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**A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF HIGH PERFORMING MIDDLE
SCHOOL STUDENTS AND THEIR EXPERIENCES OF THE DEVELOPMENT
OF THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR TEACHERS**

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by

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined the experiences of the developing teacher-student relationship from the perspective of a small group of high performing middle school students. Using qualitative methodology including interviews and diary entries, data were collected over several months and analyzed to derive an understanding of the student perspectives on teacher interpersonal behaviors, teacher functional behaviors in the classroom, student learning behaviors, and teacher reactive behaviors in response to students' behaviors.

The students' insights in this investigation offered an unexpected perspective on the interpersonal and technical behaviors of their teachers not currently present in the literature. Their achievement motivation and outcomes were the overriding influences in the development of the teacher-student relationship, and not a relationship of affiliation with the teacher as had been expected.

Second, the teacher-student relationship established patterns of interaction and expectations quite early in its development. Evidence over a period of months indicated that little had changed in the students' perceptions of their relationships with their teachers, suggesting the possibility exists that the opportunity for teachers to connect positively with students is quite limited and occurs in a very short amount of time; the implications of which mean that recovery from a negative relationship might be difficult to overcome.

Important to the students was the notion of being able to predict how teachers would behave in class and with students, how well they would perform their duties, how they would treat the students, and how they might administer the use of humor with them and their peers. Also important was the need for students to determine teacher expectations in order to earn the acceptance of their teachers through compliance and performance. The conditional nature of the teacher-student relationship elicited a number of questions for further investigation into the phenomenon of this relationship.

Information learned from this investigation has provided the impetus for a variety of future studies as well as a number of opportunities for teacher training and professional development. It also has opened the door for deeper inquiry into this phenomenon for other students.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

The teacher-student relationship has been the subject of prolific study and debate over the last several decades. A number of recent studies have attempted to identify the characteristics of teacher personality that are helpful to students and have sought to create the profile of a successful teacher-student relationship. The majorities of these studies have relied heavily on the use of quantitative, observational and survey techniques to infer the identification of the characteristics most associated with successful teacher-student relationships. (Benard, 2004; Gentry & Owen, 2004; Kaplan & Owings, 2000; Klem & Connell, 2004; Koul & Fisher, 2006; Leary, 1957; Rickards, Newby, & Fisher, 2001; Waldrip & Fisher, 2002; Wubbels, Levy, & Brekelmans, 1997)

Literature from a variety of sources discusses numerous characteristics of the relationships between students and teachers from a multiplicity of adult perspectives. The literature speaks to the emotional welfare and safety of students in the schools and supports the notion that students are most successful in schools when they sense and believe their teachers care about them. These studies also describe successful teachers as those who are experts in their content, organize their classroom in ways conducive to learning, and are openly available to their students for learning and extra support. Common themes among this research also identify positive teacher behaviors as those that include empathy, understanding, and the ability to listen, knowing students on a personal level, and are desirous of making personal connections with students. These studies give rise to questions revolving around the meaning of the experience of these relationships, but do not primarily seek to understand the students' experiential perspective. Rather, the studies attempt to identify and quantify the variety of behaviors and characteristics that should or could be present in the teacher-student relationship in order to maximize student success in the school setting. (Buttner, 2004; Checkley, 2004; Diero, 2003; Hamre & Pianta, 2006; Hargreaves, 2000; Martin, Romas, Medford, Leffert, & Hatcher, 2006)

In light of the available literature on this topic, little research has been accomplished that focuses solely on the perceptions of students regarding the teacher-student relationship. Almost no qualitative data exist that describe any of these characteristics from the student's perspective. Furthermore, little research was found to discuss the experience or the perceptions of students regarding this relationship for early adolescents.

Statement of the Purpose

The overall purpose of this study was to uncover a deeper understanding of the teacher-student relationship phenomenon of high performing students and how students experience their relationships with their teachers in school. In addition, it was hoped that this research would help to further elucidate the essence of this relationship through the experiences of the students in the building of this relationship. Such information could prove invaluable in increasing the levels of understanding and awareness about this relationship for current practicing teachers and administrators, teacher preparation professionals, and researchers who study classroom climate and teacher-student relationships.

Need for the Study

There has been a wealth of research conducted over the last half century in the attempt to more fully understand the dynamics of the teacher-student relationship. Much of the research has been conducted from a quantitative perspective and has attempted to define this relationship by identifying specific characteristics of a successful teacher. Throughout the research, it has been determined that a positive teacher-student relationship is critical to the success of students in schools.

Diero (2003) suggests that the relationships teachers should form with students are *influential* in nature and are intended to affect change by promoting learning and growth. She identifies respectful behavior as integral to the development of positive relationships between teachers and students. Respectful behavior toward students is characterized by the use of discipline as a means of instruction while teachers ethically use their power.

Buttner (2004) conducted a study among college level students through which she identified a number of other behaviors as showing respect. Included among these behaviors

are recognition of student perspectives, showing sensitivity toward students' concerns, treating students with kindness, offering help and responding to questions, affirming students' contributions to class, being honest and truthful with students, and responding non-defensively to challenges and questions.

Checkley (2004) studied the needs of the adolescent learner. As children enter the most difficult period of growth in their lives, early adolescence, they require intense support from the adults around them. It is critical for the adults to recognize how their connection with students, especially struggling learners, impacts the students' perception of that relationship. She further reports that the other critical way to connect with adolescents is to honor how they learn and nurture their unique talents. Regular communication between the teachers who serve groups of students should enlighten the professionals about students' ongoing needs and accomplishments. Using students' strengths to enhance their achievement in other ways is a way of honoring how they learn. Matching student interests with curriculum and objectives, and giving students a voice in how or what they learn will further their motivation in the process.

Osterman (2000) studied students' need for belongingness in the school community through extensive analysis of research on the topic. She uncovered a number of factors that lead to a student's understanding of how well one is cared for in the school setting. These factors relate to both adult and peer acceptance of students in the school setting. She argues that based upon the research, schools do little to attend to the socioemotional needs of students, and that policies and practices relating to achievement run counter to the development of the social relationships between teachers and students, and students with students. Relationships between the adults in the children's lives were determined to be crucial in the positive development of the students. These relationships included both teachers and parents. She concluded, "Students who experience acceptance are more highly motivated and engaged in learning and more committed to school." (p. 359) She also uncovered evidence that this level of acceptance extends to relationships beyond the teacher-student ones to relationships with peers and others. However, the research further points out the need for "changes in the cultural values, norms, policies and practices that dominate schooling, particularly at the secondary level." (p. 360)

Hamre & Pianta (2006) studied the importance of student-teacher relationships and confirmed that students' need for positive relationships does not diminish as they transition through different levels of a school. In fact, the successful transition of children from elementary to middle or secondary school is frequently dependent upon the emotional warmth and acceptance conveyed by the teachers. Positive relationships between teachers and students are established through the teachers expressing concern and showing interest in the lives of the students both in and outside the classroom.

Martin, Romas, Medford, Leffert, & Hatcher (2006) conducted a study in a therapeutic setting with a nonclinical population of adolescents, identifying a number of traits of adults that foster alliance. Twelve traits were identified as preferred by adolescents in relationships with adults. From most to least cited were the following: respect, time shared, openness, role characteristics, recognition, guidance, identification, trust, freedom, like/dislike, responsibility, and familiarity. The top three, respect, time shared, and openness were identified most by the adolescents. Respect was demonstrated through the behaviors such as "inviting an adolescent into a conversation," or "being treated as an equal by an adult." Time shared included the idea that "adults like spending time with adolescents." The third, openness, was characterized by "listening nonjudgmentally, without lecturing and by being available to receive new ideas from the adolescent." (p. 134)

Girod, Pardales, Cavanaugh, & Wadsworth (2005) gathered a number of ideas from older adolescents through essays written by the students to specific prompts designed by the researchers about a number of issues the students face. Within and among the prompts were questions about the role of the teacher in helping students to resolve issues and conflicts surrounding the topics in question. Surprisingly, a number of the essays were critical of teachers who were uninspiring in the classroom, seemed unaware of the concerns or stresses of students, or just were not available to meet students' needs. Furthermore, there was a clear identifiable need by many of the students to want a connection with the teachers, to want teachers to know about and understand the stress they feel, the fears they experience about the future, and the need they have to be engaged in productive learning. Among the eight recommendations that resulted from the study were three specific to the development of *relationships* between students and teachers. The first of these suggested that teachers be better prepared to use counseling skills in their interactions with students who need support.

The second encouraged longer lasting relationships between teachers and students with more contact time between them. And the third was a recommendation to reorient teachers to the “social and emotional work involved in teaching and the moral, ethical role that teachers must play in the education of youth.” (p. 17)

Current research has supplied a body of knowledge and understanding about the teacher-student relationship and its importance to the success of student learning, but has failed to elaborate upon the experience of this relationship from the perspective of the student. Common themes among the many studies have arisen out of the data but are largely the result of quantitative collection means in the forms of observation and survey. Few data have been collected through qualitative methods that in effect, give a voice to the students. Very little quantitative or qualitative data exists from the voices of, specifically, young adolescents of middle school age. Most of the data have been collected from elementary, high school, and college settings. Understanding the experience of developing the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of middle school children is critical to gaining an in-depth perspective on the experience of that relationship by students of this age. This research can help to develop understanding of the process of the development of this relationship as well as the essence of this phenomenon for the participants in this study. Thus, uncovering the meaning of this relationship experience for young adolescents may add a dimension to the literature not currently present.

Research Questions

This phenomenological study focused on the teacher-student relationship from the experiential point of view of the students. It sought to understand the meaning of these relationships to students and attempted to draw a deeper understanding of this relationship. The questions this study attempted to answer included the following:

1. As experienced by students, what are the meaning, structure, and essence of the relationship between students and teachers?
2. What teacher characteristics as perceived by students play a key role in how students experience the relationship?

3. What characteristics of teachers do students identify as being important to the development, either positively or negatively, of the teacher-student relationship?
4. How does the students' experience of this relationship affect their motivation to learn?
5. How do the student perspectives compare to the existing literature?

Limitations

This study was conducted with an awareness of the following limitations.

1. The video and audio taped interviews of the students provide limited details of the relationships experienced by the students.
2. The details of the teacher-student relationships provided by the students to the researcher are limited by the ability of the students to fully express an idea in verbal discourse or in writing.
3. Students may be somewhat reluctant, at least initially, to be completely open with another adult educator when talking about their teachers.
4. This study was limited to the inclusion of only high performing students in the linguistic domain, given the demands placed upon the students with regard to discourse and writing. It is therefore a highly contextualized study with a very discrete population of students.

Researcher's Perspective

The purpose of this section is to clearly identify the perspective of the researcher upon entry to the study. The researcher's perspectives naturally play an important role in designing the study, collecting data, and analyzing it. It is neither possible nor desirable to eliminate them from the process. By acknowledging them early in the process, it makes it easier to attempt to bracket them and to remain as true as possible to the experiences and perceptions of the participants. Thus, these perspectives are expressed here as a means to enlighten the reader so that the critical examination of the results of the study will occur with these ideas in mind.

1. I believe that the teacher-student relationship has significant influence on the young adolescent students' experience of school.
2. Young adolescent students' levels of motivation and achievement are greatly influenced by the relationships they have with their teachers.
3. The young adolescent students' experiences of these relationships influence their perceptions of previous as well as future relationships in the school setting.
4. The classroom climate is influenced by the beliefs and practices of the classroom teacher and exerts significant influence upon the young adolescent students' experience of their relationships with their teachers.
5. The process of this developing relationship is influenced by the personality characteristics of the teacher as perceived by the students; including traits such as skills of listening, level of respect afforded the student, classroom organization, command of content, sound pedagogy, openness to student ideas, and the ability to empathize with the student.
6. The success of this relationship depends upon the teacher's ability to establish sound rapport with the students at the beginning of the development of this relationship.

It is equally important to note here the researcher's level of expertise as this study was undertaken. A professional educator for over twenty-five years, I bring to this situation both elementary classroom teaching experience and nearly twenty years of school counseling experience from Kindergarten to college levels. The last twelve years have been devoted to serving students of middle school age. Both this experience and an avid desire to grow professionally over the years have kept my skills sharp and my knowledge and content expertise current. Both my education and my years of experience have provided me with significant expertise in the area of building and sustaining relationships, thus, equipping me with special expertise in the area that I am investigating. I have a keen understanding of child development and the needs of young adolescents, therefore increasing the knowledge field about the teacher-student relationship phenomenon will develop my deeper understanding of the needs of young adolescents and may help to further others' understanding as well.

Summary

Based upon the studies I examined, it is safe to conclude that an abundance of literature exists to support the premise that the teacher-student relationship has a critical influence upon the school experience of children of all ages and that a number of characteristics of teacher personality can be identified as important to the development of relationships of caring in the school setting. Furthermore, the quantification of the influence of these relationships on students' performance and acceptance within the school setting is evident in a variety of forms within these texts. (Benard, 2004; Buttner, 2004; Checkley, 2004; Diero, 2003; Gentry & Owen, 2004; Girod, et. al , 2005; Hamre & Pianta, 2006; Kaplan & Owings, 2000; Klem & Connell, 2004; Koul & Fisher, 2006; Leary, 1957; Martin, et. al., 2005; Richards, Newby, & Fisher, 2001; Waldrip & Fisher, 2002; Wubbels, Levy, & Brekelmans, 1997). These studies present a plethora of quantitative evidence to support the description of the characteristics necessary in a successful teacher-student relationship, but the data do not describe the perceptions of students from an experiential or longitudinal perspective. Furthermore, there seems to be a paucity of research that describes these relationships from the perspective of a young adolescent student. Therefore, in order to more fully understand this experience by students of this age group it seemed appropriate to explore the experience and meaning of these relationships from perspective of the young adolescent student over a period of time during the development of these relationships in the school setting.

It was hoped that the discovery of the meaning of these relationships from a small sample of students would add depth to the understanding of the influence of this relationship in the school setting. Although limited in scope, this study could add to the existing literature and the understanding of the meaning of this relationship through the perceptions and experiences of the young adolescent. The results of this study also could possibly lead to the deeper examination of current professional practices and improvement in teacher training and preparation programs.

Chapter Two

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

It is the purpose of this chapter to provide a review of the literature pertaining to this research study on the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of the young adolescent student. This chapter will provide a synopsis of the research about several topics related to this study and includes pertinent information about the characteristics of the young adolescent learner, current research about the adolescent brain, school climate and culture, motivation theory, and finally, teacher-student relationships in schools. Each of these topics relates to the sum of the experience of the young adolescent learner and will be addressed individually in this chapter.

The characteristics of the young adolescent learner are discussed in the context of physical, social, and emotional growth as it relates to the child's life experience as well as in the school setting. Current brain research adds a dimension of understanding about the choices and behaviors of young adolescents in this time of life and suggests that the adults with whom the child interacts would best serve the student with a clear understanding of brain development in mind. School climate and culture are described in the context of the literature defining these phenomena and provide an understanding of the influence these phenomena have on the experience of the student in the school setting. The discussion of motivation and learning relates to the student's response to the learning environment as well as the nature of external vs. internal influences on the learner's choices and decisions in the school setting. Teacher-student relationships are discussed in the context of current research and help to define the characteristics of this relationship in the broader context of this study.

Characteristics of the Young Adolescent Learner

Dahl (2003) discusses numerous physiologic changes that occur in the adolescent at puberty. He writes "...puberty [itself] is a process with multiple components, including maturational changes in at least three different hormone systems." Dahl discusses the impact of these hormone systems on adolescent development. The first system releases high levels of estrogen and testosterone to stimulate reproductive capability and fertility and is referred to as "gonadarche." The second set of hormonal changes is called "adrenarche" and centers on the releasing of testosterone-like hormones from the adrenal glands atop the kidneys. This hormone set continues to increase from between ages 6-9 until the early 20's and contributes to changes in the young adolescent's skin (acne) as well as the development of underarm and pubic hair. The third set of changes involves growth hormone (GH) produced by the pituitary gland at the base of the brain. This hormone, as it is named, stimulates physical growth in the adolescent. Two other hormone systems have enormous impact on the young adolescent. The stress hormone, cortisol, undergoes change during puberty as does oxytocin, the hormone associated with pair-bonding and parental behaviors in animals. Each of these systems is impacted by the others and altogether, the endocrinology of adolescence adds yet another layer to an already highly complicated system. (Dahl, 2003). The most obvious evidence of this growth spurt is observable across the population of young adolescents and is characterized by the appearance of primary and secondary sex characteristics. They become fertile and experience increased sexual libido. Girls typically begin to experience these changes earlier than do boys (on average 18 months earlier) and so young adolescent boys and girls of the same age appear quite different in their physical and social development. In any middle school classroom, particularly in grade 6, the observer will notice a number of girls quite physically mature (and dressing so) and boys who have not yet reached puberty. Thus, the physical development of young adolescents is a significant marker in the transition to young adulthood. (Eccles, 1999)

Jackson & Davis (2000) describe the growing process of young adolescents:

Between the ages of ten and fourteen, the young adolescent grows and develops more rapidly than during any other developmental stage except for infancy. This means that adolescents have an acute, sometimes painful,

self-awareness of their growing process. These changes then, have enormous implications for learning. Adolescents grow rapidly and erratically in fits and starts, as well as unevenly across the different areas of development. While a fourteen-year-old boy may seem physically mature, he may be quite young socially or emotionally. Similarly, while cognitive skills expand and grow more complex with greater ability for abstract thinking, during early adolescence the intellectual and physical growth is inconsistent and variable. (Jackson & Davis, 2000)

The ability of the young adolescent to sometimes think abstractly about one concept while seeming to struggle with personal choices and consequences is a common occurrence. As a participant in a social studies class, the student may be able to imagine a society with a variety of parameters, and yet have difficulty imagining consequences for making poor health choices over time. This characteristic is observed daily in the interactions between young adolescents. Likewise students may also appear to be in an uneven stage of development when comparing cognitive processes and social ones.

Young adolescents are excruciatingly self-conscious about the changes in their bodies and physical appearance. If one were to observe these students in the hallway, it would be noted that their physical movement as well as how they wear their clothing looks uncomfortable and awkward. “Young adolescents are very concerned with their physical and sexual development. For some, physical development or lack thereof is the dominant, central theme in their lives. Average gain in height is from 2-4 inches per year, and the average weight gain for young adolescents per year is 8-10 pounds. Over the early adolescence period, ages 10-15, this averages out to a gain of 10-20 inches in height and 40 to 50 pounds.” (The Family Connection, 2001) Often times, boys especially, as they begin to gain height, will look as if they have difficulty walking. Their feet, arms, and legs will feel foreign to them and appear difficult for them to gracefully maneuver. Girls and boys are observed to ‘try on’ a multitude of styles of dress, and are clearly influenced by each other as well as the media. Some of them are proud of their changing bodies and seek to display them through clothing styles. Others are modest, perhaps nervous about their bodies and tend to ‘hide’ through larger, baggier clothing. Both boys and girls are comfortable wearing the same fashions, purchased from the same stores, and don the same hairstyles, scents, and ‘looks.’ Some of them will appear as though they are satisfied while others look awkward and uncomfortable and may or may not be cognizant of how they appear to others. This

discomfort often manifests itself in the notion that ‘*Everyone* is looking at me!’ and results in a more intense desire to blend in and be like everyone else. Interestingly, they are astutely aware that others are watching and judging, and become convinced that others care as much about their appearance as they do. In reality, they take an egocentric view of themselves and tend to compare themselves with others, including what is represented in the media as the ideal. The uniqueness of each child’s growth into adolescence is by far the most treacherous road to navigate. At just the moment they derive some comfort in the myriad changes occurring inside them, something else changes and they have to readjust. The whole process can be strikingly painful and enduring for several years.

