reported 155 stories of effective teachers, with an overall mean narrative volume per story of 444.86 words ( $SD = 260.41$ ). To examine whether English proficiency and gender influenced participants' narrative volume, a  $2$  (country)  $\times$   $2$  (gender) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted and yielded only a main effect of country,  $F(1, 151) = 201.25, p < .001$ . The study had sufficient power ( $1-\beta = 1.00$ ) to detect a significant English proficiency effect on narrative volume. The effect ( $\eta^2 = .571$ ) accounted for 57.1% of the variability in narrative volume. Overall, American participants wrote significantly longer stories ( $M = 633.30, SD = 201.02$ ) compared to their Chinese counterparts ( $M = 241.80, SD = 133.46$ ). The results revealed no significant effect of gender,  $F(1, 151) = .93, p > .05$ , and interaction,  $F(1, 151) = 2.55, p > .05$ .

The mean number of personality traits per story was 3.61 ( $SD = 1.75$ ). The same two-way ANOVA was conducted to compare whether American and Chinese participants differed in the mean number of effective teacher personality traits. ANOVAs revealed no significant effect of country,  $F(1, 151) = 1.00, p > .05$ , gender,  $F(1, 151) = 1.53, p > .05$ , and interaction,  $F(1, 51) = 3.13, p > .05$ . Teacher candidates, regardless of country and gender, did not differ substantially in the mean number of personality traits of effective teachers.

To examine whether the content (represented by the 12 personality traits) of participants' narratives was a function of country and gender, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted and yielded only a main effect of country,  $F(12, 140) = 8.30, p < .001$ . The study had sufficient power ( $1-\beta = 1.00$ ) to detect a significant country effect. The effect ( $\eta^2 = .416$ ) accounted for 41.6% of the variability in narrative content. To explore the country effect in more depth, twelve separate  $2$  (country)  $\times$   $2$  (gender) ANOVAs were performed across the 12 personality traits. Table 2 indicates the means and standard deviations of the variables and the  $F$ -ratios and  $p$  values from ANOVAs. For significant effects, power statistics ( $1-\beta$ ) and effect sizes ( $\eta^2$ ) were reported in the text and not repeated in the table. In addition, for significant interaction effects,  $t$ -tests were administered to examine the gender effect in specific cultural settings. Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations of the relevant variables, as well as the  $t$  and  $p$  values. Results were reported as follows.

**Table 2: Means (SD) of Content Analysis and Two-way ANOVAs by Culture and Gender (N = 155)**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Culture</b>				<b>Gender</b>				<b>Interaction</b>	
	<b>USA</b>	<b>China</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>
Adaptability	.61 (.49)	.37 (.49)	13.56	< .001	.45 (.50)	.53 (.50)	2.53	.11	4.78	.03
Agreeability	.09 (.28)	.17 (.38)	4.49	.036	.17 (.38)	.11 (.31)	2.25	.14	2.68	.10
Caring	.36 (.48)	.50 (.50)	5.87	.017	.43 (.50)	.49 (.50)	.24	.63	1.14	.29
Enthusiasm	.40 (.49)	.28 (.45)	2.12	.15	.35 (.48)	.34 (.48)	.00	.99	.06	.82
Expectations	.30 (.46)	.19 (.39)	3.52	.063	.17 (.38)	.29 (.46)	4.24	.04	.01	.94
Fairness	.23 (.42)	.16 (.37)	1.98	.16	.22 (.42)	.18 (.39)	.07	.80	3.88	.05
Friendliness	.18 (.38)	.56 (.50)	28.10	< .001	.32 (.47)	.39 (.49)	.04	.83	.45	.50
Honesty	.26 (.44)	.31 (.46)	.06	.81	.33 (.48)	.25 (.44)	.96	.33	4.38	.04
Humor	.20 (.40)	.48 (.50)	13.90	< .001	.25 (.44)	.39 (.49)	1.63	.20	.73	.39
Patience	.18 (.38)	.48 (.50)	13.97	< .001	.25 (.44)	.37 (.49)	1.30	.26	.88	.35
Respectful- ness	.22 (.42)	.16 (.37)	2.51	.12	.20 (.40)	.19 (.39)	.04	.83	6.00	.02
Responsible	.36 (.48)	.09 (.29)	14.55	< .001	.25 (.44)	.22 (.42)	.00	.96	.54	.46

