

RESULTS

Table 1 provides the major results of the open coding analysis of 120 essays describing good and poor instruction in a university course. The table shows 4 superordinate and 28 subordinate categories emerging from the analysis of students' memories of their experience of good and poor university courses. The superordinate categories include the teacher, the context, the student, and classroom discourse. Out of 1,426 clauses referring to 1 of the 4 superordinate categories, 659 were allocated to the teacher, 352 to context, 275 focused on the student, and 140 referred to components of classroom discourse jointly constructed by the teacher and students. The table also indicates that between 4 and 10 subcategories are associated with each of the major categories. Thus, for any university course, the typical student appears to hold a relatively sophisticated mental, conceptual model of what happens in the course. However, no one individual student included all 28 subcategories when describing either a good or poor university course. Students typically provided a lengthy and holistic essay description of good rather than poor courses. This is opposite to the findings of Kember and Wong (2000). The typical student in the sample used nearly 50% more clauses to describe good in comparison to poor course happenings. This suggests that typically, poor course experiences may be less meaningful, and therefore less detailed information is retained in

Table 1. Major Categories of the Instructional Situation.

Major categories	Associated concepts
Teacher	Personal dispositions, communication skills, empowers participation, appearance, body language, age, knowledge, movement in class space, availability, knows student names.
Context	Course organization, class social/academic organization, seating arrangement, media/print tool use, lecture preparation, variety of methods used, class size, content meaningfulness, time.
Student	Feelings, thinking, use of prior knowledge, knowledge of teacher expectations, student responsibility.
Classroom discourse	Teacher/student discourse, student/student discourse, questions to students, questions from students.

memory, or students simply were less motivated to deliberately retrieve and reflect upon what happened when the received experience is poor.

Major Categories Describing Good and Poor Classroom Instruction

The dominant category most frequently referred to in student essays was the "teacher". Here the students' language reflected descriptions, interpretations, assumptions, and reports about the teacher. The focus on the teacher most emphasized: (a) personal attributes, (b) the communication skills of the teacher, and (c) opportunities provided by the teacher's plans and actions for students to participate in instruction. However, as Table 1 indicates, seven other categories referring to the teacher were also elaborated upon by students, albeit less frequently. One of these subcategories is "teacher age." It results in the same distribution of properties for both very good and poor instruction. This suggests that the professor's age is not a category perceived by education students to distinguish good and poor teaching processes. Overall, these findings support the view that characteristics of the teacher and teaching as a process variable are a substantial conceptual part of what students remember of both good and poor courses. Since every student responded to the first and second semistructured question, every student had an equal opportunity to elaborate on the teacher and on other dimensions of what happened in a good and poor university course. Students elaborated more on the first than the second interview question. This implies they knew more about, or were more aware of, these dimensions of the course as a process.

Student essays gave the second-most emphasis to the context of instruction. Thus instruction, not just the teacher characteristics and teaching, figured into students' perceptions of what happened in good and poor university courses. In theory, context refers to the relatedness of human action in meaningful situations, activity systems, and the emergence of meanings over time (Van Oers, 1998). Context may also be seen as the interpretation of a situation by a person involved. Thus, the meaningfulness of a situation may be different for different people involved in it. Another approach to context is to view it as "the joint activity between people and their socially constituted situation that structures what they do or say, not wholly they themselves" (Shotter, 1995, p. 48). The properties of a university class context include patterned activity and reoccurring actions, objects, activities, and dispositions that structure, order, and mediate the interpretation of the emotions and cognitions of participants in a course.

In this study, "course organization" and "class social and academic organization" were most often referred to as context dimensions of instruction. Closely following these two properties of context was "emotional climate" and "seating arrangements." Seven other dimensions of the context of instruction also are shown in Table 1. Six of the seven subcategories were given nearly equal emphasis in student essays. However, the seventh conceptual category referred to "time" and was least often elaborated. The category "class size" was a part of the context and appeared to have had a strong relationship to class format. For example, in all student essays, when the class size exceeded 55, students were seated in desks or chairs that were bolted to the floor and formed straight rows. It is also important to recognize that no course designated as poor was smaller than 55 students.

The superordinate category of "student" was referred to less often than "context" but more often than "classroom discourse" in students' descriptions of good or poor classroom teaching and instruction. The dominant dimension in the student category was "student feelings." It made up 75% of the concepts associated with the student variable. In this category, the essay language of students was referring either to themselves (in the first or third person), to the teacher's influence on their thinking, or to the use of prior student knowledge. For example, for the subcategory of "feelings," a student said "I felt stimulated" representing a personal reference. In contrast, in the category of thinking, a student said "He [the teacher] provoked me to think," attributing the teacher's actions as influencing what and how often the student thought.

The fourth and least frequently mentioned superordinate category associated with instruction concerned "Discourse" arising in the classroom. Edwards and Westgate (1986) defined discourse as text arising from talk in classrooms. In the essays of these preservice teachers, discourse was considered to be verbal interactions between the participants for some academic purpose. Rather than the term "discourse", the students most often used the terms "interactions," "debate," "dialogue," and "discussion." Each of these concepts may be associated with the emergence of classroom talk of discourse quality. The major subcategories included teacher-student and student-student interactions, and questions to students by the teacher and from students to the teacher or to other students. Students most often reported on teacher-student interactions as opposed to the students' verbal interactions with each other or students initiating academic questions. This finding is supported in recent empirical studies of student verbal participation in university courses (Baird,

2000; Fassinger, 1995; Howard & Henney, 1998). Moreover, the findings in this study do not inform us about the extent to which participation in discussion by most students is consolidated by only a few of the students in a class. Yet, Howard, Short, and Clark (1996) reported this consolidation of responsibility to be taken only by a few while the majority of the students were passive observers and occasional participants.

In summary, the student essays describing good and poor university instruction disclosed least about classroom discourse, more about student emotional states and cognition, still more about the nature of the classroom context, and most about the teacher or teaching. Hence, the teacher and teaching were reconfirmed as important dimensions of instruction from the students' perspective. No doubt, student expectations for participation were formed through: (a) actual university participation in courses, (b) the heavy emphasis given to teacher characteristics, communication and pedagogy in the typical university course evaluation, and (c) student exposure to research on instruction and learning as majors in Education. Still, collectively, these preservice teachers appeared to hold a sophisticated mental model of instruction within which the teacher and teaching were part of instruction. Moreover, there is no question from these data that individual student models of instruction include multiple concepts of which teaching is only one of the dominant categories. Thus, the results support the theoretical arguments made by some researchers that teacher characteristics and teaching are only part of instruction (Anderson & Burns, 1989).

A Comparison of Students' Perceptions of Good and Poor Instruction

Fifteen of the 28 subcategories could be placed on a continuum of properties, classes, or examples. Eight of these 15 categories are shown in Tables 2–5. The conceptual category labels in each table are the exact words taken from clauses in student essays. For the other categories, the properties of a category common to both good and poor courses are opposites such as “valued” and “not valued”, “promoted,” and “discouraged”. This same outcome was reported by Kember and Wong (2000). The remaining categories use unique concepts associated with either very good or poor instruction and cannot be directly compared. They suggest properties of very good and poor course experiences that students appear to have considered independent.

Table 2 illustrates that the descriptions of both good and poor courses emphasize the personal disposition of the teacher along a continuum made up of very similar personality attributes. Many of these attributes have been