Brain Research and the Young Adolescent

Contemporary research on brain development and, in particular, the adolescent brain has added a new dimension to the understanding of how adolescents think as well as behave. In a paper published by the Juvenile Justice Center of the American Bar Association (2004), new technologies such as Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) are being used to study the brain in three-dimensional images. Researchers at Harvard Medical School, the National Institute of Mental Health, UCLA, and others are working together to “map” brain development from childhood through adulthood. It has been discovered through this work that “...the teenage brain undergoes an intense overproduction of *gray matter* (the brain tissue that does the “thinking”). Then a period of “pruning” takes over, during which the brain discards gray matter at a rapid rate.” (Juvenile Justice Center, 2004) This pruning actually stimulates growth and a healthy brain. Then the *white matter*, myelination, develops to protect the brain’s circuitry, thus adding to the brain’s efficiency. This complicated and rapid process has been determined to extend into a person’s early 20’s. Dr. Elizabeth Sowell from UCLA and her colleagues found “the frontal lobe undergoes far more change during adolescence than at any other stage of life.” (in Juvenile Justice Center, 2004) The frontal lobe is critical to organization, planning, strategizing, and anticipating outcomes of decisions. It is the last part of the brain to develop. Thus, when faced with difficult choices and decisions, adolescents tend to decide with their emotions rather than their thinking. They just are not ready to use their brains for this purpose. (Juvenile Justice Center, 2004) This research is enlightening but not surprising given the common concerns presented by young

adolescents in the middle school setting; the ever messy student locker, the impulsive decision-making, lack of forethought about consequences to actions, and the pervasive seeming lack of organization and responsibility toward school work, to name a few of the most obvious concerns. A good majority of adult time with students revolves around helping them to develop the skills needed for success which would appear to run counter to the evidence present in research regarding their ability to do so. (Juvenile Justice Center, 2004)

Cognitive development

For the young adolescent, significant intellectual processes are emerging. They are moving from concrete to abstract thinking and to the beginnings of metacognition (the active monitoring and regulation of thinking processes). They are developing skills in deductive reasoning, problem solving, and generalizing. (Lorain, 2006) This means that the young adolescent is just beginning to develop the ability to solve problems, think critically, plan and anticipate consequences of choices, and maintain impulse control. Also during the brain development cycle, the short-term memory is affected. Because young adolescents' brains can only hold 5 to 7 bits of information at one time, teachers should try not to give too much information at once. It would be overwhelming and much of it would be lost. Until the adolescent brain is able to move this information from short term into long-term memory, new information will not be retained. Thus the young adolescent brain undergoes a decision; either disregard the new information or the old – but there is just not room for all of it. A typical example of how this is represented in the adolescent's experience is with classroom or homework assignments and is best illustrated through the completion of the 'project' or 'long term assignment.' Teachers should provide a plan for completion of such assignments and regularly review the process with students – a large calendar in the classroom with specific instruction has proved valuable for some students. For those for whom this process is 'out of sight and out of mind,' personal attention to each child helps to make the process more manageable.

At a recent presentation by renowned pediatric neurologist, Dr. Mel Levine, (November, 2006) this point was illustrated by helping the audience to understand the process of reading for a young adolescent. He explained that young teenagers need an opportunity to interact with text at approximately every third sentence. This means that improved comprehension merits a reflective discussion so that students can make

connections to other learning. The reason for this is that they can only hold small bits of information in their short-term memory. Therefore, if other memory inducing strategies are not used to help them connect to what they read, they will forget what is on the page. This is even more apparent for those students whose reading mechanics are in question. Thus if a student cannot process the written word, or interpret the symbols on the page, the task is even more daunting. So when frustrated students say they forget everything they read right after they read it, in effect, they are right. This is because their short-term memory cannot hold all the ‘data’ they have consumed. For students to remain attentive, they need their teachers to provide opportunities that engage them in reading about content with relevance to their own lives, in an active format, and with the choice to learn it while engaging in peer interaction. (Levine, 2006)

Implications for the classroom environment

The developmental issues of young adolescents impact how teachers should address their needs in the classroom. The physical changes “manifest themselves in behaviors that are often difficult for adults to understand and that are usually bewildering for the adolescents.” (Lorain, 2006) Three major changes in physical development result in behaviors in the classroom, if understood by teachers, can be managed in a positive way. First, a young adolescent’s skeletal structure and tailbone are beginning to harden. This process can cause discomfort when sitting too long and can contribute to sciatic pain and nerve discomfort. Thus students may be observed ‘fidgeting’ or standing at times other than when the teacher would expect or allow. Some students, too tall for the desks they sit in, may sprawl legs and arms under or over other furniture in the class to reduce the feeling of confinement to a particular space and to be able to stretch. (Lorain, 2006)

The second major change regards bone and muscle growth. Frequently bone growth surpasses muscle growth and can cause aches or “growing pains.” When young adolescents feel this way, it is helpful to allow them to stretch in order to ease the aches that occur. The third physical issue is the increased and sometimes voracious appetite of the young adolescent. They need additional food to stave off the hunger they feel as well as to support the accelerated growth occurring in the bones and muscles. (Lorain, 2006) Some of the ways to accommodate the varied physical states young adolescents experience are to provide opportunity for movement, stretching, and even snacking during class. Adapting class and

learning activities to allow for physical as well as cognitive involvement encourages student engagement and relieves the distraction of needing to move. (Lorain, 2006)

As was previously discussed regarding current brain research, the prefrontal cortex is the last part of the brain to develop and it exerts enormous influence on the way a young adolescent is able to organize tasks, make decisions, and pay attention in class. Wilson & Horch (2002) suggest that in order to maintain student focus and attention to learning new material, teachers should use a multi-sensory approach to instruction. The use of music, smell, touch, and emotion can focus student learning. Additionally, the use of inquiry or problem-based learning as instructional practice further supports the learning styles of children this age. Using high interest content, essential questions to guide learning, and multi-sensory experiences will facilitate student involvement and interest as well as build connections within the brain. A multitude of instructional strategies are suggested for use with young adolescents in the middle school classroom. They include:

- Project based units of study with student identified critical questions and student driven projects
- Use of simulations to assist in the comprehension of complex concepts
- Playing music to link memory to learning tasks; using rhythmic patterns to assist with memory in learning new concepts
- Having students write reflectively in a daily journal to reiterate and consolidate learning
- Using visual and word problems and puzzles to challenge thinking, improve problem solving, and develop confidence in the students
- Using physical and group challenges to pose problems, build collaboration and cooperation; low ropes courses, and other cooperative games
- Offering real-life apprenticeships to learn about career opportunities
- Integrated and thematic curriculum to help students establish connections in content

Finally, the key to making learning meaningful for young adolescents is by guaranteeing relevance and rigor in the classroom. Young adolescents learn best when they are challenged academically and most importantly when they see the connection to their own lives. (Wilson & Horch, 2002)

Lorain, (2006) describes a number of classroom strategies important to supporting learning for young adolescents. The classroom teacher must take into consideration what is known about how students learn at this age as well as how well new content can be integrated into the memory of a young adolescent. As was previously suggested, young adolescents best assimilate small amounts of information through repetitive exposure and meaningful experiences with the content. Lorain, (2006) provides myriad suggestions for helping students to make meaning of their learning.

- Present limited amounts of new information to accommodate short-term memory.
- Provide opportunities to connect new learning with previous learning. Use methodology that includes talking with classmates, debating issues and topics, and group discussions.
- Use varied instructional modes with tactile/kinesthetic components. Create projects using art, music, or theatre to assist with content acquisition.
- Require students to participate in problem solving and critical thinking experiences to enhance learning. Offer time to allow for practice and exercise.

Because all students develop at different rates and are at varying degrees of maturity, middle school teachers should plan lessons with the goals clearly in mind and provide multiple pathways to students for reaching the goals. Students also need predictable and safe learning environments so that they are free to take academic and cognitive risks. Important other skills should be deliberately taught to middle school students.

- **Teach study skills.** Young adolescents do not have the capacity to figure this out for themselves. Each content area allows for the learning of a variety of study skills and they should be purposefully taught to students, reinforced, and practiced regularly.
- **Maintain consistent routines.** Expect that students will need regular reminders about the rules and expectations.
- **Create and display visual process charts** for long-term projects and assignments. Review them often.
- **Provide graphic organizers** to students and teach them how to use them.
- **Provide assignment sheets** with clearly articulated timelines.

- **Use color-coding as a method of organization.** Train students to recognize that certain colors represent stages of a process; green is first, yellow is second, red is last. This helps to categorize processes for developing brains. (Lorain, 2006)

Emotional/social development and relationship needs of young adolescents

With all the significant and rapidly occurring changes in the body and mind of an adolescent, it would come as no surprise that young adolescents also experience intense and frequently unexplainable emotions. They are easily excited, and aroused by environmental influences such as music, extreme entertainment such as horror movies, and high adrenaline producing amusement park rides. They have an insatiable appetite for adventure, engagement in risk taking behavior, and to enjoy opportunities for novelty and thrill. Puberty is indeed a time when extremes in emotions are present and can exert a strong influence upon the ability of a young adolescent to consciously make good decisions or the right choices in emotional circumstances. (Dahl, 2003) As young adolescents begin to transfer their need for acceptance and attention to their peers and other significant adults, the relationships they form and opportunities they have for esteem building are crucial in the development of a healthy self-image. The young adolescent is ripe for the caring relationships that can be developed in the school setting. (Dahl, 2003)

Wood, (1997) shares four ideas that he suggests have remained relevant to the understanding of child development and can be applied in any setting within which children are a part. The first idea is, “Children’s growth and development follow reasonably predictable patterns.” These patterns exist in physical maturation, language acquisition, social behavior, and cognition. Many theorists have broken down these developmental steps into stages, but the process of development is universal. The second idea furthers the notion that “growth is deeply influenced by culture, personality, and environment.” Normal development can span two chronological years and while it is predictable, it is deeply influenced by the three factors previously mentioned. The third idea is “development and intelligence do not proceed at the same rate.” Every child develops unevenly and may appear precocious in one domain while immature in another. This means eventually all facets of the child’s development converge and create a mature individual with minor relative strengths and struggles in across the various domains. The final, but most critical idea is, “growth is

uneven.” Children, and especially young adolescents present as dichotomous individuals, in all areas of development. (pp. 26-27) They present very special challenges to those who offer support and nurturance, but also very great joy as well. He suggests that those who work closely with adolescents should keep these ideas in mind to derive understanding about what children and young adolescents are experiencing as they experience it.

The classroom implications of physical, social, emotional, moral, and brain development on the learning and relationship experiences of young adolescents are many. The need to experience positive relationships is at the core of the young adolescent’s experience of the school and social environment. Thus, both peer and adult relationships serve important functions with regard to meeting affiliation and validation needs. Friendships begin to become singularly most important to the developing adolescent. At the middle school transition, former friendships become strained as potential new relationships are introduced. These new friendships “still begin with perceived commonalities, but increasingly involve sharing of values and personal confidences.” (Focus Adolescent Services, 2000) Additionally, as children enter puberty, their perspectives on each other begin to change and can alter their relationships. During the development of these new friendships, “cliques” can be formed that involve three to six friends. The influence of these cliques can result in both pro-social and antisocial behaviors. Concurrent with the changes in relationships is a budding interest in ‘romantic’ relationships with the opposite sex. (Focus Adolescent Services, 2000) As middle grade adolescents come into increasing contact with peers who differ from them, they suffer significant stress around fitting in. Frequently the point of entry in to the middle school advances more disappointment than satisfaction in the development of these new relationships. This is due to the perception of the accompanying stereotypes and misconceptions of the varieties of students from communities within the system who have not yet intersected their experience of each other prior to the school transition. (San Antonio, 2006) So while students perceive a lost opportunity for establishing new friendships, teachers and other significant school personnel can be instrumental in successfully breaking down the barriers. To successfully connect students of varying backgrounds, teachers and other school professionals should find ways to provide co-curricular enrichment opportunities as well as to employ a variety of instructional grouping

strategies. The more exposure students of varied backgrounds have with each other, the easier it is for them to navigate and establish new peer relationships. (San Antonio, 2006)

Berndt (1982) researched relationships in young adolescence and results indicated that the intimacy of friendships dramatically increased and that the stability of these friendships changes little between the fourth and eleventh grades. Friendships are borne out of a similar orientation toward school and peer culture, and to the choice of friends most like oneself. Girls seem to have more intimate and exclusive relationships while boys, more open to new faces, navigate their relationships based upon shared experiences rather than intimate secrets. Relationship features are determined partly by the biological, social, and cognitive changes during early adolescence and are deeply influenced by the environmental and social factors present in the adolescent's life. Through this research, attention was given to four factors of friendship; *intimacy, mutual responsiveness, similarity between friends, and stability and change in the relationship*. Distinctive features of early adolescent friendships yielded information suggesting that these relationships are more ideal than during other periods of life, where there is greater intimacy and mutual responsiveness than in early childhood or later adolescent relationships. Increased intimacy or 'knowing' another is at the heart of these successful relationships and same sex relationships – especially for girls- are fertile ground for developing a deeper understanding of self and others. Also, the stability of early adolescent relationships was deemed to be more probable than not as compared to the relationships of young children or of later adolescents. (Berndt, 1982)

Hamm & Faircloth (2005) similarly describe relationships of *intimacy* between peers as a significant influence on the academic success and assimilation of adolescents into the school environment. A second characteristic of adolescent friendship was defined as *enhancement of worth*, the function of which serves to assist students in feeling worthy or valued as a member of a group, despite the perception that one does not 'fit' another social group. The third characteristic, *companionship*, is best understood by having companions, or friends, in classes to support the academic experience for students and to enhance understanding of content as well as to buffer the relationships with teachers. Thus friendship between adolescent peers is crucial to developing community among the age group and enhancing feelings of security, acceptance, and value. (Hamm & Faircloth, 2005)

Osterman (2000), in a detailed synthesis of the research on belongingness in schools suggested through her findings that, "...students' experience of acceptance influences multiple dimensions of their behavior but that schools adopt organizational practices that neglect and may actually undermine students' experience of membership in a supportive community." So if students are to feel secure, accepted and valued in the school community, classroom practices and school philosophies must further the social and academic development of students in ways appropriate to the population being served. Osterman (2000) further discovered that students who feel a sense of belonging in schools are also more "...highly motivated and engaged in learning and more committed to school." (p. 359) She also found evidence that students' individual sense of acceptance "...extends into and affects the quality of relationships with others, particularly if the norms and values of the social context encourage and facilitate supportive student interaction." (p. 359) The most important place in a school setting for this to occur is the classroom. This is where students develop positive or negative feelings about themselves that ultimately have an impact on the student's performance in school. Osterman suggests that schools and individual classroom teachers should engage in organizational, instructional, and interpersonal strategies that support students and enhance their relationships within the school community. If schools are successful in helping students to feel connected and worthy within the school environment, the likelihood of students transferring this goodwill outside the school setting is very good and will bode well for them in future relationships with peers as well as others. George & Alexander (1993) add, "Middle school students need models of effective interpersonal communication. They need an adult to whom they can turn for assistance in their attempts to achieve success in school and out, an adult who is their school friend without being a peer." Meeting the relationship and affiliation needs of young adolescents is necessary for students' healthy development. Adults in the middle school are in the best position to provide this support. (p. 201)

Johnson, Poliner, & Bonaiuto, (2005) describe a number of effective strategies for fostering a healthy, productive classroom experience. The best forum for this to occur is within the classroom setting by a teacher who has established a trusting relationship with the student. Young adolescents require direct instruction in the development of social skills. Students learned to articulate problems, risks, and consequences. They also could apply

social and emotional skills in a skit or role-play in the classroom, but they did not transfer these skills to settings outside the confined instructional venue such as the cafeteria or playground. Students had advanced their cognitive understanding of the social concerns, but had not transferred the appropriate behavior to these situations. (p. 59) The researchers concluded that while having the cognitions in place was the first step toward change, having the practice and reinforcement was crucial to changing the behaviors that cause problems. One such strategy took the form of “Gatherings,” and are referred to as Morning Meetings, circles, or advisory groups. The essence of these gatherings provided a structured opportunity for students to get to know one another and their teachers. The results encouraged cooperation, communication, and self-restraint in the classroom. Through the gatherings, teachers have been able to create classroom cultures that encourage full student participation and a sense of community. This helped teachers to get to know their students, to reduce classroom conflicts, and improved access and equity during instructional time.

Rimm-Kaufman (2006) conducted a social and academic learning study of a 5th-6th grade classroom of whole-language instruction using the *Responsive Classroom* approach to instruction. This method incorporates “developmentally appropriate teaching practices along with many techniques to integrate social and academic learning in the classroom.” (p. 1) This research “found a link between the use of the Responsive Classroom approach and improved student learning.” (p.1) Through this study, it was discovered that students whose teachers used this approach had “greater growth in prosocial skills and assertiveness over a single year.” (p. 11) This translated into more helpful behaviors between children that included comforting one another when they were upset, introducing themselves to newcomers, and initiating conversations with peers more frequently than in those classrooms where teachers were not using the Responsive Classroom approach to instruction. There also was a resulting “closeness” reported by the teachers toward their students, and a level of trust that students felt in seeking assistance from their teachers. Students in the Responsive Classrooms appeared to have more positive perceptions of school, and they did seem to do better academically, but these two factors were independent of each other. The students who reported feeling good about school were not necessarily the students with high levels of academic performance. (p.13)

Wolk, (2003) discusses community as an “active way to live together,” (p. 14) and that classroom relationships build community. He suggests four ways in which teachers can promote community and relationships in their classrooms. The first is *discussion and debate* where students and teachers participate in regular discourse about issues and concerns in the classroom and about what they are studying and learning. Through discourse, trust and respect are established between teachers and students, and among students. When teachers offer freedom to discuss meaningful content, good relationships are cultivated. The second method is *class murals and collages*. When students participate in creating art, the atmosphere of the classroom is enhanced. Allowing students to discuss themes and plan the art together encourages cooperation and respect for each other. The third classroom method is *drama and role-playing*. Engaging students in dramatic skits and plays bring a class together toward a common purpose. The fourth method is *playing games*. One of the best ways to build relationships with students is through fun. Educational games that build cooperation are preferable to competitive ones. When everyone can be a winner, relationships are safely encouraged. (p. 15)

Wolk (2003) uses other examples of classroom strategies teachers have employed to encourage and develop relationships with their students. Getting to know young adolescents through autobiographies, creating picture books, one-on-one conversations, and writing to photographic prompts of their lives and neighborhoods extends the classroom community. Using an inquiry based curriculum with a constructivist approach, and relevant connections to students’ lives and cultures makes the learning experience meaningful to students. Teachers should allow students to see their personal side. Laughing with students when something is truly funny is a wonderful way to connect with students in the classroom. Middle school students love to see their teachers as ‘people;’ it takes the mystique out of the relationship and draws everyone closer.

Dorman, Lipsitz, & Verner (1985) and the Center for Early Adolescence identified a list of the developmental needs of young adolescents and strongly suggest that schools are in a position to be responsive to their needs. The following are the descriptive characteristics of a middle school they have identified that best meet the young adolescent’s needs. In schools where these strategies are implemented, the atmosphere is conducive to creating responsive classrooms.

1. ***diversity*** (in experiencing teaching, curriculum, and scheduling) through implementing high interest curriculum, exploratory coursework, and flexible scheduling.
2. ***self-exploration and self-definition*** through integrating developing capabilities, interests, and relationships into a sense of who they are through curricular experiences; guidance programming should focus on self-exploration in career guidance, family relations, and sexuality.
3. ***meaningful participation in school and community*** through student initiated study and activities, co-curricular opportunities, and service learning/community service
4. ***positive social interaction with peers and adults*** through small peer group learning activities, adviser-advisee programming, staff participation in activities, and informal contact outside the classroom
5. ***physical activity*** through noncompetitive physical education and tactile kinesthetic learning opportunities
6. ***competence and achievement*** through an emphasis on academics, high quality instruction, positive expectations of all students, generous rewards and praise, and opportunities for increased responsibility and independence; varied instructional methods, high interest exploratory courses, and a plethora of extra curricular activities
7. ***structure with clear limits*** through involving students in shared decision-making and rule building with clear consequences.

School Climate and Culture

The literature is replete with numerous definitions of elements of school climate as well as with descriptions of the characteristics of supportive, successful schools. McBrien & Brandt, (1997) combine climate and culture into the following definition;

School culture and climate refers to the sum of the values, cultures, safety practices, and organizational structures within a school that cause it to function and react in particular ways. Some schools are said to have a nurturing environment that recognizes children and treats them as individuals; others may have the feel of authoritarian structures where rules

are strictly enforced and hierarchical control is strong. Teaching practices, diversity, and the relationships among administrators, teachers, parents, and students contribute to school climate. Although the two terms are somewhat interchangeable, school climate refers mostly to the school's effects on students, while school culture refers more to the way teachers and other staff members work together. (n.p.)

Outlined in this definition, are a number of factors that contribute to the sum of the climate and culture of a school. A nurturing environment, individualization, and relationships seem to be at the heart of this definition. Numerous others have sought to define each of these elements exclusive of each other as well as to combine the elements in the creation of or understanding of the foundations of a positive school climate.