### 3.1 Personality Traits Enhancing Teachers' Classroom Operation

#### 3.1.1 Adaptability

ANOVAs revealed a main effect of country,  $F(1, 151) = 13.56, p < .001$ . The study had sufficient power ( $1-\beta = .955$ ) to detect a significant country effect. The effect ( $\eta^2 = .082$ ) accounted for 8.2% of the variability in adaptability. Overall, American participants showed a significantly greater concern with teachers' adaptability ( $M = .61, SD = .49$ ) compared to their Chinese counterparts ( $M = .37, SD = .49$ ). The analysis yielded no significant gender effect,  $F(1, 151) = 2.53, p > .05$ . Both female and male participants stressed that adaptability has implications for teacher effectiveness.

Furthermore, the country by gender interaction effect was significant,  $F(1, 151) = 4.78, p = .03$ . The effect ( $\eta^2 = .031$ ) was small and accounted for a mere 3.1% of the variability in adaptability. Since the study had insufficient power ( $1-\beta = .584$ ) to detect a significant interaction effect on adaptability, the interaction effect should be interpreted with caution. T-test results suggested that for American participants, gender had no significant effect,  $t(78) = .43, p > .05$ , and both females ( $M = .64, SD = .49$ ) and males ( $M = .59, SD = .50$ ) emphasized the personality trait of adaptability. For the Chinese participants, in contrast, the gender effect was significant,  $t(73) = 2.62, p = .01$ , and the effect size was medium ( $d = .32$ ), with females showing a significantly greater concern with adaptability ( $M = .47, SD = .50$ ) compared to males ( $M = .17, SD = .38$ ).

**Table 3: Mean (SD) of Content Analysis Variables and T-test for Variables with Significant Interaction**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>USA (n = 80)</b>				<b>China (n = 75)</b>			
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>p</b>
Adaptability	.64 (.49)	.59 (.50)	-.43	.67	.17 (.38)	.47 (.50)	2.62	<b>.01</b>
Fairness	.31 (.47)	.16 (.37)	-1.57	.12	.08 (.28)	.20 (.40)	1.24	.22
Honesty	.39 (.49)	.16 (.37)	-2.38	<b>.02</b>	.25 (.44)	.33 (.48)	.72	.08
Respectfulness	.31 (.47)	.16 (.37)	-1.57	.12	.04 (.20)	.22 (.42)	1.94	<b>.056</b>

#### 3.1.2 Enthusiasm

For the personality trait of enthusiasm, ANOVAs revealed no significant effect of country,  $F(1, 151) = 2.12, p > .05$ , gender,  $F(1, 151) = .00, p > .05$ , and interaction,  $F(1, 151) = .06, p > 0.5$ . Teacher candidates overall emphasized the role of enthusiasm in enhancing teacher effectiveness. The emphasis did not vary significantly with participants' country and gender.

#### 3.1.3 Fairness

ANOVAs yielded no main country,  $F(1, 151) = 1.98, p > .05$ , gender,  $F(1, 151) = .07, p > .05$ , and interaction,  $F(1, 151) = 3.88, p > .05$ , effect on the personality trait of fairness. Teacher candidates overall believed it important that teachers treat students fairly, and their beliefs in the importance of fairness did not differ significantly with country and gender.

#### 3.1.4 High Expectations

ANOVAs suggested that country had no main effect on teachers' expectations,  $F(1, 151) = 3.52, p > .05$ , indicating that both American and Chinese participants did not differ significantly in emphasizing that teachers maintain high expectations for students. The same analysis yielded a main effect of gender,  $F(1, 151) = 4.24, p = .041$ . Inspection of the means indicated that overall, females attached greater importance to teachers' high expectations for students ( $M = .29, SD = .46$ ) than males ( $M = .17, SD = .38$ ). However, the study had insufficient power ( $1-\beta = .534$ ) to detect a significant gender effect, and the effect size ( $\eta^2 = .027$ ) was small and accounted for a mere 2.7% of the variability in this trait. Therefore, the gender effect should be interpreted with caution. In addition, the country by gender interaction effect was non-significant,  $F(1, 151) = .65, p > .05$ . No substantial difference existed in emphasis on teachers' expectations between American females and males, nor between Chinese females and males.

#### 3.2.5 Humor

For this personality trait, there was a significant country effect,  $F(1, 151) = 13.90, p < .001$ . The study had sufficient power ( $1-\beta = .959$ ) to detect a significant country difference in sense of humor.