Schaps (2003) believes the development of a caring community is at the heart of the creation of a positive climate and culture and is the result of what he calls four community-building approaches. The first approach, "*actively cultivate(s) respectful, supportive relationships among students, teachers, and parents.*" (p. 31) Schaps claims that the relationships are the "heart of community," help to bring together students and families of diverse backgrounds, and engage them in active involvement in the children's education. The second approach, "*emphasize(s) common purposes and ideals.*" (p. 31) Schools that help children to develop a strong moral compass, good character, and citizenship support positive daily interactions among its members. This approach speaks to the assimilation of common values into the implied curriculum of the school. Through both modeling and deliberate instruction, important values of the community in which the school serves the children are either specifically 'taught' by the adults, or 'caught' by the children. Either way, the effort to embed chosen values into the instructional life of the school is what this approach entails. The third approach, "*provide(s) regular opportunities for service and cooperation,*" (p.32) and assists students in developing an altruistic sense of others while encouraging them to contribute to the wider community. When children purposefully give of their time, effort, and ideas to the improvement of someone else's life, they develop empathy for others, increase their own self-esteem and are able to value their place in the bigger picture. Caring for others is crucial to the development of young people and they learn that they can make a difference. The fourth approach, "*provide(s) developmentally appropriate opportunities for autonomy and influence.*" (p. 33) Schaps believes that empowering students

in the decision-making process to set a classroom and school agenda teaches children how to live within a society and contribute to a democracy. When students are provided with an opportunity to solve problems within their school community, they ‘own’ the environment, and see themselves as valuable community members.

The second significant part of McBrien’s and Brandt’s definition refers to *culture*. Culture is something that is constructed by the adults in a school environment and is the prelude to the development of the climate of a school. In a longitudinal case study conducted by Bryk & Schneider (2003) relational trust is examined in the context of school reform. The study occurred over four years in twelve different school communities and yielded the identification of several criteria inherent in the development of a school climate and culture. The focus of the study was on the concept of Relational Trust, whereby in a successful school community, agreement about the role relationships of each member of the group must be accomplished and clearly understood by all those involved; teachers, parents, and administrators. Relational trust incorporates four “specific considerations” in its development; “respect, personal regard, competence in core responsibilities, and personal integrity.” (p. 41)

Respect, as a component of relational trust, requires that adult members of the school community be immensely respectful in their interchanges requiring them to listen to one another. If interpersonal respect is present, the adults may successfully negotiate social interchange even when they do not agree. *Personal Regard* “springs from the willingness of participants to extend themselves beyond the requirements of a job description or union contract.” (p. 41) Being genuinely open to others represents an example others can follow and is best practiced when first demonstrated by the school leader. To be open means that there is a desire to go beyond the expectation of one’s job to meet the needs of other people; those who work in the learning community as well as those who are served by it.

Competence in Core Role Responsibilities means that all adult members of the community regularly serve the children and families in their care with great competence, exercising their duties thoughtfully, carefully, and well. The fourth component of relational trust is that of *personal integrity*. Perceptions of personal integrity have an impact on relational trust. If adult members of the school community believe in the personal integrity of its members and regularly demonstrate integrity, it serves the greater good of the children, and relational trust

is furthered. If even the slightest doubt exists in this regard, relational trust is compromised. Bryk & Schneider (2003) conclude that the school leader is key and has the greatest influence on the development of relational trust in a school setting. If leaders give full attention to the development of trust in their school, a positive climate and high student achievement are likely to result from the effort. They further conclude good schools that keep the “connective tissue” of relational trust healthy will bind together their work on behalf of students.

Through extensive study of students’ concerns about their school experience, Frieberg (1998) further supports the notion that a “healthy school climate contributes to effective teaching and learning.” (p. 22) He discusses the complex elements of school climate and attempts to define what is necessary to create a positive climate as well as to determine what negative factors contribute to a toxic climate. He asserts,

The elements that make up school climate are complex, ranging from the quality of interactions in the teachers’ lounge to the noise levels in hallways and cafeterias, from the physical structure of the building to the physical comfort levels (involving such factors as hearing, cooling, and lighting) of the individuals and how safe they feel. Even the size of the school and opportunities for students and teachers to interact in small groups either formally and informally add to or detract from the health of the learning environment. The support staff – cafeteria workers, bus drivers, custodians, and office staff – add to the multiple dimensions of climate. (p. 22)

He further adds,

No single factor determines a school’s climate. However, the interaction of various school and classroom factors can create a fabric of support that enables all members of the school community to teach and learn at optimum levels. (p. 22)

Frieberg (1998) concludes his work with the notion that “measuring school climate can help us to understand *what was* and *what is*, so that we can move forward to *what could be*.” (p.26)

Lipsitz & West (2006) identify what they call “three interlocking priorities” (p.57) that breed successful high performing middle schools. These three priorities include academic excellence, developmental responsiveness; and social equity, democracy, and fairness.

Schools that expect academic excellence of their students, apply practices that include rigorous curriculum for all students, high expectations of all students by teachers, and the use of “highly focused and energetic teaching.” (p. 59) Students in schools where academic excellence is demanded are enthusiastic about what they are learning, see relevance in the content, and are collaborative members of the assessment process. Teachers are provided with opportunity for professional development to collaborate on instructional practices, content deepening opportunities, and improvement of pedagogy. They also are invited to participate in decision-making about content and practice as regular and ongoing professional development.

A school that is developmentally responsive “provides access to comprehensive services that foster healthy physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development.” (p. 60) This means that all students and their families are supported socially and emotionally through programs and services. Knowing too that faculty and staff cannot provide all the necessary support, agency and community partnerships are engaged to assist in meeting the needs of the students. Another focus of developmental responsiveness is the alliance building that occurs to support the well being of students. Parents are invited to participate as collaborative members of the teaching team and are encouraged to be involved and stay involved. Communication and information sharing about student achievement through electronic and other means is ongoing and regular and continually gives the message to parents that they are important partners in their child’s development.

Schools that engage in social equity practices ensure that all students have equal access to highly demanding and rigorous educational opportunities. This often means integrating special needs children into the regular academic learning environment, blurring the boundaries of special and regular education practices, and providing adapted curriculum, instruction, and assessment to any child who needs it. Additionally, faculty and staff are encouraged to collaborate on these practices so that all children benefit. Social equity also includes paying attention to attendance, discipline, and suspension rates as well as monitoring the application of these practices to varied demographic groups or populations in order to remove barriers to instruction. On the opposite end of this social dynamic, is the opportunity for schools to further challenge students who are already at the top, by looking to differentiate instruction in ways that accelerate learning, eliminate repetitious instruction, and

prevent academic stagnation. Closing achievement gaps, furthering gender equity, and monitoring these processes is the marker of stellar social equity practice in schools.

And finally, good schools that embrace these practices have a visionary and capable leader who is unafraid of taking risks on behalf of students and faculty, and who selflessly and tirelessly examines all available data for potential improvement and for celebration. These leaders are able to anticipate needs, see beyond the moment, and support their faculty, staffs, and students under the best and the worst of circumstances. They are key communicators, change agents, and ambassadors for their schools. They are relentlessly in pursuit of excellence, are unafraid of the work this entails, and demand accountability from everyone, including the students. (Lipsitz & West, 2006)

These studies and others believe that organizational structures of a successful school as well as its processes are at the heart of the development of a positive climate, however, Sergiovanni & Starratt (2002) define climate as a matter of impression. They submit,

Climate can be viewed as the enduring characteristics that describe the psychological makeup of a particular school, distinguish it from other schools, and influence the behavior of teachers and students, as well as the “feel” that teachers and students have for that school. (p. 310)

They further propose,

Climate provides a reading of how things are going in the school and a basis for predicting school consequences and outcomes. Such a barometer represents an important tool for evaluating present conditions, planning new directions, and monitoring progress toward new directions. (p. 310)

As was cited earlier in Frieberg’s (1998) work, this last portion of Sergiovanni & Starratt’s definition of climate supports the notion that the climate of a school determines the success or failure of a school and that the use of a number of measures can assist in knowing the state of the climate in any given school. Thus the success of a school can be determined based upon its measures of climate.

School climate has been defined in a number of different ways. Several elements have been identified as necessary and crucial factors in the development of a positive school climate. The relationships among the members of a school community are primary in setting the tone one feels in the school setting. Instructional practices, student engagement in learning, and empowerment are other themes identified in the literature.

Motivation and Learning

Noddings (2003) believes that in order for students to live happy and productive lives, schools must provide opportunity for students to *be* happy while learning. Noddings discusses the “satisfaction of needs...[as a] major factor in happiness.” She believes that one of the “aims of education” should be for students to derive happiness while in the process of learning. How she defines this happiness entails an in depth analysis of how schools currently function, and what schools need to do in order to ensure that this is accomplished. She qualifies her thinking by stating,

...happiness is not best construed as a state earned or promised for future life. Happiness in the present is not incompatible with future happiness, and it may even be instrumental for future happiness. Educators should therefore give attention to the quality of students’ present experience. (p. 240)

Barone (2006) in a study of what works in high poverty schools to narrow the literacy gap illustrates three paradigms that exert influence on the successful achievement of children in the contemporary school setting. The first, *Positioning Theory*, as it is defined in contemporary literature (Davies & Harré, 1990), was initially introduced into the literature by Lev Vygotsky (1986) as a social development theory. Vygotsky postulated that human beings use speech and language to navigate their social environment, and through this process all interactions lead to cognitive development. His description of a phenomenon called the “Zone of Proximal Development” explains that all learning occurs as a result of determining where a child is currently functioning intellectually and the identification of what is yet to be learned. This gap is successfully negotiated with the assistance of a teacher or mentor in the process of guiding the child’s learning and development. Throughout this collaboration, the interactions are considered symbolic. This means that the use of language (symbols) in this interaction creates meaning for the participants. Their interactions position the participants in relation to each other’s experience of the interaction. There are no roles ascribed in this instance and thus, the meaning is derived from the interaction and the exchange of symbols. Davies and Harré (1990) define positioning in the following way,

Positioning, as we will use it is the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent

participants in jointly produced story lines. There can be interactive positioning in which what one person says positions another. And there can be reflexive positioning in which one positions oneself. However it would be a mistake to assume that, in either case, positioning is necessarily intentional. One lives one's life in terms of one's ongoingly produced self, whoever might be responsible for its production. (n.p.)

Barone (2006) applies positioning theory to how children frame their own identity as it is directly related to their interactions with their teachers. She posits that how well children engage in the learning process is a direct result of the dynamic of their relationships with their teachers. The student who feels connected with his teacher will position himself within the dynamic of the relationship as a potentially successful student. Likewise, if the student does not get along well with a teacher or believes the teacher does not “like” him or “listen” to him, he will position himself in a way that causes him to believe he cannot succeed, is not valued, or is not capable of being a good student. Thus, the outcome of the child’s school experience is related directly to the “positioning” of the student in his relationship to the teacher.

The second theory, *Constructivism*, is defined by Barone (2006) as a “collaborative method for increasing student engagement and achievement.” (n.p.) In more detail, Atherton (2005) defines Constructivism as, “the label given to a set of theories about learning which fall somewhere between cognitive and humanistic views.” (n.p.) The mind makes sense of the material presented to it. Constructivism assumes that the learner assimilates to what the teacher presents – however in this case, the learner is more involved in ‘constructing’ new meanings from that which is presented or discovered within the learning environment. Cognitive constructivism defines how learners understand *things*, whereas social constructivism emphasizes meaning that grows out of *social encounters or relationships*. In an overview of various constructivist approaches, Huitt (2003) reports that,

Advocates of a constructivistic approach suggest that educators first consider the knowledge and experiences students bring with them to the learning task... school curriculum should then be built so that students can expand and develop this knowledge and experience by connecting them to new learning. (n.p.)

Academics such as John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Jerome Bruner were considered chief theorists of cognitive constructivism, while Lev Vygotsky remains the leading theorist of

social constructivism. (Huitt, 2003) Constructivist learning remains a key theory in contemporary school settings, as relevance in instruction, interdisciplinary learning, and spiraling curriculums assist students in constructing new meaning from their learning experiences.

Barone (2006) adds *Resilience Theory* to the discussion of what she terms, “turnaround teachers.” Turnaround teachers are those who nurture resilient behaviors in children by, “giving positive comments, connecting with children’s out-of-school lives, and maintaining high expectations of all children.” (n.p.) The personal connections that teachers make with the students in their classrooms foster student motivation, the development of positive relationships, and increased student achievement. Barone makes a strong argument for close attention to the details of relationships with students and though knowing one’s content is crucial to imparting critical knowledge, children learn best when they know the teacher cares for and about them.

Berliner (2003) suggests three strategies for practitioners to motivate students in the classroom. The first, “create positive learning environments” (p. 46) involves finding ways to congratulate and encourage students; minimize competition to eliminate the possibility of ‘losing’ in academic activities; establish collaboration, communication, and problem solving procedures within the school setting; and involve students in the development of respectful and reasonable rules that reinforce personal responsibility.

The second requires that teachers provide “engaging content.” (p. 46) They can accomplish this by using instructional practices that motivate students to express themselves, and share their opinions, experiences, and feelings. Being accepting of various cultures, experiences, and languages facilitates this process as well. Connecting students’ personal experiences to the learning environment and inviting students to choose or create learning activities is also motivating to students. Teachers are also encouraged to design lessons in small units that encourage positive peer interaction.

The third, “choose instructional strategies that motivate,” (p. 47) involves conveying high expectations for academic performance and behavior; minimizing the use of ability grouping to build social skills; evaluating student work frequently to monitor and adjust instruction; using a multimedia approach to elicit good responses; encouraging academic risk taking; and teaching metacognition to help students to understand how they learn.

Brophy (1987) established that students are more willing to work in school when they appreciate the value of the classroom activity and when they believe they can succeed with reasonable effort. Through extensive research on this topic, he compiled a list of strategies and behaviors teachers should engage in to motivate their students.

Practitioners should concentrate on creating a supportive environment, providing appropriate levels of challenge, choosing clear and meaningful learning objectives, and varying motivational strategies establish a learning atmosphere where students want to engage. Learning activities that provide appropriate levels of challenge and appeal to their affect further motivates students. Thus, programming student learning for success, and encouraging goal setting, self-appraisal, and self-reinforcement skills helps students to commit to learning. Helping students to link effort to outcome, and assisting reticent or discouraged students through performance contracts further supports students' needs for motivation. (p. 42)

Motivating students with extrinsic or intrinsic rewards can be used to appeal to student acceptance of the learning opportunity being presented. Extrinsic rewards can vary from material to intangible such as time with the teacher or work displays. These too should vary depending upon the needs of the individual students. To capitalize on students' levels of intrinsic motivation, educators are encouraged to adapt tasks to students' interests, include novelty and variety, allow choices or autonomy in decision making, provide opportunity for active responses, give immediate feedback to student responses, allow students to create finished products, include fantasy or simulation through role-play or drama, and incorporate game-like features into the process/product. Teachers should also recognize that learning is a social activity by utilizing variety of questioning techniques to inspire high-level analysis and synthesis of what is being learned. (pp. 43-47)

Affectively, students are more successful with new learning when they have access to each other as they share in this process. Teacher support through purpose setting and being clear about the task also minimizes student anxiety and encourages motivation. The pace and intensity of the learning should vary by student and should depend upon the students' acquisition of the new learning being presented.

Bruya & Olwell (2006) describe the potential for high levels of motivation through Csikszentmihalyi's concept of "flow." They aver that there is a psychology to how people

balance skill, interest, and challenge when engaging in new learning. They claim that when these three factors are in exactly the right balance, student motivation is high. If any of the three are not at an optimum level, then the task will be frustrating, resulting in low levels of motivation and subsequently, low levels of performance. The concept of “flow” is one that the authors believe schools should take seriously in their efforts at reform.

Danziger & Waldfogel (2000) regarding the struggling learner, share research from Eccles and Wigfield who discuss how motivation and performance are determined by classroom-level and school-level influences. They note that the quality of teacher-student relationships provides the foundation for student motivation and success. They support the idea that all student achievement should be recognized rather than just the best students and strongly suggest that students should be individually assessed on their personal levels of mastery. Tracking by ability levels results in poor achievement and poor behavior by low ability children, thus grouping children into ability levels should be limited to certain classes such as reading and math. (p. 9)

Seifert (2004) suggests that motivation may be thought of as patterns of behavior linked to affect. He opines that teachers must be aware of the role of feelings and competence play when engaging students in learning. Students must perceive that there is meaning in the learning being presented to them, and they also must believe they are capable of achieving some level of mastery with the content. He suggests that teachers must present clear learning objectives, and encourage student autonomy in the learning process. He concludes his study by stating that the single most important factor in the motivation of students is the relationship between the teacher and the student. Student success is contingent upon a nurturing and supportive teacher who instills a sense of confidence and self-efficacy in students. It is this relationship that will successfully elicit “learning-oriented behaviours of the intrinsically motivated student.” (p. 148)

Teacher-Student Relationships

It has long been determined that a positive teacher-student relationship is critical to the success of students in schools. Diero (2003) suggests that the relationships teachers should form with students are *influential* in nature and are intended to affect change by promoting learning and growth. She identifies respectful behavior as integral to the

development of positive relationships between teachers and students. Respectful behavior toward students is characterized by the use of discipline as a means of instruction while teachers ethically use their power.

Buttner (2004) conducted a study among college level students through which she identified a number of other behaviors as showing respect. Included among these behaviors are; recognition of student perspectives, showing sensitivity toward students' concerns, treating students with kindness, offering help and responding to questions, affirming students' contributions to class, being honest and truthful with students, and responding non-defensively to challenges and questions.

Checkley (2004) discusses the needs of the adolescent learner. As children enter the most difficult period of growth in their lives, early adolescence, they require intense support from the adults around them. It is critical for the adults to recognize how their connection with students, especially struggling learners, impacts the students' perception of that relationship. Checkley further reports that the other critical way to connect with adolescents is to honor how they learn and nurture their unique talents. Using students' strengths to enhance their achievement in other ways is a way of honoring how they learn. Matching student interests with curriculum and objectives, and giving students a voice in how or what they learn will further their motivation in the process.

Hargreaves (2000) studied the emotions of teachers and their perceptions of their interactions with students at both the elementary and secondary level. His focus was on highlighting the importance of emotion in the act of teaching and introduced four key concepts in the study; *emotional intelligence*, *emotional labor*, *emotional understanding*, and *emotional geographies*. He avers that emotions play a significant role in the interactions between teachers and their students and that how this plays out in the classroom is significantly different between elementary and secondary environments. He illustrated each of these concepts through a series of interviews of select teachers from a number of different school settings and concluded "teaching is an emotional practice." (p. 824) Teachers use emotions all the time in their interactions with students, colleagues, and parents, and are embedded not only in the mind, but are also expressed in interpersonal interactions. The expression of emotions and the investment teachers make in this regard is largely contingent upon the atmosphere in which teachers work, the receptiveness of students to their

interventions, and the acceptance teachers experience by colleagues and the school community. The fostering of positive relationships with students is dependent upon the established norms within the teacher's work environment. The more positive the environment, the more likely the teacher will be able to 'read' his/her students' emotions and respond to their needs.

Klem & Connell (2004) provide additional support for the importance of the teacher-student relationship in helping students to achieve. They evaluated student academic success as it related to their relationships with their teachers resulting from engagement in learning. Using the Research Assessment Package for Schools, (RAPS-S and RAPS-T) both students and teachers were surveyed simultaneously to determine correlations between student engagement in learning and teacher support of students. Key findings indicated, "teacher support is important to students' engagement in school as reported by students and teachers." The authors define high engagement in terms of teacher behaviors such as "...creating a caring, well-structured learning environment in which expectations are high, clear, and fair..."(p. 270). "High levels of engagement also are associated with higher attendance and test scores" – variables that predict that students will complete their schooling. In the conclusion of this extensive report, it is strongly suggested that creating personalized learning environments that seek to raise academic achievement can be structured in ways that commit to the development of long-term teacher-student relationships, a critical and necessary component of student engagement in learning (p. 271).