The effect size ( $\eta^2 = .084$ ) accounted for 8.4% of the variability in humor. A comparison of the means revealed that Chinese participants attached greater importance to teachers' sense of humor ( $M = .48, SD = .50$ ) compared to their American counterparts ( $M = .20, SD = .40$ ). There was no significant gender effect for sense of humor,  $F(1, 151) = 1.63, p > .05$ . Females and males both emphasized teachers' sense of humor for effective teaching. No significant interaction effect was yielded for sense of humor,  $F(1, 151) = .73, p > .05$ . American female and male participants did not differ in their emphasis on teachers' sense of humor, nor did Chinese females and males.

### **3.1.6 Patience**

ANOVAs indicated that country had a main effect on the personality trait of patience,  $F(1, 151) = 13.97, p < .001$ . This study had sufficient power ( $1-\beta = .960$ ) to detect a significant country effect on patience, and the effect ( $\eta^2 = .029$ ) was small and accounted for a mere 2.9 % of the variability in patience. American participants overall showed significantly less emphasis on the personality trait of patience ( $M = .18, SD = .38$ ) than their Chinese counterparts ( $M = .48, SD = .50$ ). Gender effect was non-significant,  $F(1, 151) = 1.30, p > .05$ . Both female and male participants emphasized the role of patience in teacher effectiveness. In addition, the country by gender interaction effect was non-significant,  $F(1, 151) = .88, p > .05$ . The gender effect did not vary with country. American females and males did not differ in their emphasis on the role of patience, nor did their Chinese counterparts.

### **3.1.7 Responsibility**

ANOVAs yielded only a main effect of country on the personality trait of responsibility,  $F(1, 151) = 14.55, p < .001$ . The study had sufficient power ( $1-\beta = .996$ ) to detect a significant country effect on responsibility, and the effect ( $\eta^2 = .088$ ) accounted for 8.8% of the variability in responsibility. American participants overall showed a significantly greater concern with teachers' sense of responsibility ( $M = .36, SD = .48$ ) than their Chinese counterparts ( $M = .09, SD = .29$ ). No significant gender effect was revealed,  $F(1, 151) = .002, p > .05$ . Both females and males stressed the importance of teachers' responsibility. In addition, the country by gender interaction effect was non-significant,  $F(1, 151) = .54, p > .05$ . The gender effect did not vary with country. American females and males did not differ in emphasizing the role of responsibility in enhancing teacher effectiveness, nor did Chinese females and males.

## **3.2 Personality Traits Enhancing Teacher-Student Interaction**

### **3.2.1 Agreeableness**

ANOVAs yielded a main effect of country,  $F(1, 151) = 4.49, p = .036$ . The study had insufficient power ( $1-\beta = .558$ ) to detect a significant country effect on agreeableness. The country effect should be interpreted with caution. The effect ( $\eta^2 = .029$ ) was small and accounted for a mere 2.9% of the variability in agreeableness. Overall, American teacher candidates ( $M = .09, SD = .28$ ) showed less concern with teachers' agreeableness compared to their Chinese counterparts ( $M = .17, SD = .38$ ). The results revealed no significant gender effect,  $F(1, 151) = 2.25, p > .05$ . Both females and males showed strong emphasis on teachers' agreeableness. In addition, the country by gender interaction effect was non-significant,  $F(1, 151) = .268, p > .05$ . American females and males did not differ significantly in stressing teachers' agreeableness, nor did Chinese females and males.

### **3.2.2 Caring**

For this personality trait, ANOVAs revealed only a main effect of country,  $F(1, 151) = 5.87, p = .017$ . Nonetheless, the study did not have sufficient power ( $1-\beta = .673$ ) to detect a significant country effect in caring, and the country effect ( $\eta^2 = .037$ ) accounted for a mere 3.7% of the variability in caring. This effect should be interpreted with caution. A comparison of the means revealed that American participants ( $M = .36, SD = .48$ ) attached less importance to teachers' caring than their Chinese counterparts ( $M = .50, SD = .50$ ). The gender effect was non-significant,  $F(1, 151) = .24, p > .05$ . Females and males did not differ substantially in emphasizing the implications of caring for effective teaching. In addition, there was no significant interaction effect,  $F(1, 151) = 1.14, p > .05$ , meaning that no substantial difference existed between American female and male participants with regard to caring, nor between Chinese females and males.