Hamre & Pianta (2006) studied the importance of student-teacher relationships and confirmed that students' need for positive relationships does not diminish as they transition through different levels of a school. The successful transition of children from elementary to middle or secondary school is frequently dependent upon the emotional warmth and acceptance conveyed by the teachers. Positive relationships between teachers and students are established through the teachers expressing concern and showing interest in the lives of the students both in and outside the classroom. Teachers want to respond appropriately to students' needs and will make the effort to do so, provided the school atmosphere, culture, and other social factors are stable and supportive. In middle school, these relationships are further enhanced by the structure of the students' learning environment. Using smaller communities or "teams" of students and teachers adds emphasis to the teacher-student

relationship. When students are able to have regular and ongoing contact with the teaching team to which they are assigned, their level of comfort is increased. Teachers are also more able to attend to the needs of the students since they are able to meet regularly and discuss student needs while planning to provide necessary academic and other support. Such a structure limits the potential for impersonal relationships and allows for more flexibility between and among the teaching team. Together, teachers are able to positively affect student success as a result of planning together and communicating about students' needs. The translation of these ideas to classroom practice includes the deliberate teaching of social, emotional, and behavioral skills, frequent social conversations outside the realm of instruction, being available to students who are struggling, listening to and respecting the perspectives of students, and finally, using behavior management strategies respectfully and with care. (pp. 65-66)

Martin, Romas, Medford, Leffert, & Hatcher (2005) conducted a study in a therapeutic setting with a nonclinical population of adolescents. Twelve of traits of adults that foster alliance with adolescents were identified. From most to least cited were the following; respect, time shared, openness, role characteristics, recognition, guidance, identification, trust, freedom, like/dislike, responsibility, and familiarity. The top three, respect, time shared, and openness were identified most by the adolescents. Respect was demonstrated through the behaviors such as "inviting an adolescent into a conversation," or "being treated as an equal by an adult." Time shared included the idea that "adults like spending time with adolescents." The third, openness, was characterized by "listening nonjudgmentally, without lecturing and by being available to receive new ideas from the adolescent." (p. 134)

Girod, Pardales, Cavanaugh, & Wadsworth (2005) gathered a number of ideas from older adolescents through essays written by the students to specific prompts designed by the researchers about a number of issues the students face. Within and among the prompts were questions about the role of the teacher in helping students to resolve issues and conflicts surrounding the topics in question. A number of the essays were critical of teachers who were uninspiring in the classroom, seemed unaware of the concerns or stresses of students, or just were not available to meet students' needs. Furthermore, there was a clear identifiable need by many of the students to want a connection with the teachers, to want teachers to

know about and understand the stress they feel, the fears they experience about the future, and the need they have to be engaged in productive learning. Among the eight recommendations that resulted from the study were three specific to the development of relationships between students and teachers. The first of these suggested that teachers be better prepared to use counseling skills in their interactions with students who need support. The second encouraged longer lasting relationships between teachers and students with more contact time between them. And the third was a recommendation to reorient teachers to the “social and emotional work involved in teaching and the moral, ethical role that teachers must play in the education of youth.” (p. 17) Older adolescents from this study are desirous of such a relationship with their teachers.

Kohn (2005) discusses the imperative of unconditional teaching and the impact of this practice on students in the classroom. He claims,

Unconditional teachers are not afraid to be themselves with students – to act like real human beings rather than crisply controlling authority figures. Their classrooms have an appealing informality about them. They may bring in occasional treats for their students – all their students – for no particular reason. They may write notes to children, have lunch with them, and respond from the heart to their journal entries. Such teachers listen carefully to what kids say and remember details about their lives: “Hey, Joanie. You said on Friday that your Mom might take you to the fair over the weekend. Did you go? Was it fun? (n.p.)

The teacher-student relationship is an opportunity to treat students with respect and acceptance and to view this relationship as holistic. He further states,

Accepting students for who they are – as opposed to for what they do – is integrally related to the idea of teaching the whole child. That connection is worth highlighting because the phrase “whole child” is sometimes interpreted to mean “more than academics,” which suggests a fragmented education. The point isn’t just to meet a student’s emotional needs with this activity, her physical needs with that activity, her social needs with something else, and so on. Rather, it is an integrated self to whom we respond. It is a whole person whom we value. And to do so in any way that matters is to accept children unconditionally, even (perhaps especially) when they screw up or fall short. (n.p.)

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview of the variety of topics related to teacher-student relationships and the influence of a number of factors on the success of students in the school setting. The research cited within this chapter attempted to provide general background on the needs of the young adolescent learner; including the physical, cognitive and social-emotional factors that exert influence upon the child's experiences in the school setting. Further understanding of the needs of young adolescent learners is captured in the research discussing motivation and learning, and the affective needs of students. Understanding the difference between school climate and school culture helps to define the context within which children are compelled to participate in the educational setting and the degree to which it is within their control or not to affect the atmosphere in which they learn. Subsequent to this understanding is the charge placed before professional educators to create an environment conducive to the successful engagement of all types of learners.

In all facets of this review, common themes emerged from the literature. First, the student's experience of the school setting is influenced by the climate, culture, and norms of the school and their readiness for each learning opportunity. The students' experience is further influenced by how well they connect with the curriculum and content available to them, and the manner in which a program is delivered. Students' levels of motivation and achievement are also deeply embedded in the experience of the learning. Finally, the workhorse of the process of education rests primarily with the teachers and their relationships with students as the most influential commodity within the school setting.

This review is intended to frame this study with crucial background information and to fuel the acquisition of a deeper understanding of the experiences of students in the school setting. While a great deal of research speaks to the function of the teacher-student relationship and the kinds of behaviors and activities that produce successful learning, there is no reference to the experience of this relationship from the perspective of the student. Therefore, this study will provide a perspective on this relationship out of the experiences of students and will likely add a dimension of knowledge and understanding to the literature not currently present. Thus, the following chapter will detail methodologies that will be employed to answer the research questions previously outlined in Chapter 1.

Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The overall questions to be examined in this study are:

1. As experienced by students, what are the meaning, structure, and essence of the relationship between students and teachers?
2. What teacher characteristics as perceived by students play a key role in how students experience the relationship?
3. What characteristics of teachers do students identify as being important to the development, either positively or negatively, of the teacher-student relationship?
4. How does the students' experience of this relationship affect their motivation to learn?
5. How do the student perspectives compare to the existing literature?

This chapter will describe the methodology used for answering these research questions. This chapter will begin with a discussion of the type of research that was used and the reasons for the appropriateness of the methodology for the research questions being asked. A description of the participants in this study will follow. Next, the actual methodology for the research questions will be discussed including how the data will be collected and interpreted. The final part of this chapter will deal with issues of reliability and validity as they pertain to this research study.

Theoretical Framework: Phenomenology

Prior to conducting any research, the researcher must determine the nature of the research problem and ask what design would be most appropriate for investigating and subsequently finding answers to the research questions being asked. Based on the research problem and the kind of study being proposed, the researcher has determined that the use of qualitative inquiry would best be used to seek the answers to the research questions.

Glesne (2006) describes the qualitative research process in the context of explaining how a researcher arrives at a version of truth by explaining the open-ended nature of the qualitative process.

Typically, qualitative research is not explicitly driven by theory, but it is situated within theoretical perspectives. Researchers often use empirical generalizations and formal theory to help form initial questions and working hypotheses during the beginning stages of data collections. As they begin to focus on data analysis, researchers may seek out yet other theories to help them examine their data from different perspectives. Qualitative research may or may not eventuate in statements of theory that are grounded in the data. (p. 29)

According to Glesne (2006), “three data-gathering techniques dominate in qualitative inquiry: participant observation, interviewing, and document collection.” Each technique can be accomplished with a wide variety of practices that deeply involve the use of the senses. (p. 36)

Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe the form of naturalistic studies to be “virtually impossible to design in any definitive way before the study is actually undertaken.” (p. 187) Naturalistic inquiry utilizes the “human instrument” as the most adaptive tool in the process of data gathering and implements inquiry in the form of “interviews, observations, document analysis, unobtrusive clues, and the like.” (p. 187) Once the researcher is in the field, he/she participates in the “form of successive iterations of four elements: purposive sampling, inductive analysis of the data obtained from the sample, development of grounded theory based on the inductive analysis, and projection of next steps in a constantly emergent design.” Iterations must be repeated until the theory is stabilized and the emergent design is fulfilled to the extent possible within the constraints of time and resources. (p. 188)

Numerous researchers have identified many different types of qualitative inquiry. Patton (2002) charts sixteen perspectives that have emerged from equally as many disciplinary roots. Among these sixteen are two that were considered in relation to this study. While “no consensus exists to classify the varieties of qualitative research,” appropriate consideration was given to phenomenology. (p.131)

Phenomenology emanates from the discipline of philosophy. This form of inquiry seeks to focus on exploring how human beings “make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning.” (Patton, 2002, p.

104) The researcher thoroughly captures and describes how people experience some phenomenon, through their senses. The gathering of data in phenomenology requires the use of in-depth interviews directly with the people who experience the phenomenon of interest. They have “lived experience” as opposed to secondhand experience. (p. 104) One dimension that differentiates phenomenology is the idea of *essence*. With phenomenology, there is an assumption that there are “essences to shared experience,” that are the “core meanings” mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced. (p. 106) “The experiences of different people are bracketed, analyzed, and compared to identify the essences of the phenomenon,” (p.106) which in this case is the teacher-student relationship. The type of question a phenomenological inquiry would address includes, “What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?” The uncovering of essences sets phenomenology apart from constructivist inquiry. For the purposes of this study, phenomenology is the preferred form of qualitative inquiry.

Bernstein (1976) illustrates the phenomenological framework through a discussion of Alfred Schutz’ philosophy of phenomenology. *Verstehen*, according to Schutz, is “the name of a complex process by which all of us in our everyday life interpret the meaning of our own actions and those of others with whom we interact.” (p. 139) Schutz further illustrates the thinking that accompanies the qualitative study of sociological contexts;

The world of nature, as explored by the natural scientist, does not “mean” anything to molecules, atoms, and electrons. But the observational field of the social scientist – social reality – has a specific meaning and relevance structure for the human beings living, acting, and thinking within it. By a series of common-sense constructs they have pre-selected and pre-interpreted this world which they experience as the reality of their daily lives. (Bernstein, 1976)

Schutz (in Bernstein, 1976) identifies three closely interrelated types of inquiry required for a phenomenology of the social world. The first is “an explication and clarification of the basic concepts [of] subjective meaning, action, and intersubjectivity; the second is the development of distinctions and categories required to understand properly the dynamics and structure of the ‘life-world;’ and the third is the application of this categorical scheme for the investigation of specific social phenomena.” (p. 138) He concurs with Max Weber’s belief that, “generalized theoretical categories are essential to the proof of causal relationships in

the human and cultural field as they are in the natural sciences.”(p. 138) He also suggests that restricted universality is true in both social and natural sciences in that both can permit prediction only to a limited extent. On intersubjectivity, Schutz clarifies that all humans are actors on a social scene and that we live in an intersubjective world of nature and culture potentially common to all human beings. The interaction in the intersubjective world requires the use of language and communication. Therefore, meaningful construction of the social world is both universal and individual. (p. 138)

Patton (2002) describes *verstehen* as “understanding” and “refers to the unique human capacity to make sense of the world.” (p. 52) Emphasized in phenomenological inquiry, *verstehen* presupposes that humans possess a distinct and unique form of consciousness that involves the capacity for empathy; this distinguishes humans from all other forms of life. Because of the uniqueness of the human experience, humans can be understood differently than all other life forms. Therefore since humans have the capacity for choice, deliberation, emotions, and meaningful behavior, meaning and understanding of the life experience can be derived through naturalistic techniques.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to elucidate the perceptions of children as they consider their relationships with their teachers and to uncover information about their lived experiences in the context of those relationships (the ‘life-world’). This study seeks to report the stories of students as they are affected by the teacher’s choices in their interactions with them as well as to discover the effect of the teacher’s instructional decision making. The study, a qualitative inquiry into the classroom and relational experiences of rising seventh grade students, was focused solely on the perceptions of the students. The focus of the study was on how the students perceived their experiences and interactions with their teachers in the immediate past, and present, and was to uncover the meaning of their relationships with them. It was hoped that by studying these phenomena, insight into these relationships may highlight important details about students’ lived experiences in the classroom and their beliefs and perceptions about the student-teacher relationship; that the examination of the data provided by student voices may help to develop a deep understanding of the phenomenon of the relationship, and to give a voice to student perceptions of this relationship. For the duration of this study, the researcher was the ‘human instrument’ used for the purpose of data collection and analysis.

This study was conducted in a middle school of 480 students in a small suburban school district in Pennsylvania. The school is comprised of 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students, with a professional staff of 45, one principal, and one assistant principal. The student to teacher ratio averages 20 – 24 in most classes.

The participants for this study were selected from among a group of rising seventh grade students. Methodologically, the selection of a sample of five students, was purposefully accomplished. Patton (2002) avers, “ The logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding. This leads to selecting *information-rich cases* [italics in original] for study in depth. Information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research...” (p. 46)

Selection of the students for this research study occurred as follows:

1. I determined the group of students currently participating in the Fast Pace Language Arts class in the sixth grade. This determination was accomplished by examining the rosters of the teacher who instructed this group of students. These students are homogeneously grouped into these sections. The Fast Pace Language Arts class requires students to have a command of the English language in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, and that they are capable of regularly demonstrating skill in using the language in all these venues to the extent that sixth grade students would be expected to perform at the level of a course of this nature. Placement in this course was made by the fifth grade teachers at the end of the students’ fifth grade year. Remaining in the course throughout the sixth grade year required a combined demonstration of high skill and high motivation within the curriculum, as well as high performance on curriculum- based assessments. The teacher of this course was deemed “highly qualified” under the requirements of the No Child Left Behind legislation and was in the best position to judge who among the students has the highest command of the skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

2. I then examined existing achievement and performance data on the group of students and determined the highest 10% of the group. The majority of these students scored in the 75th percentile or above on standardized measures in reading, reading vocabulary, language, language mechanics, and listening. I identified students who scored above the 90th percentile. The standardized measure utilized was the Stanford Achievement Tests – Ninth

Edition. The Pennsylvania System of Statewide Assessment (PSSA) was a further source of data utilized in determining the upper 10% of student performers within this group. Data from both these sources was used to compile the list.

3. I sought the advice of the Language Arts teacher regarding these students about which students, in her experience, were most articulate, had the greatest command of spoken and written language, and were able to communicate with ease in the presence of adults.

4. Once the upper 10% of the students were identified through this process, a further discussion was held with the language arts teacher to gather her perceptions of the students' ability or potential desire to participate in this study in light of the requirements for data collection. The field of potential participants was narrowed to six students, three boys and three girls. I met with these six students to explain the study and to provide information to them to share with their parents. Five of the six students agreed to participate in the study, two boys and three girls. These students were high performing but not necessarily identified gifted as defined in Chapter 16 in the state of Pennsylvania.

5. None of the students had an Individual Education Plan or Chapter 15 504 Service Agreement to access educational services due to a specific learning disability or other health impairment.

Given the population from which the participants were selected, it was likely that the students had a majority of good experiences in school, and positively experience school in general because they are capable students relative to the general population. Selection of highly capable students as participants increased the likelihood that I would be able to acquire necessary detailed data from interviews and diaries.

The rising seventh grade students were expected to participate in 1) three to four semi-structured interviews about their relationships with their teachers, 2) maintain a diary or personal log of their experiences with their teachers in the interim period between interviews, and 3) participate in these interviews while I utilized video and audio recording equipment to capture the interviews. All three of these methods are described in the following section of this chapter.

Data Collection

This phenomenological study focused on the teacher-student relationship from the experiential point of view of the students. It sought to understand the meaning of these relationships to students and attempted to draw a deeper understanding of this relationship. The questions this study attempted to answer included the following:

1. As experienced by students, what are the meaning, structure, and essence of the relationship between students and teachers?
2. What teacher characteristics as perceived by students play a key role in how students experience the relationship?
3. What characteristics of teachers do students identify as being important to the development, either positively or negatively, of the teacher-student relationship?
4. How does the students' experience of this relationship affect their motivation to learn?
5. How do the student perspectives compare to the existing literature?

The first set of interview protocols dealt with the past and immediate past experiences of the participants in their relationships with former teachers. The questions also asked the students to share their expectations of the year to come and their hopes for their relationships in the next school year. The following questions were used to guide the interview.

Interview # 1

1. Describe your relationships with your teachers in general.
2. Talk about a positive relationship experience. What made this a positive relationship experience? What did the teacher do or say that gave you a positive experience? What feelings did you experience during this interaction with your teacher? What happened in your interaction with the teacher that caused you to feel this way? What did this relationship mean to you?
3. Talk about a negative relationship experience. What made this a negative relationship experience? What did the teacher do or say that gave you a negative experience? What feelings did you experience during this interaction with your teacher? What happened in your interaction with the teacher that caused you to feel this way? What did this relationship mean to you?

4. Describe your ideal student-teacher relationship. Describe the influence and responsibility the teacher has in this relationship. Describe the influence and responsibility the student has in this relationship.
5. Think about a favorite teacher you have had over the years. Describe this teacher's relationship with you. What characteristics of this teacher made him/her your favorite teacher?
6. Describe how your relationships with your teachers have shaped your school experience.
7. Talk about your motivation to learn as it relates to the relationships you have with your teachers.
8. Think about your upcoming school year. Do you know anything about the teachers you will have this coming year? What expectations do you have about these teachers? How are you feeling about your potential relationships with the teachers? Do you have any predictions about how your year will go?
9. What should I have asked you that I didn't think to ask?

Interview #2

The second set of interview protocols were administered one week after the participants had begun the next school year. These protocols were similar to the first set of protocols but were administered in the present tense.

1. Describe your experience of your relationships with your current teachers.
2. Right before the year began, you had some ideas about what your school experience would be like. Describe the accuracy of your expectations and the reality of your experience as it is today.
3. Do you have a favorite teacher this year? What makes this a positive relationship experience? What does the teacher do or say that gives you a positive experience? Describe the behaviors of the teacher that make this relationship a positive one. What feelings do you experience during this interaction with your teacher? What happens in your interaction with the teacher that causes you to feel this way? What does this relationship mean to you?

4. Do you have a least favorite teacher this year? What makes this a negative relationship experience? What does the teacher do or say that gives you a negative experience? What feelings do you experience during this interaction with your teacher? Describe the behaviors of the teacher that make this relationship a negative one. What happens in your interaction with the teacher that causes you to feel this way? What does this relationship mean to you?
5. How do these two relationships shape your performance in school? When you think about your school performance, what influence does your relationships with these [two] teachers have on your learning behavior?
6. Talk about your motivation to learn as it relates to the relationships you have with your teachers.
7. Describe how your current relationships with your teachers have shaped your school experience this year.
8. What should I have asked you that I didn't think to ask?

Diaries

At the conclusion of the second interview at the end of the first week of school, the participants were asked to maintain a diary about their experiences in their relationships with their teachers. A protocol for the diary was developed to seek the students' reactions to their ongoing experiences with their teachers. The protocol was written to provide focus for the students to write about as they experienced their relationships with their teachers and because students of this age find it easier to write to a prompt than to formulate their own. The diary protocol was the same for each of the four entries as follows:

Write about a specific experience you are having with your teacher(s). This experience can be positive or negative for you.

- Provide details about when this experience has happened and how you feel while you are in the experience.
- How does this experience affect how you feel about your teacher(s), your motivation to learn, or your experience of school?

The participants were asked to make at least one entry per week for one month about a specific experience they might have had with one of their current teachers based on this protocol. The diaries were collected right before the third interview. I read them, and began the third interview with a review of the diary for each of the participants. I asked the students to simply tell about what they wrote and to describe their feelings about the experiences they described in the diary.

Glesne (2002) speaks to the kinds of data that a qualitative researcher might collect in the data collection process. She suggests, “In considering options, choose techniques that are likely to (1) elicit data needed to gain understanding of the phenomenon in question, (2) contribute different perspectives on the same issue, and (3) make effective use of the time available for data-collection.” (p. 36) The use of both semi-structured interviews and document collection in the forms of diaries will yield rich data for “thick description” of this relationship phenomenon. (Creswell, 2003)

Interview #3

Protocols for this interview were developed after the second interview and emerged from the interview data previously collected. The focus of these protocols was to develop a deeper understanding of the experience of the student-teacher relationship previously described by the students and also on the data collected from the students’ diaries.

1. Describe how your relationships with your teachers have changed since the beginning of the year. Describe how your feelings about your teachers have changed since the first week of school. Tell me a story about the biggest change you have seen and felt.
2. Do you have a favorite teacher? Describe what this teacher does that makes him/her your favorite teacher.
3. Do you have a least favorite teacher? Describe what this teacher does that makes him/her your least favorite teacher.
4. Compare how you perform in your favorite class with your least favorite class. Describe your feelings about your effort in these two classes. What are your thoughts and feelings while you are in these two classes?
5. How does your favorite teacher treat other students?

6. How does your least favorite teacher treat other students?
7. Have you ever felt like you were treated unfairly by one of your teachers? How did that affect your relationship with that teacher?
8. Talk about how you feel when you think your teacher treats other students unfairly. How does that affect your relationship with that teacher?
9. What makes you do the work for class when you dislike the class or the teacher?
10. In your opinion, do all experiences with teachers have to be positive in order for a student to grow and learn? What about you?
11. If the student does not try or do his/her daily work, how much responsibility belongs to the teacher to bring that student along? How should the teacher do that?
12. In an unconditional relationship the people in the relationship are able to accept each other without any conditions or limitations. Parents typically provide unconditional love and acceptance to their children. This means that no matter what their children say or do, even if it's wrong or incorrect, the parents will continue to love them. Is it possible for teachers to accept every student they have in class unconditionally? Explain why you think what you do.
13. Is there anything else you would like me to know about your experiences with your teachers that I did not ask you?

The diary queries were individualized, based upon the data in the diaries and invited the students to talk about what they wrote or to 'retell' the story from their point view based on the experiences they described in writing.

Procedures

After selecting the participants, the first semi-structured interview occurred in June and July of 2007, the end of the academic year. This interview was audio and video taped which I then subsequently transcribed. A semi-structured interview involves "certain steps" as illustrated by Lincoln and Guba (1985) after the determination of what participants to use. These steps include:

1. "Preparing for the interview" entails 'practicing' with a stand-in to help decide on an appropriate sequence of questions, and to help the interviewer decide upon his/her own role in this process.

2. “Initial Moves” is the asking of general questions to give the respondent time to adjust to the interviewer and to “organize his/her head” for the interview questions.
3. “Pacing the Interview and Keeping it Productive” involves creating a rhythm of questioning and encouraging responses that create “talk turns” for the respondent as well as calling for reactions or ‘more’ to further illustrate a point.
4. “Terminating the Interview and Gaining Closure” occurs when the interview becomes redundant, and/or the participants are both fatigued. At this point, the interviewer should engage in a “member check” with the participant to validate the constructions of the interviewer. Closure requires that the interviewer thank the participant and provide additional opportunities for contact. (p. 271)

Upon completion of the interviews, I immediately checked the video and audio equipment to be certain the taping occurred and created field notes on my initial reactions to the data presented by the participants. The equipment performed flawlessly, thus it was not necessary to make voluminous notes and to contact participants by phone to do member checking. The video from each interview was uploaded to the computer and iMovies were created from the video data. These were used in the transcription process and data analysis.

Data Interpretation

Interviews and Diaries

In qualitative research, data analysis begins and continues during the process of naturalistic inquiry. “Ideas for making sense of the data that emerge while still in the field constitute the beginning of analysis; they are part of the record of field notes. Recording and tracking analytical insights that occur during data collection are part of fieldwork *and* the beginning of qualitative analysis.” (Patton, 2002, p. 436) Glesne (2006) suggests the process of early data analysis is “...done simultaneously with data collection [and] enables you [the researcher] to focus and shape the study as it proceeds.” (p. 148)

The interview processes yielded a transcript of questions and answers from the interviews. I managed these data as they occurred through the transcription of each interview immediately after the interviews. Patton (2002) suggests that transcribing offers, “...a point of transition between data collection and analysis as part of data management and

preparation. Doing all or some of your own [the researcher's] interview transcriptions (instead of having them done by a transcriber), ... provides an opportunity to get immersed in the data, an experience that usually generates emergent insights.” (p. 441)

Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe the tasks of unitizing, categorizing, and member checks as a three-part process of content analysis. (p. 344) Each of these steps were taken in the analysis of the transcribed interview data as well as with the diaries. A brief discussion of these processes follows.

When unitizing, data from interviews and diaries can be broken into small “*units of information*” that will serve as the basis for defining categories. These units were derived from the transcribed texts and met two criteria; first, the units must aim at some understanding or some action that I needed to have or take. Second, each was the “smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself and interpretable in the absence of any additional information other than a broad understanding of the context in which the inquiry is carried out.” (p. 345) Each unit was then coded for the *source, type, site, or episode*. (p. 346) In the process of categorizing, each unit of data was placed in a yet-to-be-named category and “provisional” rules were defined for each of the categories. During this process units of data that offered ambiguity were subjected to “member check” to help clarify the meaning and intent of the interaction. (pp. 350-351)

Patton (2002) refers to analyzing text (interview transcripts, diaries, or documents) rather than observation-based field notes as content analysis. He further qualifies this process as a “data reduction and sense making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings.” These core meanings can be termed “patterns” or “themes.” (pp.452-453)

This three-part content analysis was used for all interviews and diaries in this study. I transcribed all fifteen interviews and unitized all data, creating individual cards for every participant, and every question. All units of data were then placed into provisional categories and the categories were subsequently defined based upon thematic ideas as they emerged from the groupings and regroupings of the data. Four major themes were derived from the categories and were used to conceptualize the teacher-student relationship in this study. After this qualitative analysis, the participants were viewed as a group to identify similarities and differences, then were separated as individuals so that further examination of the data

could provide insight into patterns. Upon completion of that analysis, member checking occurred to verify my understanding of the data with each of the study participants.

Validity and Reliability

Creswell (2003) asserts, "...validation of findings occurs throughout the steps in the process of research, ...validity does not carry the same connotations in qualitative research as it does in quantitative research, nor is it a companion of reliability ...or generalizability." (p. 195) "Validity, on the other hand, is seen as a strength of qualitative research, but it is used to suggest determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant or the readers of an account." (p. 196)

Creswell (2003) recommends eight strategies from which the researcher can select to assist in the process of data analysis to validate the acquired data. I utilized four of these strategies during the process of data collection and analysis. The fifth strategy was used to help clarify the data analysis in the process of analyzing discrepant data. The strategies are described below.

1. "*Triangulate* different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes." (p. 196)

Triangulation will be accomplished through the examination and comparison of data from interview, diary, and video/audio recorded observational sources. Since understanding the essence and experience of this relationship is at the heart of this inquiry, data from multiple sources were necessary to the validity of the study. Interview data were transcribed, coded, and compared between the participants to look for common themes. Diary data were used to derive a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of the relationship during the periods between interviews; it also was used to formulate other protocols about emergent ideas and thoughts that corroborate or conflict with interview data. The video provided insight into the visual data present during the interviews and assisted me in deriving a coherent understanding and connection between *what was said* and *what was demonstrated* in the interview. I used the video to look for congruence (or not) between what the participants said and how they behaved during the interview. Both further confirmed my interpretive accuracy with the participants during the data analysis and further validated the story being told.

2. “Use *member-checking* to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking the final report or specific descriptions of themes back to participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate.” (p. 196)

Member checking was accomplished through contact discussions with the participants after the process of data analysis following the data collection experience. The data analyzed included interviews, diaries, video recordings of the interview, and my field notes. I returned to the participants post analysis and asked the question, “Here is what I am thinking your experiences have been. If any part of what I tell you seems to be not quite right, then I am wrong. You cannot be wrong. So if there is something that seems not quite right, please tell me how to fix it.” While much of this did occur during the process of data collection, the member-checking process occurred primarily after the data analysis. Member checking involved the participant as collaborator on the telling of the story.

3. “Use *rich, thick description* to convey the findings. This may transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences.” (p. 196)

The use of rich, thick description was accomplished during the process of data analysis and interpretation throughout the study. The rich, thick description provides detail and clarity to the data in the form of analysis and researcher reflection. The collaboration between participants and researcher added depth to the description of the essence of the phenomenon.

4. “Clarify the *bias* the researcher brings to the study. This self-reflection creates an open and honest narrative...” (p. 196)

The processing of qualitative data is unavoidably a human experience. I was open about my reaction to ideas in the description so as to make available to the reader any overlay of bias in interpretation. This was previously addressed in Chapter 1, in the section on the Researcher’s Perspective.

5. “Present *negative or discrepant information* that runs counter to the themes.” (p. 196)

To add further credibility to the account, as the researcher, I identified negative or discrepant information and treated these data with potential value in the final analysis.

Finally, to further the internal consistency and reliability of this study, I undertook yet other strategies to validate the trustworthiness of the data collected and analyzed. Glesne (2006) suggests “peer review and debriefing” and “external audit” as means to extend the opportunity for validating data analysis and enhancing trustworthiness of the study. Peer

review and debriefing requires, “the invaluable assistance of friends and colleagues.” (p. 167) She suggests that the researcher ask them to work with portions of the collected data – “developing codes, applying your [the researcher’s] codes, or interpreting field notes to check [your] perceptions.” (p. 167) Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this process as “audit.” To assist in the audit of the research work, Glesne (2006) suggests that researchers maintain an extensive fieldwork notebook such as a three ringed binder, “tabulated and with a detailed table of contents.” (p. 167) Maintaining an inclusive notebook will make the fieldwork audit easier and will enforce the organizational process that assists with the analysis of data. (p. 169)

An external audit of this process was completed by a professional educator with decades of experience in teaching, school administration, and higher education. This individual has served in multiple capacities as a teacher, principal, and assistant superintendent of schools. She holds a doctorate in education and, though currently retired from public education, she teaches at the university level. Her expertise was highly valued during the process of analysis, and her insights into my data analysis were crucial to the validity of this study.

The audit process was elaborate. At the conclusion of my data analysis, I provided my colleague with all my data on note cards. The note cards had been coded and color-coded for each of the study participants by interview, date, and question. Units of data had been placed upon the note cards and the cards were placed on notebook rings in categories. I provided a chart of the Themes and Categories as I had defined them based upon my analysis (see Appendix H) and asked her to examine the cards and compare the data to the chart and categorical definitions, while determining if she agreed with my initial analysis. Her analysis of the data was completed within a week, at which time we met to discuss her questions or perceived inconsistencies in my analysis.

Upon review of the data, categories, and themes, we initially agreed upon 92% of the placement of each piece of datum in the categories. Only one card was removed from the entire set of data because the datum could not stand alone and provide meaning in the analysis. The remaining data discussed were from a variety of categories and thus I did not believe represented any glaring misinterpretation of the data overall. She suggested no changes in the categories, themes, or their definitions. With further discussion of our

understandings of the categorical definitions, we increased our agreement to 96% leaving the remaining 4% of the data to be moved to other categories. Following this discussion, I provided her with a copy of my data analysis in text form for each of the study participants so that she could read the descriptions I had written as a further opportunity for audit. No changes resulted from that review.

As I undertook this study, all of the structures discussed in this chapter were employed to gather, interpret, and analyze the data. The issue of trustworthiness was addressed through the multiple uses of the strategies discussed previously in this chapter. To further illustrate how the use of these strategies enhanced trustworthiness, the following added structure to the use of the strategies and the location of their use in this process. Lincoln and Guba, (1981; 1982; 1985 in Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002) identify four criteria for trustworthiness that frame naturalistic inquiry. The Qualitative terminology of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability is used to create categories of strategy identified in this chapter. The following summarizes the variety of cogent research strategies that were employed in this body of work.

Credibility

- Triangulation
- Member Checks

Transferability

- Use of thick description
- Purposive sampling

Dependability

- Create an audit trail
- Triangulation
- Peer examination

Confirmability

- Triangulation

(Anfara, et. al., 2002, p. 30)

Chapter Four

PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA COLLECTED FROM INDIVIDUAL STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and interpret the data that were collected for each of the five students who participated in this study utilizing the research methodology described in Chapter Three. The research questions outlined in Chapter One will guide this narrative in outlining the most salient points of this investigation.

The following questions were used to guide this discussion:

1. As experienced by students, what are the meaning, structure, and essence of the relationship between students and teachers?
2. What teacher characteristics as perceived by students play a key role in how students experience the relationship? What characteristics of teachers do students identify as being important to the development, either positively or negatively, of the teacher-student relationship?
3. How does the students' experience of this relationship affect their motivation to learn?

OVERVIEW OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS AND THE INVESTIGATIVE PROCESS

There were five study participants in this investigation, three girls, and two boys. At the start of the inquiry, each student had just completed the sixth grade, and each was currently enrolled in a middle school as a seventh grade student. These students were invited to participate in the study once they were identified through the process of selection discussed in Chapter Three. Each of them will be described individually in the following text along with the biographical data and personal information they shared in the process of this investigation.

Each student participated with me in three semi-structured interviews that were video taped, audio taped, transcribed, and unitized in response to interview protocols. The first interview with the participants occurred in late June or early July (2007) immediately

following their sixth grade experience. The second interview occurred approximately one to one and one-half weeks after the beginning of the new school year, and the third interview took place approximately four weeks after the second interview. In between the second and third interviews each student also maintained a diary in response to a single protocol designed to invite their descriptions of experiences with their teachers over this period of time. They were asked to make one entry per week in the diary describing an experience they had that week. I collected the diaries just before the third interview and incorporated a discussion of their entries into the third interview. The following is a narrative summary of the data collected during this process.

JAROD: STUDENT NUMBER ONE

Biographical Data

Jarod is a 13-year, two-month-old seventh grade Caucasian male. He was selected for participation in this study because he met the outlined criteria as a linguistically capable student previously discussed in Chapter 3. Jarod is a bright boy with performance levels of B+ in the fast pace language arts class. Jarod works hard in school, and takes his school performance seriously. His grades range from A's to B+'s in all content areas. Jarod is the oldest of four children in his family, and he has a passion for baseball, which he plays throughout the summer and fall. Jarod is very respectful of the adults in the school environment and his responses to my queries were filled with deference to the teachers who have served him.

Jarod was asked to define the word 'relationship' and then to discuss the teacher-student relationship from his point of view. He defined the word 'relationship' in this way, "It means that two people get to know each other and actually care for each other and have a bond with each other." He further elaborated on what this means to him in the classroom by describing the teacher-student relationship from his experience by talking about his perception of how teachers see him;

Well – Most of the teachers I know... most of them like me. And I think the student- teacher relationship is when a teacher can help a kid and know him or her at the same time. It's kind of hard to explain.

I interpreted his definition to mean that it is very important to Jarod that his teachers know him in ways that feel encouraging to him. He further qualifies this idea by stating, “Maybe knowing some of the student’s personal life as also with their academic abilities.” So knowing the student both personally and academically are key elements in Jarod’s definition of the teacher-student relationship.

Essence of Teacher-Student Relationship

Jarod described a number of different circumstances in his relationships with his teachers from previous as well as current experiences to illustrate what this relationship means to him. In particular, he recalled a time when his dog had died. His teacher became aware of his loss and was particularly sensitive and empathetic to his feelings and needs in the classroom when she learned about the dog’s death. He describes this experience;

Well, uh, last year I had a dog that died and I told my teacher that and she kind of let me have a break a little bit and be a little bit nicer to me. She likes knowing my personal life and helping with it kind of...for a couple of days I was a little out of it.

In yet another experience, Jarod talked about a teacher he had in elementary school. Jarod described him as having a sense of humor, and he was able to joke around with Jarod in class, but he also had high expectations for him. Jarod liked being able to have this experience with his teacher and it made going class fun for him. He looked forward to being in this teacher’s class every afternoon. He described this teacher as his favorite from the previous year;

...probably last year with Mr. S. when we would know each other and we could joke about each other and he wouldn’t even get mad at me at all. And he was also kind of strict with me which kind of helped me to be a better student.

Jarod also had this experience with a teacher in his earlier elementary days and described her as having a sense of humor with him. The humor, however, was also tempered by demand and expectations that she had of his performance in her class.

This teacher, she would also be able to kid around with me. But she would teach me a lot cause I had her for most of the classes – and I think that helped her get to know me more cause I had her five out of the six classes. And she would expect a lot from me. I know one time, I usually do my

homework, but I remember I didn't do my homework and she would just get mad at me...more mad than she would most of the time with other students.

It was apparent to Jarod that his teachers, while enjoying an exchange of humor in their relationship with him, maintained high standards and expectations for his performance in their classes. Jarod summarized his experience of these relationships by talking about liking to go school, and knowing that he and his teachers knew each other well enough to enjoy humor together in the class. This helped him to feel connected to his teachers. In reference to the teacher named, Mr. S., Jarod had this to say;

It meant that I could go to school and be happy rather than be bored all day cause I knew sixth period was going to fun.

The meaning, structure, and essence of this relationship for Jarod is one of connectedness, of teachers knowing students personally and academically, and expecting high levels of achievement from them. For Jarod, it's also being able to appropriately joke with a teacher, but know the limits of this behavior, and to adhere to the structure his teachers have provided for him to be successful in the classroom.

Key Characteristics

Data unitized from Jarod's interviews and diary elucidate a number of characteristics in the teacher-student relationship that play a key role in his experience of this relationship. While humor plays an important role in this relationship for Jarod, other aspects of relating are equally critical. It is important that he is able to know his teachers, to understand how they teach, and to be able to predict the amount of effort he is going to need to put forth to succeed academically in the classroom. Of note also is the appropriateness of the demands placed upon him by the teachers. When he was asked about the development of these relationships after the year had begun, he elaborated upon what this had been like for him;

I'm getting to know them a lot more, uh, I know their style better and that helps me know what's in store for class. ...most of the teachers have stayed the same, but the history teacher, he's getting a little bit better cause we're getting into the book more...he's becoming more of a teacher. Probably the amount of work we're getting...and sometimes a lot more variety of things like in math she'll give us more problems, she'll give us different types of problems of what we covered. And uh...now it's like I

don't know, at least probably an hour of homework a night compared to the easy review of what used to be 15 minutes.

In a previous relationship, Jarod described a frustrating situation for him that made it hard for him to learn. The teacher had placed a high demand on student independence, something that Jarod had not yet developed. This frustrated him and he felt as though he could not succeed. He described this experience;

... it felt to me that he wasn't really teaching us. He was just telling us to do stuff. Go home and do it and I was kind of struggling the first two semesters... When I was kind of struggling with the homework... I thought I was a failure. He was making us go home, take notes, doing all this work that he didn't even teach us during the school day. It made me find out stuff about [myself] – help yourself out.

Similar to this experience, Jarod found that his current history teacher is placing a demand on him to be independent, which he now likes. This is also a change from the previous experience. Jarod has decided that being forced to be more independent makes him a more independent learner.

...he [the history teacher] tells us an assignment and then he says 'no questions, you don't talk, don't ask anyone or me,' and he won't answer anything so just little things too... like I was in the computer lab and I say, where's the pencil sharpener? And he said, 'look around, you can find it.' Just things like that that help us be more independent...

Jarod likes when teachers have demanding expectations but they are tempered with teacher empathy with regard to how the students are taught. This appropriate level of challenge is a balance that must be struck in Jarod's mind between what students are expected to learn and what they are expected to do in the process. He elaborated about his current teachers;

They're not being too overwhelming with the work, cause if it's too overwhelming I think you learn less cause you are focused on what things they want you to remember less from each thing or whatever. So if they give you a couple good topics to learn from then that's being caring more cause it's easier, but you're learning more [about fewer topics].

It is important for Jarod to feel secure in his experience of school, and this transfers to how he feels about his relationships with his teachers. His experience of these relationships

depends upon how well the teacher is able to know him personally and academically, share humor with him, be stern about classroom expectations, and appropriately demanding of him in class. He summarizes his ideal teacher-student relationship;

Okay well, the teacher should know what's going on in your life. Umm...know when you're struggling with something, and maybe help you when you're struggling but also be strict with you or else you'll never really get any smarter. I think if it were perfect you would leave for the school year knowing you just had a real good teacher knowing that you did the best in that class that the teacher could help you with.

He also likes being in school when learning is fun. He says that good teachers;

[make] you a better student and making you enjoy school cause you know most kids just they hate school – hate school. Then that teacher would help you enjoy your learning more.

Jarod elaborates on his experience of his math teachers and draws a comparison between his previous year teacher and the current one. He identifies helpfulness in his current teacher as a critical characteristic in this experience and the frustration he felt when this did not happen in his sixth grade year. He shares;

It's very helpful the way she teaches cause it helps me to comprehend the lesson for the day...cause now it's actually starting to get difficult instead of just review, it's starting to get into uh two sided equations and stuff like that... with variables and different things and that helps me a lot when I am in the classroom and she's actually writing on the board the examples and she does those for us and she gives us one to do and it's easier than last year because he would tell us to do it and do the notes and go home and... I would have to do it all myself and that would be difficult to teach myself...[it] would have been much easier if someone had been there explaining it for me.

Jarod benefits most from direct instruction where the format involves teaching, modeling, providing guided practice and independent practice before expecting students to be completely independent with homework. This was not his previous experience. Having this experience now provides comfort to Jarod and he believes that his teacher will continue to be present when he needs her. He identified her as his favorite teacher this year since, "...she helps us a lot more..." and she is focused on delivering the curriculum in a way that kids understand. This teacher's method of direct instruction and pedagogical competence fills

Jarod's learning needs best. Jarod reports her as well planned and he believes in his heart that she will help him. He trusts her.

Another of Jarod's favorite teachers this year is his language arts teacher. What he likes most about this class is that she, too, is structured in her delivery of curriculum. But different from the math class, he enjoys having choice in assignments and reading. He reported his feelings about this in his diary;

This year our teacher lets us read any type of book that we would like. That helps me because I like to read biographies and short story books more than novels. I am really enjoying language arts.