### **3.2.3 Friendliness**

For the personality trait of friendliness, ANOVAs revealed only a main effect of country,  $F(1, 151) = 28.10, p < .001$ . The study had sufficient power ( $1-\beta = 1.00$ ) to detect a significant country effect, and the effect ( $\eta^2 = .157$ ) accounted for 15.7% of the variability in this trait. Overall, American participants ( $M = .18, SD = .38$ ) showed significantly less concern with teachers' friendliness than their Chinese participants ( $M = .56, SD = .50$ ). The gender effect was non-significant,  $F(1, 151) = .04, p > .05$ . Females and males did not differ significantly in emphasizing friendliness. In addition, the country by gender interaction effect was non-significant,  $F(1, 151) = .04, p > .05$ . No substantial difference existed in emphasis on teachers' friendliness between American females and males, nor between Chinese females and males.

### **3.2.4 Honesty**

ANOVAs revealed no significant country effect,  $F(1, 151) = .06, p > .05$ . American and Chinese teacher candidates overall emphasized the importance of honesty for teaching effectiveness. There was no significant effect of gender,  $F(1, 151) = .96, p > .05$ , suggesting that both female and male participants did not differ in their emphasis on honesty. While ANOVAs yielded a significant culture by gender interaction effect,  $F(1, 151) = 4.38, p = .04$ , the study had no sufficient power ( $1-\beta = .547$ ) to detect a significant interaction effect on honesty, and the interaction effect ( $\eta^2 = .028$ ) accounted for a mere 2.8% of the variability in honesty. Further analyses revealed that a significant gender difference only existed in the perception of American participants,  $t(78) = 2.38, p = .02$ , with American males showing greater concern for teachers' honesty ( $M = .39, SD = .49$ ) than females ( $M = .16, SD = .37$ ). There was no significant gender difference in the perception of teachers' honesty among Chinese participants,  $t(73) = .72, p > .05$ .

### **3.2.5 Respectfulness**

ANOVAs revealed no main effect of country on the trait of respectfulness,  $F(1, 151) = 2.51, p > .05$ . American and Chinese participants overall emphasized it important that teachers treat students with respect. The same analysis yielded no main effect of gender on respectfulness,  $F(1, 151) = .04, p > .05$ . Female and male teacher candidates showed no substantial difference in their emphasis on teachers' treating students with respect. However, this analysis showed a significant interaction effect on respectfulness,  $F(1, 151) = 6.00, p = .02$ . Further analyses revealed that the Chinese showed a marginally significant gender difference in teachers' respectfulness,  $t(73) = .72, p = .056$ , with females reporting a greater concern ( $M = .22, SD = .42$ ) than males ( $M = .04, SD = .20$ ).

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1 Findings**

The current study starts with the goal of seeking cross-cultural commonality in personality traits that are believed to enhance teacher effectiveness. Analysis on textual data reveals evidence confirming the hypothesis in the first research question that effective teachers in American and Chinese classrooms share a wealth of personality traits that help improve teachers' classroom operation and interaction with students. This cross-cultural commonality is especially noteworthy, considering that American and Chinese participants come from different socio-cultural background and have different schooling experience. Overall, the narratives of American and Chinese preservice teachers disclose a dozen personality traits that become common descriptors of actual effective teachers. In the eyes of American and Chinese participants, effective teachers demonstrate adaptability, enthusiasm, fairness, high expectations, good humor, patience, and responsibility, and they are agreeable, caring, friendly, honest, and respectful. These personality traits may be not exhaustive, but they are consistent with those emerging from the relevant literature. This finding leads the authors to conclude that teachers who possess and demonstrate some, if not all, of these qualities, regardless of country and gender, are more likely to establish connectedness with students, engage students in teaching and learning process, and thus bring about desired school outcomes.

This study has a second goal of investigating whether culture has an effect on education students' perceptions about personality traits of effective teachers. MANOVA provides evidence confirming the hypothesis in the second research question that culture has a significant effect on the way American and Chinese teacher candidates perceive the roles of personality traits in effective teaching. ANOVAs on each individual personality trait show further evidence indicating that of the twelve personality traits culture, seven are affected by culture, including teachers' adaptability, sense of humor, patience, responsibility, agreeableness, caring, and friendliness.