While Jarod reported that he enjoyed having teachers with a sense of humor, he has been struggling with this issue in his history class. History is a favorite subject of his, and he is anxious to delve into the content in the class this year, but his study of history was stymied by the teacher's overuse of humor. During member checking, Jarod reported the teacher had since retreated from such overuse of humor. However, during the interview period, Jarod felt bored and unfocused, and he worried that if the teacher didn't soon bring structure to the lessons, he would fall asleep in class or worse yet, not perform well. He expressed this concern in his diary.

I am trying to do well in History but I am so bored of it that it is hard to keep interest in it. Hopefully, the teacher will stop trying to be a comedian and just teach. For example, we were talking about population growth and hunger and someone in the classroom mentioned, "Spam." Then the teacher put on some kind of Monty Python video about Spam. Sometimes the teacher is funny, but that isn't helping me learn anything.

In another class, Jarod feels awkward and uncomfortable with the Physical Education teacher whom he describes as unpredictable, whose mood and demeanor can change suddenly. Jarod sees this as an "odd relationship," and observes that sometimes the teacher can be kind and the next minute he could be yelling at the entire group. He elaborates about this experience in his diary;

It only takes one kid to mess up the whole class. If the gym is off to a good start, one kid could disobey and then he is cracking the whip on everybody. Gym class is supposed to be a fun class where kids can get exercise and relieve your stress, not a 45-minute drill session. Having a moody teacher makes gym the best time of the day or the worst; you really never know until you get there.

Jarod has also experienced this moodiness on another occasion when this teacher was unfair and critical of him and another student who were returning equipment to the gym. Jarod couldn't quite understand the reason behind the rant, but has decided that sometimes teachers can be mean as well as nice. He says that in the end, "it isn't really going to affect you for the whole school year."

Jarod recognizes a number of characteristics of teachers that both enhance his learning and create a challenging climate for him. Teacher behaviors including helpfulness, structured lessons, and assignment choice all create an atmosphere of support that encourages his learning. On the contrary, overuse of humor and moodiness create an atmosphere of mistrust and uncertainty. He faces these circumstances in his daily class routine.

Motivation to Learn

Jarod was quick to respond to a query about what makes him do the work if he does not like the teacher or the content by saying, "...just the thought of getting a good grade on it. I just get it over with or else I'll just need to do it tomorrow night for late credit." This internal motivation is what keeps up his effort. So in spite of the differences in his teachers' personalities, demeanors, or teaching styles, Jarod is motivated to do well. However, it is easier to do well when he connects with the teacher or the teacher's style works for him. In the first interview, Jarod said about the ideal learning situation, "You did the best in that class because the teacher was perfect with you." Jarod elaborates on this further in a later interview when he talks about his math teacher, whom he appreciates;

In math I'm feeling a lot better because I feel like I understand the work more so I can do it to like an A+ level or like try to. And uh, the help makes me feel better about getting homework finished more thorough and faster. It makes me more focused...cause she's really strict on the homework policy. I think it will just make me learn better and more...It motivates me to learn more because if it's a good teacher, then you'll want to go to class and that makes you want to learn...well it makes you more focused on the subject.

Jarod learns best in a situation where the teacher is clear, directive, and available for help, and less so in unpredictable, less structured situations. He tends to connect better with

more structured teachers, but will do well in any circumstance because of his high level of internal motivation.

LEX: STUDENT NUMBER TWO

Biographical Data

Lex is a 13-year, 2-month old seventh grade Caucasian male in a middle school of 480 students. He was selected for participation in this study because he met the outlined criteria as a linguistically capable student previously discussed in Chapter 3. An ‘A’ student in linguistically based courses, Lex does well in verbal and written pursuits. In mathematics, Lex also does well, but is not accelerated (as he is in the Language Arts) and thus participates in the expected coursework at his grade level. Lex is easily conversant and highly detailed in descriptions of his experiences. He also possesses a depth of understanding about relationships that transcends what one would expect of a boy his age. His responses to my queries were detailed and deep with a maturity that surpassed my expectations.

Seeking to know Lex’s understanding of the word, ‘relationship’ was necessary to bring to light what his frame of reference is in developing relationships with his teachers. He described the word relationship to mean the, “Feelings and actions that happen between two people and...how they connect, how they interact.” He also elaborated on his need to know his teachers in a way that would enable him to interact with them comfortably. This ‘knowing’ seems to help him to connect with them in ways that make it easier for him to interact with the teachers. He elaborates on this idea,

...I like to get to know my teachers. And so when I talk to my teachers, I really try to sort of get to know them a little more...

Lex likes to try to interpret his teachers’ behaviors and to make meaning of what they say and how they behave. He prides himself on ‘figuring out’ people so that he can interact better with them. Lex believes that people have a “theme” to their behavior. This theme illuminates the personality of the teacher so that others can use this understanding to interact with the teacher on his/her terms. He explains,

I think everybody sort of has an overall theme to the way they act and speak. There’s something underlying there with the way they speak and so

different people have different themes and if I can sort of figure out the theme of things, I can interact better with people.

Lex's obvious deep understanding of human relationships was stunning to me. He exhibited a mature understanding about human interaction that is quite different than what one would expect of a young adolescent boy. He is truly interested in knowing another individual; the secondary gain from a successful relationship with a teacher is comforting to him. Knowing the individual is keenly important to Lex and having a successful relationship bodes well for his school experience. I also interpreted his need to know another individual as critical to his ability to allow them to know him so that the relationship is actually an exchange between student and teacher. This mutual exchange is what creates the setting for a positive school experience for Lex.

Essence of Teacher-Student Relationship

Lex described his need for teachers to be able to explain content to students in a way that they would understand it. He says, "Well I think to explain – to know how to explain something to each student – in how they want to hear it explained. I think that's good." Lex further supports this idea by insisting that teachers must be sincere while making the effort to explain things to students by saying, "...to be sincere I think is a big part of that – a big part of knowing how to teach each student how they want to learn." He gives a personal example of this experience when he describes his Spanish teacher.

Well, like my Spanish teacher likes to tell a lot of stories about him and I like that... but they're also related to what we are learning and so that helps me to understand. I'm sort of a verbal learner. He tells a lot of stories and that helps me to understand what we're learning better. Also, that teacher tells things about himself and that's positive for me.

In the final statement of this discussion, Lex refers again to his need to know his teachers in a personal sense. Knowing his teachers this way provides a frame of reference to him in order that he can gain a deeper understanding of the content. This 'knowing' also helps him to connect with his teachers. He is more able to discern the 'theme' of the individual and from that he derives comfort in the relationship. Being comfortable is critical to his success as a learner. He also elaborates upon how a small change in the classroom

environment can add comfort to the learning experience of students. In his diary, Lex describes how one of his teachers did this;

...one of my teachers told the students that he knows how uncomfortable sitting in cold, hard chairs could be, so we all moved to the four couches in the back of the room [to read silently]. I think that changing the environment of the classroom is a great way to break up the monotony of school. It can make the students learn in different ways; that may change the relationship between the teacher and the students.

This teacher is empathetic to the students' need for variety and he is perceptive about what kind of classroom environment might engage young adolescents. So he provides opportunity for students to move around and to be comfortable while engaging in learning activities. Lex likes this change in the classroom and feels energized and motivated by it.

Lex expressed some strong opinions about how influential the teacher is in the student-teacher relationship and in student-student interactions. He believes this sphere of influence affects how students treat each other and can have a positive or negative effect on the school environment. He elaborates;

You know, I think a big part of the school is the kids and how they interact. That's always what interests me...but the teachers...can influence kids, not particularly their mood, but how they think, and what they think about and then that sort of goes into the um, kid-kid relationship...

Included in this influential behavior are those choices teachers make in their interactions with the students. Lex recalled a previous experience with a teacher who did a number of different things that Lex enjoyed. He talked at length about this interpersonal experience;

He didn't use a lot of variety of things that I like...[but] I liked the warmth of his personality and that helped me to better just try to be a good student for him. And I liked the way he sort of helped me a lot, especially in math...and he knew the way to teach each student in the way that they wanted...so he knew how to motivate each student and how to explain things to them too which would help them better understand what they were learning.

The essence of this relationship for Lex includes a deep interpersonal experience for him. He enjoys having teachers that are open, appropriately self-disclosing, know how to reach a variety of learners, and are empathetic to the feelings and needs of the students. Lex

believes the teacher-student relationship is highly influenced by the teacher and this influence extends beyond the individual student to the greater population.

Key Characteristics

Lex described his need and desire for a teacher with a sense of humor. In the following description, Lex talks about one of his teachers in a pleasant sort of way and how this teacher's style seems to match his own. He is looking forward with anticipation to the experience he will have in this classroom;

Well...Funny is very important to me and he's funny and he's not – he's sort of my kind of funny which means he's very open and not really like he's laugh out loud funny but um, so um, but it's not sort of that he doesn't try too hard to be funny. His style of teaching from what I can tell so far is sort of going to suit me very well. It's language arts...a lot of creative writing – just a very sort of openness about everybody just sort of letting everybody go but at the same time commanding authority – that's good and...

It's interesting to note that while Lex perceives the teacher's style to be somewhat “open” and accommodating to the students, he believes the teacher still commands authority in the classroom. Lex also describes this favorite teacher as creative;

The theme for him is very creative that's really important to me. He's not stiff and he seems like he enjoys his teaching. I think if somebody doesn't enjoy their teaching that's going to rub off on the whole class. That makes it bad for everyone.

Lex also conveyed that he has relies heavily upon a “feel” he gets with another person that helps him to determine whether or not he likes the individual. This is a result of everything that the teacher says or does. He relies heavily on intuition with regard to these relationships. He describes this phenomenon;

Well it's a lot of it is the feel that I just get from the teacher sort of coming from little things that I haven't acknowledged consciously...

Lex seems to enjoy teachers with a sense of humor, who are creative in their approach to teaching, and who show genuine concern about students. This gives him a good feeling even though he struggles with defining what this means. He does exert significant energy around developing a deep understanding of the teacher and what is expected of him. He makes the effort to match his response with the teacher's style – so that he satisfies the

teacher's requirements in a way that is pleasing to the teacher. I think this compromises his personal style somewhat and presents a challenge to him. He uses examples to explain this further below;

Well, I try to give the teacher what they want you know more if it's someone I think I can give more to. If it isn't then I won't. Like with my science teacher I will give her what she wants so I will just give her straightforward factual answers. I won't put like a joke in there or a little bit more insight in there...sometimes I will put a little bit more insight in there but not often. That makes my answers sort of suited to that person. And it will be the opposite with my favorite teacher.

Lex appears to 'individualize' his responses to his teachers so that he performs and responds as they would expect him to. His responses are not always congruent with his personality, but it is satisfying to him to please his teachers in ways they would want. He listens to what teachers want from him and he responds with compliance and without question;

...like I'll listen to what the teacher says. Um, if the teacher tells me to do something and to the best of my judgment it sounds pretty reasonable, well, you know, I'll do it.

Lex has a somewhat dependent relationship with his teachers and relies heavily on his intuition about them. He enjoys their humor and complying with their expectations of him. He likes to please them and will expend a good amount of energy doing so.

Lex described being greatly affected by the mood of a teacher in the classroom. He avers that the mood of a teacher exerts a significant influence on the climate of a classroom. The condition of the climate subsequently impacts the students' ability to learn and to achieve. He explains;

“Well sometimes I think that the teacher just needs to lighten up a little bit. Cause sometimes...if the teacher had like a bad day or a bad morning or whatever...sometimes it, well all the time I think the mood of a teacher reflects on a classroom...”

Lex described how students react to the mood of a teacher who is having a bad day. I interpreted this as a stress reaction reflecting the discomfort of the students. Instead of being able to rely on the teacher for instructional and emotional support, the teacher places a heavy demand on the students for independence and self-sufficient performance. The teacher's

mood could likely reflect the teacher's reaction to events outside the control of the students yet, it impacts the mood of classroom and the performance of the students. Lex describes the students' behavior in reaction to the teacher's mood;

...you know, then the classroom's gonna start getting like, you know, 'I don't want to do this,' and they're going to get just wild and more hyper cause that's what kids do. I think if the teacher sort of tries to come in, at least to pretend that she or he is in a good mood, um then that would sort of reflect on the classroom. But, I've had a lot of cases [when] that happened; teachers in a bad mood and stuff, and that's negative for me.

Lex is highly sensitive to the mood of a teacher and that sensitivity affects his ability to perform in the classroom. His description of the class' reaction to the teacher's mood seems to reflect his own. Regarding the teacher's mood, Lex seemed to feel that if the teacher was honest with him about having a bad day, it would make the relationship between him and the teacher easier to negotiate. Lex recognizes the human condition and that not all teachers will be in good humor and radiate excitement about teaching every day. Even so, he recognizes that not all experiences with teachers have to be positive in order for him to grow and to learn. He explains;

Part of growing and learning is to have bad teachers. That's something you're going to have to deal with. So now and later, people in positions of authority that you don't think should be there [may be there]...I think a positive experience with a teacher is a better way to grow and learn, but I think you can grow and learn the other way, unless you had all bad teachers...I'd still be growing and learning to an extent but not, I don't think you can grow and learn as much.

Lex talked at length about the responsibilities of teachers and students in the learning process. He perceives that each student and teacher bears about half the responsibility for the learning process and that teachers and students both must accommodate to the other in order for successful learning to take place. The measure of effort is perceptible on both sides of the relationship. He explains;

I think if a student isn't going to do their work...I think it's up to the teacher to definitely help them learn what that student wants in order to learn well. But sometimes that can be totally ridiculous. It's a 50/50 split. The student has to try harder and try to adapt to that teacher and the teacher has to try to help that student along in adapting. So, it's a compromise...

Lex also feels better in a classroom where the teacher is in control. He tells the story of his current Spanish teacher who teaches by the use of immersion and seems to have a high tolerance for talking during class. Lex finds this to be extremely distracting. Coupled with the confusion of learning the language through immersion methodology, he does not believe this teacher uses good content pedagogy. He submits that she has command of the language, but not of the class.

...it doesn't work very well for me, I don't think yet. So, I mean, she does tell us what words mean and stuff, but she speaks long, long sentences in Spanish with a lot of words we never heard and some words that we have heard, but it's too fast for me to take them and filter them in English...but she's also, I don't know if she's actually oblivious or if she just decided to be oblivious because basically everybody in her class just talks. We talk all the time and she doesn't really seem to know that we're talking... I don't think that's a good teaching method.

For Lex to feel comfortably engaged in his learning environment, his teachers must show him that they enjoy teaching, and are able to overcome the adverse effects of a negative mood. He also must perceive that teachers and students are exerting equal effort in the relationship in order for students to succeed in the learning environment. And finally, Lex needs to believe that his teachers have command of the class and are in control of the students in the environment.

Motivation to Learn

Along with Lex's desire to comply with his teachers demands based on how he perceives them to be, he also experiences varied levels of motivation in the classes of his favorite and least favorite teachers. He explains very clearly how he responds to their expectations;

With my least favorite [teacher] I am not as motivated to learn because I'm not being somebody that I'd rather be with them. If I'm going to give straight factual answers it's not my favorite thing in the world to do. I'd rather give something a little bit more exciting...creative so uh that sort of motivates me less. But with my favorite teacher I can give a creative answer and that makes me want to do more which is good because in Language Arts there are a lot of really scary long term projects and if I want to do them well then that's going to be good.

I asked Lex if he could essentially put aside his feelings about the teacher he likes less to really perform at a high level. He responded by with the following insight;

Well, I will, but that's much harder for me just because of the kind of person I am. I know people who can do that and just be sort of positive about everything. I am actually pretty negative about a lot of stuff. So um but yeah... But so not really negative...yeah negative...yeah I can be pretty negative so if I'm in so if my performance...I'm not going to do the best I can because I won't know what the best I can is unless I'm [feeling good]in...[class]

Lex seems to know himself exceptionally well here. He provides insight about how he might perform in any situation and his performance is largely a reflection and a result of how he feels. If he is comfortable in a class or with a teacher, he will perform better than if not. Emotion plays an important role in Lex's performance in school. It is difficult for him to put that aside when making decisions about how much effort he will put into his schoolwork. However, he is clear about his motivation to achieve. He will achieve at his optimum although doing so may be more enjoyable in some classes than in others. Getting good grades remains paramount regardless of his feelings for his teachers. This appears to be a conscious decision.

RANDI: STUDENT NUMBER THREE

Biographical Data

Randi is a 12-year-8-month-old seventh grade Caucasian female in a middle school of 480 students. She was selected for participation in this study because she met the outlined criteria as a linguistically capable student previously discussed in Chapter 3. Randi is a bright girl with performance levels of A to A- in the fast pace language arts class. Randi works hard in school and takes her school performance seriously. Randi has a passion for knowing about and understanding the world and has asked to independently study French through online coursework this coming year. She is highly motivated and passionate about accepting people of different backgrounds into her world. Randi has three younger siblings; among them is a sibling with special challenges. Randi is also a girl scout and very involved

in her troop. She and her family have traveled extensively over the years thus she has a view of the world slightly different than many students her age.

Seeking to know Randi's understanding of the word, 'relationship' was necessary to bring to light what her frame of reference is in developing relationships with her teachers. She described the word relationship and the teacher student relationship in the following statements;

I think relationship is a bond between people that's not just any kind of bond just kind of this really stronger thing – kind of like friendship and love and things like that.

Randi believes the teacher holds a high level of responsibility for connecting to students in this relationship. The teacher should be making the effort to get to know students;

It depends on the teacher really. If the teacher is trying to connect with the students more I think that there's more of a relationship between them but if the teacher isn't trying to connect with them as much as they could be then their relationship isn't as strong. So...

Essentially, Randi believes it is the teacher's effort that will make the difference in the success of the teacher-student relationship.

Essence of Teacher-Student Relationship

Randi became quite animated when she began to talk about this experience for herself. From her perspective, she believes that teachers have made a great effort to connect to the students. She also discriminates between the kinds of relationships that teachers can develop with students. She separates this kind of relationship from the types that are developed between peers.

Well I would say most of the teachers in the school district really try to connect with the students so I think I have really strong relationships with the teachers. Most of them, we become kind of friends you know, but it can't really be real friends because they're teachers and we're students so it can get to friends and sometimes we just become friends, but that's really all it gets to be so...

Randi's experience of the teachers connecting with her speaks to her perception of the personalities of the teachers. If the teachers have a warm personality, she perceives that they connect well with her.

I think it's because sometimes the teacher tries to connect more with me and sometimes they just pay attention to all the students as a whole and it's...they're a warm person.

Randi believes that teachers get to know students by seeing things from the point of view of the students. This is, in effect, empathic behavior. When teachers can see from the students' points of view, they can more effectively provide instruction and develop that relationship.

Usually they try and get into your point of view and try and see how you're thinking and yeah...Well I think they just try and in their own head they try and see things from your point of view and try to make the lessons easier sometimes or make it so you're going to understand them more and they could and maybe you could understand each other more...

Randi believes that her desire to attend school is owed directly to the kinds of relationships she had with her teachers. She also suggests that for students who do not feel cared for by the teachers or who have experiences of the teacher being 'mean' to them is not likely to want to attend school. She elaborates on this point;

Well I think that that made me want to come to school cause I know that some people when teachers are mean to them they just they um feel like they don't, they don't want to come to school anymore and they just try and ignore it the best way they can even though they have to go. So I think that because our teachers are so nice to all the students that I think that it's made the children want to go to school and want to learn so...

The essence of this relationship for Randi is one of connection to her teachers. She enjoys school because she feels connected to her teachers and perceives they are connected to her. These connections create an empathetic mutual relationship where teachers instruct and care for students in ways that breed academic success.

Key Characteristics

Randi was excited to talk about her third grade teacher. She felt particularly close to this teacher because of the way she was with the students. From her description, it seems as though this was a mutual relationship that made for easy exchanges between the students and the teacher. The fact that the teacher was young and personable is what made a positive experience.

Well I've had them with many teachers but one that's really coming to mind right now is with my third grade teacher, Miss F. She was um I think with was her second year of teaching and she was really down to earth and she really understood what we had to say. And we usually did things for each other. I remember, we um, we used to do things for her. I remember one time we threw her a party at the end of the year.

Randi also talked about the teacher being patient and having a system for discipline. It was important to Randi that the teacher demonstrates positive behaviors while disciplining students; her patience with students was also important. For Randi it was also critical for the teacher to be predictable in her behavior as well as in her responses to students. If there was a need for discipline, then her 'system' was something all the students were accustomed to. It was predictable. The teacher's predictability and patience created comfort for Randi.

In the following passage, Randi describes her perception of the students' responsibility in the relationship they have with their teacher. Randi particularly feels responsible for not upsetting her teacher. It is important to her that she behaves in ways that make the teacher happy and proud of her. She also presumes that other students feel the same way and want to behave in a way that elicits this positive feeling from the teacher. She also has faith in the teacher and trusts that what the teacher wants from the students is something they can deliver.

Well, I really don't like to see my teachers unhappy or anything so I try not to upset them. I like to keep them in a happy mood and make them proud of our class. I think that's true for basically every student. They may not feel responsibility to do it, but I think in their head, they absentmindedly do it.

Randi described a few instances of negative experiences with her teachers. The following negative experience is one that is related to what Randi calls, focus in the

classroom. If the teacher is too focused on the lesson and not on the students, this feels negative to her;

Um I think about the times I have had a negative relationship I think they're just small things like the teacher is just really focused on the lesson and not so much on making sure everybody is learning it and just the type of teacher who doesn't try and make sure everybody understands but makes sure that if you learn the lesson that will be...

More recently, Randi has been concerned about one of her current teachers whom she perceives is critical of students in a sarcastic way. This makes her extremely uncomfortable. She describes him as using a joking manner with students that calls attention to them negatively, often to the amusement of the entire class;

They aren't mean jokes, no he'll just, okay I'll give an example. I don't mean to be mean to my friend, Wally, but he started waving his hand up in the air whenever [the teacher] asked a question and [the teacher] said, "Dude, you're never gonna get a date like that if you're raising your hand like that. You're gonna end up in a van by the river!" – which is his repeated joke. Every five minutes that's his joke. Somebody got him a little model of a van because apparently this was a joke a kid told him some time ago...somebody actually got him a little van. He says that joke over and over again. I don't want to be the subject of his next river joke...I don't want to be in a 'van by the river!'

The fear of being the victim of one of this teacher's jokes was realized as she describes the following incident in her diary. The class was asked to respond to a passage they read aloud and to describe what they thought was important. Randi was proud of her response and volunteered to share it;

I told him what I wrote and how it would be important to a thief. I was proud of my explanation, but he simply said, "So if I was to take this paper and roll it until it was really tiny and poked your eye out with it, then would your story have a point?" I flushed and laughed to conceal my embarrassment, but I was mortified. I couldn't believe it! The entire class was laughing at my expense. What an utter nightmare! Ever since, I have made an effort to become invisible. No one deserves to be treated like that. This event has made me very wary of [the teacher] so I am always alert in his class. My only motivation in his class is to get good grades and NEVER get laughed at again!

This experience caused Randi to feel mistrusting of the teacher. She had so hoped she would escape the sarcasm and now, she will only respond in class when she feels certain her answer is correct. She will not take an emotional risk because she does not trust that he will treat her gently. Above all else in his class, she fears his rejection and really needs his validation.

Randi loves to write. It is her favorite form of expression. A contrasting experience to the previous one is one that she had with the teacher she has identified as her favorite for the year. She was ecstatic that the teacher approached her, talked with her about what she had written, and she felt very good about having the teacher's attention. Furthermore, she felt like she had made a connection with the teacher; for now [the teacher] knows something significant and important about Randi.

Well, the first time I think she did it, we had to write an essay about what we want to do 15 years from now and I wrote about I wanted to go to Oxford University in England and studying languages there and studying abroad for a few years. And she came up to me and she said, "[Randi], I read your essay. It was *very* well written! So you want to learn languages?" And I said yes, and we started talking about how I'm doing Spanish right now and French and I'm also hoping that maybe I can do German in high school.

Randi felt proud that the teacher noticed something important about her – and more importantly, remembered to ask her about it in class. I asked her how this made her feel;

Well, kinda proud that she noticed something...not a lot of teachers notice that kind of thing...well, they do, they read the essay, they think that point's interesting, and then they forget about it because they have a hundred other essays to do...and that's why I felt so good inside that she actually remembered and she was able to talk to me about it.

This teacher has endeared herself to Randi by showing genuine interest in the students' writings. She also has earned a good bit of respect from Randi who is both touched and impressed by the teacher's efforts to get to know her.

Randi is clear about the characteristics she enjoys about her teachers as well as those that concern her. Characteristics such as empathy, patience, caring, and acceptance of students create a soothing atmosphere for Randi. In contrast, sarcasm and public ridicule have seriously negative effects on her and subsequently cause her to exercise caution,

increasing her alertness to potentially irksome situations. She also believes that she has an influence on the teacher's mood in class and therefore on the teacher's response to her. Randi needs and desires a positive atmosphere and kind treatment from her teachers in order to be comfortable to learn. She also likes to be able to predict a teacher's behavior and response to her. Fear of embarrassment or rejection by significant adults seems to be a highly sensitive concern of hers.

Motivation to Learn

Randi has a number of different motivations for learning and doing well in her classes. Some of her motivation stems directly from her desire for acceptance from her teachers. She also wants to do well simply because she likes achieving and has goals for her future that would require her continued diligence in this regard. She described each class;

Hmmm. There's a different motivation for every class. For Algebra class, my motivation is that I want to do well so I can, in the end, make sure I can get into an AP or honors or whatever it is math class. So that's part of my motivation... and this is also for every class – I also want to make my teachers feel good about me... Well I think I said this before, but my main motivation [about science class] is that she'll still continue to read my work and, you know, like me, and I want to keep in her good favor because she seems like the person if you are in her good favor then you could really in the end have a really great relationship with, you know. That's my main motivation in science class.

Her desire to 'save face' and avoid embarrassment during sports activities in gym is the motivating factor here;

Gym Class...I'm not very good at sports so my motivation is trying to make it seem like I'm good at sports so I don't embarrass myself...I'm not a sport person...I like playing, I'm really competitive... I don't like to push people around, I really like to win. I don't throw a fit if I don't though. Health class is also just one of those things where you just do it. And if you do it, you get an A+. It's not really about whether you've done it correctly.

Randi is also looking for personal acceptance and approval from her history teacher. It is interesting that she perceives the best way to gain his approval is to be noticed in his class. Because of the seating arrangement in his classroom, Randi does not sit close to him. She does not feel as though he notices her during class. She believes that if she were seated closer to him during instruction, he would be more aware of her presence. He would observe

her compliant student behavior and she would have an opportunity to show him that she is a good student.

Fifth period...oh History...In history my motivation is to keep in Mr. S.'s good favor because he seems like a nice guy too and since I really like history I want to do really well in there cause I've just always liked history ever since I was really little and language. I think we could have a better relationship if we talked more cause there are a lot of people in my history class. Like 25 or something like that...there are so many people and I'm usually the farthest away from him...[shows her seat in a diagram] and he's usually looking to the people on these sides.

When I asked Randi if she thinks the teacher is aware of her presence and participation in class, she agreed that he probably is, but that the size of the class precludes him from making a personal connection with each student on a daily basis, herself included.

I think maybe he can, he just doesn't regard it as much because if he was looking at every single person in class, he would start on one side and he would pay the most attention to the person he starts on but as he would get to the middle he would just want to get done. So he'll just go right through.

Randi enjoys the language arts class because she has a passion for reading and writing but I did not detect that she feels a personal connection with the teacher. In fact, Randi is anxious about the potential for being a victim of the teacher's teasing. This seems to motivate her to stay in his "good favor" for a reason different from her science or history teachers. Randi is also very sensitive to the potential that her friends could be the subjects of his jokes. It seems that Randi's motivation to stay in her teachers' "good favor" is the overriding influence in the choices she makes in her classroom behaviors.

CAROLINE: STUDENT NUMBER FOUR

Biographical Data

Caroline is a 12-year, two month old seventh grade Caucasian female in a middle school of 480 students. She was selected for participation in this study because she met the outlined criteria as a linguistically capable student previously discussed in Chapter 3. Caroline is a bright girl with performance levels of A to A- in the fast pace language arts class. Caroline works hard in school, and takes her school performance seriously. Caroline has a passion for horses and spent a portion of her summer at equine camp where she learned

different riding techniques and care taking skills. Caroline is a passionate young girl with strong convictions. She is also compassionate and empathetic – two qualities that became apparent in our interviews.

Seeking Caroline's understanding of the word, 'relationship' was necessary for me to know and to bring to light her frame of reference in the development of her relationships with her teachers. She described the word, 'relationship,' in a multitude of ways;

Well I think relationship is like the way you react with a person. Like a bad relationship would be like trying to I don't know like get away from them or ignoring them. A good relationship would be like talking to them or I don't know like saying hi and there's different kinds of relationships – like friendship relationships where you hang out sometimes and there's like a love relationship or something where you like each other or something...yeah.

About what this word means to her in the teacher-student relationship, Caroline continues:

Well to me it kind of means you can like talk to each other like if you have a problem or something or you can just ask like questions about the test and maybe you don't really like your teacher so you don't really ask them something unless you really need help and your friends can't help.

Caroline goes on to say that approaching a teacher for help is much easier to do when one likes her teacher and finds the teacher easy to talk to. She describes a teacher that is easy to talk to;

They don't really like ask you questions back or like why don't you get that or something like that. They let you explain and then they might explain a different way and they might be like nicer to you or comfortable and sometimes like that strict teacher, strict student relationship more comfortable friends kind of thing.

In Caroline's experience, the teacher who listens to students' questions and concerns without reproach is perceived to be easy to talk to and also empathetic to the needs of the student. She also feels more trusting towards teachers who are patient with students and their concerns.

Essence of Teacher-Student Relationship

Throughout the interview process, Caroline is passionate about how teachers treat students in school. Her experience of the teacher-student relationship revolves around her perception of how students are treated by the teachers as well as her perceptions of the teachers themselves; their personalities and characteristics. She describes a situation where she feels defensive for a peer;

...one of my teachers sometimes would look down on the students who weren't doing good. Instead of like really trying to help them just like help them to do something, sometimes he'd like point it out in the middle of class and make fun of them kinda which was kinda mean I thought.

When this happens, Caroline feels angry and has difficulty overlooking this behavior;

Well it just makes me like really mad to the teacher because I mean there's no point to doing that and I feel really bad to the other person and it doesn't really affect like my grades or anything but my relationship with the teachers doesn't get any better.

Caroline believes that teachers should be an example to students in the ways that they relate to students. She likens their role to that of mentor and seeks to have students be treated with respect.

Well I think the teacher should be kind of like a mentor cause they're like a teacher in education, yeah, but they should also set a good example about how to like treat people like I was saying some of the teachers are mean to other people who don't do as well so that can teach you," Well you don't do as well so you aren't as good as me..." but they might be better than you in something else but you like deny it or something. I think that they should be nice to everyone to treat them with equality and I think like um, they should also try to teach you education stuff so be like a mentor and a teacher.

Caroline had a very positive experience with a teacher who became a favorite of hers. In this experience, Caroline relates that she was challenged academically, and that the teacher was very helpful if a student had a problem. She also provided a variety of learning activities that were of high interest. Her motivational tactics were fun for the students and seemed to make them feel like a team ~ or that their efforts together would render them able to meet the challenges before them. She explains;

Well I had this one teacher and she was really, really nice. She challenged us like a lot. She really did push all of us. But she also like was really nice and she helped you if you had a problem. Instead of just like ignoring it or something and if you didn't do your homework, she got mad at you but then she'd ask you why and try to understand why you didn't do it. And she during recess, she'd take individual classes with kids that really needed help with this one area and um she would give like, if you got the highest A in the class, she gave you like this paper that like said something and she'd sign it or something like that. And if you did really well on your test, like she'd give you stickers and something like that and everyone it really didn't matter the sticker it mattered that everyone did so well and everything like that and she'd announce like the 100% so you'd get like really pumped up and sometimes when you're writing she'd play music which was really fun and um, I don't know, some how ...and she did really fun writing topics she was nice to everyone, she had really like some relaxed days and some were like really hard days and she'd just do like a lot for us. And um, she tried to like organize fun things for us to do, hard things for us to do. She was just like the best teacher I have ever had – she was so awesome.

Caroline seems to respond well to a teacher who is demanding but helpful and develops community with the students. It seems as though Caroline felt comfortable with this teacher because of her efforts to accommodate and motivate them. The essence of the teacher-student relationship for Caroline is one that includes empathy, understanding, compassion, and fairness. Caroline seems to connect well with teachers who understand students' feelings and teach them accordingly. In the absence of these characteristics, Caroline becomes angry and upset. Her perceptions of teachers who demonstrate little care for the students makes it hard for her to like them.

Key Characteristics

Caroline talks about her relationships with her teachers and believes she has succeeded academically because she was able to achieve to their expectations. Throughout the interview, though, Caroline continues to reference other students' experiences from the vantage point of how she feels during their interactions with the teacher. A description of this follows;

Well most of my teachers, they all have been very nice. They all have been easy to talk to and I've gotten good grades in their class cause they explained it like a good way. But some other teachers that I've had, well maybe in this past year that was not really nice to the other students around

me – they might be nice to me. Sometimes they might single out a student and it might have been kind of – I don't know – 'Why don't you get that?' Like if you ask a question over a book, he might explain it the same way – in the book which is kind of the reason you're asking cause you don't get it in the book. The book is kind of confusing and that's why some teachers are like that. But I don't really like understand...

Caroline described a situation with another student whom she thought was being treated unfairly by a teacher. She felt like the teacher was not very patient or understanding of the student's needs during this time she described in class. Clearly, Caroline felt passionately empathetic for this student and angry and irritated with the teacher. Caroline's experiences with her teachers are both interpersonal and personal for her. She has her own experience, then she experiences other students' relationships with their teachers.

One student in my class kept asking questions and he just always tells us "Relax, come on why are you so upset?" This was the time around finals and stuff and I thought he should just let her ask the questions and maybe explain it a different way and other times she would be doing nothing and her binder was like really big she was saving all her stuff up to study for the final and she is like the best student in our class and he yelled at her in the middle of class to empty her binder and so she had to go over to the recycling bin in the middle of class in front of everyone and empty her binder and she was like humiliated and he like I don't know – he didn't really care. It was so rude. I just couldn't believe it, I was like seriously...

Caroline's experience of the classroom is not limited to just her own. She seems to see the big picture, and has a reaction to it as well.

Caroline described a teacher whom she liked even though others may not. In particular, she found the teacher's methods to be fun, creative, and motivating to her. The teacher would employ a variety of techniques to teach the writing concepts the students needed to learn. She enjoyed being in this teacher's class;

Um well one of my teachers, not many students in the school like her but, I did. She um wasn't too like hard she would like really push you and then she'd like have a fun day or something. Where we would do something easy. And she gave really fun topics for like our writing assignments which was really cool cause it was really fun to do creative writing and she covered like all the writings. And uh she would give us examples from the PSSA writings or something so that we'd get ready and that really helps and one situation she made up like this story from like this book that we'd have to continue in like all these writings that were like half finished.

We'd have to continue on them and that was really fun because it gave us a chance to be creative instead of writing persuasive or informative writings so I mean I just really liked her and how she taught.

Caroline's experiences with one of her teachers has been both pleasant and unpleasant depending upon the situation and the circumstances. This teacher has demonstrated sincere empathy for students on occasion but also has subjected them to what Caroline would describe as extreme. She has not personally experienced being the focus of the sarcasm, but felt angry when a peer had fallen victim. She describes both of these instances in her diary;

Well, a few days ago I was in Language Arts class and [the teacher] was making fun of [a student]. [The teacher] always makes fun of [the student] but he always does it in a fun way. Plus [the student] laughs too so I always thought it was okay but this time he went too far. [The teacher] was making fun of him by making a funny voice and saying, "I'm stupid," acting as [the student] then [the teacher] said, "Yes you are," but everyone was still laughing plus [the student]. Then [the teacher] went over the edge and mumbled, "Just like your mother and sister." I think he was trying to be funny and didn't really mean HIS mother and HIS sister, but he didn't need to add that. Everyone laughed except me and [the student] I think. I want [the teacher] to lay off, but keeps going...

Within a week, this teacher provided all of the students with root beer floats upon completion of a large project as a form of reward. This put him back in Caroline's good graces. She begins this entry by saying, "I love Mr.----."

The thing about him is he is sooo funny and that really helps because some teachers in the past made language arts really boring and so I think that having fun once in a while is really great. Also when we accomplish something, we get a drink in class. One time we had root beer floats because we finished a big project with an essay. I feel that I like him now because he gives a dose of fun in a subject I always loved. I sometimes can't wait to go to language arts.

Caroline has an intense passion for fairness primarily in how teachers treat students. She also is highly motivated by a teacher who varies activities, appropriately challenges her, and is helpful. She is exceptionally empathetic and passionate about her reactions to circumstances that she deems unjust. Her ideal teacher would pay close attention to students' feelings and would take great care not to embarrass or humiliate them.

An ideal teacher would be like someone that's helpful that's not mean but he like keeps the class under control and he could be nice to everyone but still punish the students that are doing bad...

Motivation to Learn

Caroline talks here about how the relationship ~ when it is positive ~ tends to color the experience of the student. If the relationship is a good one, attending class and participating is a pleasure. Even more interesting is how the teacher-student relationship impacts the student's relationship with other students. If the relationship with the teacher is good, then so are relationships with peers. If it is poor, so go the peer relationships.

If you have a good relationship with your teacher you kind of like tend to be more happier cause like it's not as hard and if you have a bad relationship, you kind of get really mad or something if you do bad on a test and just don't like the teacher then you're like taking it out sometimes on your friends which is what I've done before. I feel kind of bad.

Furthermore, Caroline is clear that her motivation is much higher when she feels good about her relationships with her teachers. She wants to attend class and do well there, unless the teacher does something to make her feel uncomfortable even if it's not about her.

Well like I said before, if you have a good relationship you want to go to that class. I get this Wooo! You want to go! But in classes you don't I just want to get out of here as fast as I can. Just as long as nothing bad happens and the teacher doesn't do anything bad. That's pretty much it.

Caroline's internal motivation compels her to work for the good grades even when she is not totally happy in a class. While discussing her favorite and least favorite classes related to her levels of motivation, Caroline had this to say;

Probably it [motivation] won't be equal [in language arts and Spanish] like I'll probably do much better in Language Arts cause I really like it, but in Spanish I mean I think I'll just do like, I mean I'll still get like A's and stuff but I'll be more like competitive and more like I want to do well more than enjoy it.

Caroline's motivation to earn good grades outweighs her need to always enjoy her classes. It is easier, however, to do well when one is happy, but she is motivated nonetheless to achieve at the level she believes she is capable of. She says;

I don't like to get bad grades at all and I don't like to disappoint the teacher...like say I don't ever care about the teacher's opinion at all, I still want to do well just for me and my parents or something. Just to know I did well...

Caroline's motivation to achieve is the overriding influence in the choices she makes in the classroom. She would prefer to both like the class and the teacher, but will choose to do her best in whatever circumstances she finds herself.

COLLEEN: STUDENT NUMBER FIVE

Biographical Data

Colleen is a 12-year, two month old seventh grade Caucasian female in a middle school of 480 students. She was selected for participation in this study because she met the outlined criteria as a linguistically capable student previously discussed in Chapter 3. Colleen is a bright girl with performance levels of A to B in the fast pace language arts class. Colleen works hard in school and is a serious minded student. Colleen prides herself on her compliance in school and enjoys learning new things. She is thoughtful, insightful, and quiet. She is empathetic towards others and is very community minded. She prides herself on her participation in school activities such as student council, and morning announcements. She also likes playing co-curricular sports after school. She is the oldest of three children in her family.

Seeking Colleen's understanding of the word, 'relationship' was necessary for me to know and to bring to light what her frame of reference is in developing relationships with her teachers. She described the word relationship in this way;

I would say the interaction between two either people or wildlife or anything basically just an interaction. Well for wildlife, I mean like if an animal is a carnivore he would interact with animals more aggressively but if it was an herbivore then it would interact with it probably less because it's not much for meat but because it likes plants and grass.

Colleen likened the interaction of people to that of wildlife – more for drawing a comparison based on the differences in how the species interact. She also talked about authority with regard to the teacher-student relationship. She believes that teachers (and

other adults) have the ultimate authority over children, but that children have authority over their own learning;

I think it means understanding between a teacher's authority and a children's authority to learn. Well since they [the teachers] have more authority you don't want to talk back to them or anything cause then they can actually do something about it. But the children they can only say stuff, but their parents would handle it rather than them.

She defers to adults as the ultimate authority and as having more power than children to complete or accomplish something. Children's levels of authority are limited to their own accomplishments and certainly not equal to that of the adults.

Essence of Teacher-Student Relationship

Colleen talks about her experiences of her relationships with her teachers from the frame of reference of her academic record. She is very proud of her hard work in school. She also sees herself as helpful to other students.

Okay well, I've been a very good student. I haven't talked back or anything which is really good. Uhm...I get good grades uhhh... I pay attention in class and whenever um some kids have some problems and they ask me I try to help.