Americans showed a significantly greater concern with teachers' adaptability, sense of humor, and responsibility and were less concerned with teachers' patience, agreeableness, caring, and friendliness compared to the Chinese. In addition, American and Chinese teacher candidates did not differ significantly in teachers' enthusiasm, fairness, high expectations, honesty, and respectfulness; culture has very small or only marginal effects on these personality traits. In reflection, the authors noticed that Americans showed greater emphasis on adaptability, sense of humor, and responsibility, the traits benefitting teachers' classroom operation, while the Chinese were more concerned about agreeableness, caring, and friendliness, the traits benefitting teacher-student interaction. This phenomenon may be accounted for by the cultural differences between the two countries. As discussed previously, America overall is an individualistic, low-context society, while China is a collectivistic, or interdependent, high-context society and has a long history of emphasizing harmonious interpersonal relationship. In classroom operation, American teachers are expected to use individualized instructional models, adapt to individual student needs through on-going reflection on classroom experience, and demonstrate commitment to the profession. Chinese teachers, in contrast, usually are expected to help students score high on high-stake tests and are less concerned about individual student needs. In terms of teacher-student interaction, American teacher-student relationship is more often characterized by a professional, service-to-client orientation and involves little personal connection. Chinese teacher-student relationship, in contrast, features friendship or sometimes a private, parent-to-child relationship, which involves frequent, personal, familial connections. It is not unusual for a Chinese teacher and her students to become life-long friends, and it is also not unusual for a Chinese teacher to pay her students a home visit and sometimes treat her students as her own children, or for a student treat her teacher as parent. This intimate, familial teacher-student connection is seldom seen in American teacher-student interaction. It seems safe to say that cross-cultural differences existing in classroom operation and teacher-student interaction are particularly embodied in the way American and Chinese teacher candidates perceive personality traits of effective teachers.

A third goal of the current study is to examine whether gender has an effect on how teacher candidates view the role of personality traits in teacher effectiveness. Overall, MANOVA lends no support to the hypothesis in the third research question that gender has an effect on teacher candidates' perceptions of effective teacher attributes. Further, ANOVAs conducted on each individual personality trait suggest that only one personality trait—teacher expectations—is significantly affected by gender, with females showing a significantly greater concern than males about the importance of teacher expectations. The other 11 traits are not significantly affected by gender; female and male teacher candidates do not differ substantially in their emphasis on the importance of adaptability, enthusiasm, fairness, patience, sense of humor, responsibility, agreeableness, caring, friendliness, honesty, and respectfulness. However, the current study reveals significant culture by gender interaction effects on three personality traits: adaptability, honesty, and respectfulness. American females are significantly more concerned than males about teacher honesty, while Chinese females are significantly more concerned than males about teacher adaptability and respectfulness. Other than that, both American females and males do not differ significantly in the other personality traits, nor do the Chinese females and males. The previous literature (e.g., Bryant et al., 1980; Gorham & Christophe, 1990) reports gender difference in the use of humor and the current study does not provide evidence in this regard; however, this study adds to the literature that cross-cultural gender difference exists in teacher expectations and within-cultural gender difference exists in teacher adaptability, honesty, and respectfulness.

#### **4.2 Conclusion and Implications**

This study shows that effective teachers possess or demonstrate adaptability, enthusiasm, fairness, high expectations, good humor, patience, and responsibility, and they are agreeable, caring, friendly, honest, and respectful. These personality traits serve as rudimentary predictors of teacher success. It also indicates that importance of an individual personality trait may vary with culture and gender. American preservice teachers attach greater importance to teachers' adaptability, sense of humor, and responsibility and less importance to teachers' patience, agreeableness, caring, and friendliness compared to their Chinese counterparts. In addition, this study discloses gender difference in some personality traits.

Female preservice teachers regardless of country show greater concern than males about teacher expectations. In the United States, female teacher candidates are more concerned than males about teacher honesty, while in China, females are more concerned than males about teacher adaptability and respectfulness.

The current inquiry, while exploratory in nature, has several implications. This cross-cultural effort focused on the narratives of education students and portrayed actual—rather than ideal—effective teachers. This effort indicates that a narrative approach is instrumental in mapping out the lived experiences of effective teachers to which we otherwise may have little access. Moreover, this inquiry not only disclosed the cross-cultural commonality and differences in personality traits which enhance teacher effectiveness but adds to the existing literature new knowledge about within-cultural gender differences in teacher candidates' perceptions of effective teacher personalities as well. All in all, knowledge emerging from this study will inform global readers of developing alternative strategies to improve cross-cultural communications and enhance international understanding not only in the field of education but beyond.

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