Trust is an important factor in the teacher-student relationship for Colleen. However, Colleen believes this trust is earned by demonstration of her compliance. Once she believes the teacher trusts her, then she trusts the teacher. She explains this phenomenon;

Because then if you get good grades or you interact with the teacher responsibly they can trust you to do little errands for them. If they need like some paper or something or they would ask you like ... like they're trusting you. Well then if they trust me, then I would obviously trust them because they're the teacher and adults usually keep their words longer than children.

It seems as though Colleen believes she has to earn her acceptance by the teacher through the development of trust. This appears to happen when Colleen demonstrates her compliance and earns the teacher's trust. Thereafter the trust factor dictates how much freedom the teacher affords her in that relationship.

Colleen described her teachers as helpful and gives examples of what helpfulness means to her;

They help me when I have any problem... Like seeing what I did wrong on a math problem...or like making sure that I know about everything that is going on in the seventh grade.

The best illustration of helpfulness she described was through a diary entry;

Recently, my locker has been sticking, so it was hard to get open. One day my locker was so stuck, I couldn't open it. So I asked...my homeroom teacher to help. She couldn't get it open so she called [my history teacher] to help. He finally got it open a couple minutes later. After I got my books and started to close my locker, [my history teacher] said, "Colleen, just leave it open so I can fix it so that it won't stick anymore." I said okay and went to class. By the time I came back to my locker after first period, my locker was "as loose as a goose." The next day I gave him a bag of candy for his sweet tooth...as an appreciation gift for showing me that I can always count on him for anything. No matter what I might need help with, he'll be there.

In discussing this situation with her, she provided what she called a metaphor for this relationship experience;

Well, I actually think of it as kind of a metaphor. The stuck locker would be like me struggling with something and then Mr. --- opening the locker is him trying to help me get out of that struggle.

Colleen places a high premium on trust in the teacher-student relationship and out of that trust loyalty is developed between the teacher and the student. If Colleen believes the teacher trusts her, she naturally trusts the teacher. She also enjoys being able to easily seek the help of her teachers. The structure and essence of this relationship for Colleen seems to bear primarily on these two characteristics in the relationship. All else in the relationship is built upon them.

Key Characteristics

Once trust is established in the teacher-student relationship, other characteristics and factors emerge from Colleen's experience of her teachers and the learning environment. Colleen describes a positive relationship experience when she relates a story about a student teacher she had in fifth grade;

...she would help us with like Wordmasters and stuff like that. She did a lot of fun games. She even got to rent the gym for us to play a game where

we had to memorize the wordmasters and when she'd shout out the definition then we would have to um go and grab the ball in the center of the gym, race back to the line, and then she would ask for the word and we each got a [...] at word or two words so you would say the word that it was. Some other times was...she had a wall in the back of her room that had some words like flossynossyhilopilofication ... It means um worthless... And so she'd have like these cards in the back and on the back of them would have the definition so in case you wanted to extend your vocabulary you would have some words in the back.

Colleen really enjoyed having this teacher. She was energetic and creative in her approach to teaching some difficult material to the students. This was a stimulating experience for Colleen.

It is very important to Colleen that she gets to know her teachers and that they share information about themselves so that she can gain an understanding of them. The frame of reference she develops helps her to understand what might influence the way they teach. She makes interesting comments about this below;

I think um I'll try to get used to the teachers first...like know about like at first in sixth grade when I was just meeting the teachers they said a little bit about themselves, like they had two cats named so and so. I'd ask them because if they don't tell me anything about them then I don't really know them that well and so it would be a bigger understanding of where my teacher came from and how it could and how her [life] outside of school could influence her teaching. Like if they have a lot of kids then they then I would assume that they have patience. Because then I know the teacher better than just their name. Cause if it's just their name then I'm like okay Mrs. So and So and I don't know anything about them or anything and it gets like a boss or something...

Throughout the interviews, Colleen iterates that trust is an important element in her relationships with her teachers. The trust factor, however, is one that she would expect teachers to have of her. She describes a specific instance where the teacher keeps track of students' progress based on their self-reports of work completion and accuracy. In this case, the teacher trusts students' honesty about their performance without requiring proof. This struck a significant chord with Colleen who defines the value of this relationship in terms of the degree of trust she feels the teacher has for her;

Well, I said before that um, good positive relationships with the teachers is basically built on trust and so far trust has been a big part. In Mr. ----'s class when we do our homework he lets us grade ourselves like he gives us

a ten, he lets us give ourselves a grade. If we think we did a good job we would give ourselves a 10 out of 10 or if we had a couple of mistakes we would give ourselves a 9 out of 10...

Colleen is especially appreciative of her favorite teacher's openness to student choice. Though he may expect students to read 20 minutes in his class, Colleen likes that she can read a book of choice and not a required reading. This particular teacher behavior seems to validate the trust factor – trust that students are reading, trust that students are doing required work outside of the classroom and that they will use the time given to them by the teacher for its intended purpose. The open nature of this behavior also speaks to freedom within structure. Colleen really enjoys and values this particular behavior on the teacher's part.

Well obviously I laugh a lot...Let's see I sit quietly and do my work. When he wants us to read...like sometimes he gives us a couple like 20 minutes in class to read our favorite book. I like that he's open so we can read any kind of book we want rather than picking out books that we read for class, cause I like to do that on my own time.

Freedom within structure is highly motivating to Colleen. She describes herself as previously not much of a reader. But it seems that having choice is a highly motivating factor in her decision to read more. She has discovered she likes this.

Well before I wasn't very much of a reader – I would read if I had to – now that he lets us free read I discovered so many other books and so now I really like it.

Colleen enjoys her relationships with her teachers and was the only one of the five study participants that did not relate a negative experience with any of her teachers. She did not identify a least favorite teacher or any concerns about the other teachers she has. She tended to focus on the good feelings she has toward the teachers whom she believes trust her.

Other characteristics that she identified in the experience of her relationships with teachers included the teachers' use of humor, freedom of choice with assignments, enthusiasm for teaching, and empathy for all the other responsibilities of the students. Colleen discussed this empathetic approach several times when she elaborated that she was grateful that her teachers understood that she had other obligations outside of school and that having the freedom to complete her work beyond a typical homework deadline endeared her teachers to her.

Motivation to Learn

Colleen had previously described herself as compliant and desirous of doing whatever the teacher asks of her every time. Her experience of her classes and schoolwork is more pleasant for her if she likes her teacher. If Colleen feels trusted by her teachers then she is motivated to work hard for them. If Colleen's teachers understand that she has other obligations outside of school requiring her time, then she will work very hard to satisfy their requirements of her. If, however, the teacher does not understand her or her needs, it is harder for her to do the work though she will still comply. She says;

Well if I really like the teacher, it makes me want to do stuff. They'll understand like after school activities and that I need to be trusted now. And that's why they don't give as many homeworks... and when I don't like a teacher then I still do the work although I don't want to do the work cause it's not fun because the teacher isn't really enthusiastic and nicer because of the reason I don't like them.

Colleen's level of motivation to perform in school is connected to how she perceives the teachers she has for class. If they are enthusiastic in their approach to instruction, this is highly motivating for her. The converse is also true. She describes;... when they're enthusiastic I like to work for them and so I usually try my hardest but as it gets to the teachers that I don't like, I don't really like to do the work because there's not really any motivation but I still do it. Colleen is highly motivated to earn good grades and her success in doing so fuels her motivation to continue to do well. She explains;

Okay well...when I get good grades then it makes me want to um do more to get more good grades. It just like gives me energy. ...it shows the teacher that I have a good understanding of the lesson and I'm not getting left behind.

Even though Colleen may dislike the class or a teacher, she continues to be motivated to do well;

My mom never wants to see me get a bad grade. And so basically, her motivation, yeah, and I want to get into a good college so...I would not like the feeling [of getting a bad grade].

Colleen is most motivated by a positive experience and relationship with her teachers. She believes that students can only grow and do well when a positive relationship exists.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to elaborate upon each of the students' experiences with their teachers within the framework of the initial research questions and to tell the story of their relationships from their points of view. Each of the five students in this study has had a number of unique experiences as well as common experiences to elaborate upon during the course of this investigation. The unitizing of the data from these discussions has provided the basis for the development of eighteen categories of teacher behaviors/characteristics outlined on the following chart. The categories have then been recast into four major themes. The functional definitions of the eighteen categories and four themes will be the subject of major discussion in Chapters Five through Eight. The following chart illustrates the data available by category and theme for each of the five study participants. The asterisks indicate that the participants provided data for the categories listed. In blocks where there is no asterisk, data are not available from the interview or diary sources for that student. In the following four chapters, I will elaborate upon the themes and categories with an analysis of the data provided by the students.

Chart 4.1

Identification of Themes and Categories by Study Participant

Themes/Categories	Caroline	Colleen	Randi	Lex	Jarod
Teacher Interpersonal Behaviors					
Allows students to know him/her	*	*	*	*	*
Empathetic	*	*	*	*	*
Helpful	*	*	*	*	*
Sense of Humor	*	*	*	*	*
Knows Students	*		*	*	*
Pleasant Mood	*		*	*	*
Fair/Equal Treatment of Students	*	*	*	*	*
Predictable	*	*		*	*
Teacher Functional/Mechanical Behaviors					
Content/Pedagogical Competence	*			*	*
In Control	*		*	*	*
Creative	*	*	*	*	*
Appropriately Challenging	*	*	*	*	*
Student Behaviors					
Critical of Teacher	*	*		*	*
Build Relationship with Teacher	*	*	*	*	*
Motivation to Achieve	*	*	*	*	*
Teacher Reactive Behaviors					
Critical of Students	*		*		*
Trusts Students		*	*	*	*
Conditional Acceptance of Students	*	*	*	*	*

 = data not evident * = categorical data evident

Chapter Five

THEME ONE – TEACHER INTERPERSONAL BEHAVIORS

Introduction

This theme portrays how a teacher *behaves* in the classroom while providing instruction and while *interacting* with the students, as perceived by the students. The theme illustrates behaviors that the students observed and experienced in their teachers as they remembered them from previous relationship experiences and also while experiencing the development of new relationships with their teachers for the current school year. The theme integrates a variety of specific teacher behaviors. None of these behaviors stands alone; each is discernable by specific perceptions of the students, but all fit together to create the essence of this interaction in the classroom between students and teachers.

Each of the students exuded excitement about the coming year and getting to know their teachers but this excitement was also tempered with a bit of anxiety about what the relationships and the coming year would bring to their lives. One idea was prominent in the discussions; having a good relationship with their teachers was a common need for all the students. It was crucial that they felt like their teachers understood them and came to know them as individual people. Likewise it was equally important that they understood their teachers at least well enough that they could function successfully in their classes. For these students, the process of moving on and moving up in our system of education is iterative and while the movement from one grade to another is a common and predictable experience, all the other relationships formed with their teachers over time serve to inform their subsequent relationship development experiences.

There is synchrony to this experience that is common for students and teachers in our system of education. Typically students move from the more exclusive relationship experience of one elementary teacher to the expanded and more intermittent relationships of the secondary school experience. Each experience provides opportunity for the widening of the student's social circle as well as the whole of the human experience. The different people the students meet and come to know will serve to add value (or not) to their experiences of school, themselves, and their lives. Forming these relationships is at the core of the school experience for without them, the structure of the learning experience would be possibly

chaotic and unguided. The study participants were genuine in their descriptions of their relationships with their teachers and provided an enlightening perspective on this very important human experience.

The beginning of the school year was the first opportunity for the development of this relationship to occur. Each new relationship experience provided a fresh opportunity for the students to be 'known' and 'valued' by their teachers. The students were hopeful that getting to know their teachers would alleviate their anxieties and concerns about how to be successful in school, and in particular each class. The students saw their class work and homework as the conduit through which they would gain the acceptance of their teachers. In order to succeed in each class, they would need to know about their teachers in ways that would guide the choices they would make throughout the year. Most important was the desire to be liked by their teachers. Once these relationships were established, they became predictable and because the students came to know their teachers, and known by their teachers, they could develop patterns of interaction they could depend upon each time they had contact with their teachers.

We can safely liken this experience to that described in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Huitt (2004) synthesized Maslow's 1954 research. He reports, "Maslow posited a hierarchy of human needs based on two groupings: deficiency needs and growth needs. Within the deficiency needs, each lower need must be met before moving to the next higher level. Once each of these needs has been satisfied, if at some future time a deficiency is detected, the individual will act to remove the deficiency. The first four levels are:

- 1) Physiological: hunger, thirst, bodily comforts, etc.;
- 2) Safety/security: out of danger;
- 3) Belongingness and Love: affiliate with others, be accepted; and
- 4) Esteem: to achieve, be competent, gain approval and recognition."

The students who participated in this investigation very likely came to school with their physiological needs met, however, the establishment of safety and security within the school environment presents as a need that must be fulfilled in order for students to participate as fully as possible in their school experience. Furthermore, the need to belong and to be loved are ever present as necessary too in the successful negotiation of the school

environment. Once the students could establish that these needs were being met by their relationships and interactions with their teachers, then they could put forth their best effort at learning content.

A thorough examination of the behaviors identified in this theme provides a structure within which one can understand the essence of the interpersonal part of the teacher-student relationship. Excising these interpersonal behaviors from all the others identified throughout this investigation provides an opportunity to view them as an entity, but care should be taken to see them as a part of the bigger picture.

While in the process of instruction, teachers must as a function of their role, inject themselves into the experience. They are the agents of change; the catalysts that create the difference in students. As human beings they are no different than the students, as each brings to the classroom environment and the teacher-student relationship, the sum of his/her life's experiences, perceptions, talents, skills, needs, and wants. Students also inject themselves into the learning experience. The major differences between the two are age, maturity, and life experience. The essence of this theme speaks to the interpersonal nature of relationships and the imperative of teachers to behave in a manner that is conducive to the learning environment in their interactions with students. Wubbels, Levy, & Brekelmans (1997) concluded that, "...a teacher's interpersonal skills are crucial to creating and maintaining a positive working climate. Essentially, effective teachers have to be excellent communicators as well as fine technicians." (p. 82) A fundamental theory behind the communication model inspired in part by Leary (1957) is that teacher *behaviors* change according to the circumstances in which the interaction occurs. The evidence gathered in this study supported the idea that effective teacher-student relationships, according to students are those that involve "...strong classroom leaders who are friendlier and more understanding and less uncertain, dissatisfied, and critical than most teachers. Their best teachers also allow them more freedom than the norm." (p. 83)

The deep discussions I was privileged to have with the students provided insight into their experiences with their teachers. Teaching and learning are very personal experiences, so personal that to understand the interactions in this process is exceptionally complicated. But, there were clear connections made that I could discern from the stories told by the students. These connections suggest that behaviors and choices about interactions between

people do not occur in a vacuum. Neither do they occur without incorporating memory or without purpose. Every action begets another action and so as the students exercise their intuition, previous experience with the person, and facts they have gathered about their experience of the relationship, they interpret their teachers' behavior and respond to it. This pattern of interaction becomes settled early in the relationship and both parties, teachers and students, accept it. It is from there that they synchronize their relationship so that learning can be the outcome.

The core behavior in this theme is *Empathy*. Empathy is the lens through which all the other behaviors occur. The two primary connecting behaviors to empathy are *knows students* and *allowing students to know the teacher*. These two behaviors are required in order for the relationship to be established. Without them, the student-teacher interaction would be sterile. The remaining behaviors are connected to these first three but not necessarily to each of the others. These connections were made based upon the stories of the students as they unfolded and illustrate the interactions between the categories that comprise this theme.

Empathetic

The notion of teacher empathy or teachers being empathetic played most prominently in the student interviews and was defined by these students as the teacher understanding the personal needs of the students and knowing how to best instruct each student individually based on their learning styles and preferences. The students really valued teachers who could understand them, see things from their points of view, and teach them in ways that it would be easy for them to understand.

Caroline was especially excited to talk about her language arts teacher and to describe his empathetic behavior as it related to his expectations of students. She was impressed that he related to the students in a way that showed he understood how they might feel about homework and outside of class expectations. By making their relationship equal as she perceived it, Caroline and all the study participants who had this teacher were highly motivated to meet his expectations. They felt that he was walking in their shoes – he understood what it felt like to have to do the homework he asked of them.

...he doesn't treat us like students, he treats us like equals...much better. Like the first day, he said, "Whenever you do homework, I do it." He does the same homework we do. And I think that's cool because he says teachers always told him to do it because it's good for you and then you ask like, "Why don't you do it?" And he does it so I think that's much nicer instead of just giving us homework and not really knowing how it feels to do it all the time. (Caroline, Interview I)

By sharing his own experience of questioning the purpose of homework, the teacher demonstrated for the students that he, too, once sat where they are and that he also questioned the value of what teachers would ask him to do. This simple interaction – the sharing of a familiar story and experience – engaged the students in the moment. There was this collective, "Aha!" on the part of students. They believed the teacher once experienced exactly what they are experiencing now. Once the students believed the teacher validated their experience of doing homework for his class, they were suddenly motivated to please him by doing the work. After all, if he was going to do the work he assigned to the students in his spare time, then it must be important to do. Martin et. al. (2006) defined this behavior as showing respect to students and described this behavior as treating students as equals. This behavior addressed the adolescents' need to be understood, accepted, and valued by their teachers.

Randi elaborated upon an experience she had previously with one of her teachers. A good experience with one of her teachers would leave her feeling as though the teacher really tried to understand her point of view and how she was thinking. In this experience, her memory of the interactions she and her peer colleagues had with this teacher were fresh in her mind. Her teacher demonstrated empathy by listening to what the students had to say. Randi and her counterparts felt valued and understood by this teacher and this teacher behavior encouraged the students to share what they thought and felt with her. This teacher behavior resulted in the students wanting to do things for her. Martin et. al. (2006) describes this behavior as listening "nonjudgmentally, without lecturing and by being available to receive new ideas from the adolescent." (p. 134)

She was um, I think with us her second year of teaching and she was really down to earth and she really understood what we had to say. And we usually did things for each other...(Randi, Interview I)

This desire to exchange favors with the teacher seemed to be the result of a natural inclination by the students to do something that would please their teacher. The secondary gains from doing something nice for someone else were the good feelings the students experienced at having been altruistic. Yet, it was also what Randi perceived her teacher did for them. Because the teacher showed an interest in listening to what the students had to say, they again felt validated and understood. Randi also elaborated upon the development of her relationship with her current science teacher. She describes this teacher as being “very attentive to every student’s work” and was especially pleased that her teacher asked if she could keep one of Randi’s assignment products, an acrostic poem about a gemstone. This form of validation seemed to encourage the students to be open to the teacher, forthcoming in sharing ideas, and willing to return the favor to the teacher. This interchange also seemed to build trust between the students and their teacher.

Lex believed that in order for teachers to be successful with students, and for students to succeed academically, teachers needed to instruct them in ways that they could learn. He elaborated upon the necessity of knowing how students learn best and how individual this experience can be. Sincerity was a critical part of this experience in that Lex needed to believe as though teachers were truly interested in providing him with the individual attention he deserved. He elaborated;

Well, I think to explain – to know how to explain something to each student in how they want to hear it explained. I think that’s good...and I like teachers who are sincere...to be sincere I think is a big part of that – a big part of knowing how to teach each student how they want to learn...(Lex, Interview I)

Colleen elaborated several times over the course of our discussions it was really important to her that her teachers understood that she had obligations to other productive activities such as student council and sports and that her time after school was often divided between these activities and her homework. She recalled the experience with one of her teachers from a previous year who explained that he understood students had evening activities so he would assign work that could be accomplished over time rather than be due the following day. It seemed as though he was also trying to teach students about time management and making good decisions. She explained,

He understood that a lot of people had after school activities that took a while so he let homework be done for two days...like today he would assign it and then the next day would be the time that you'd have to finish that. In case you had after school activities that you couldn't possibly get your homework done. (Colleen, Interview I)

Jarod described his experience of his teachers by elaborating upon the need for teachers to be caring and to demonstrate an understanding of student readiness to learn and to respond to instruction. He believed that teachers had a responsibility to students to do two things, "...to teach in a caring way, but also [to teach] a lot of things that are new." He also seemed concerned that teachers were able to gauge the pacing of instruction so that students were able to absorb it, but also were not overwhelmed with the demand of learning a lot of content at one time. He elaborated on this thinking;

They're not being too overwhelming with the work cause if it's too overwhelming I think you learn less cause you are focused on what things they want you to remember...so if they give you a couple good topics to learn from then that's being caring more cause it's easier but you're also learning more. (Jarod, Interview I)

Focusing on depth of content was more important than breadth to Jarod. It was just too overwhelming for him to focus on a lot of information at once. Pacing of instruction seemed to be a function of being able to know how students are feeling and to discern the timing and depth of instruction so that the students believed teachers cared about how they were feeling while they learned and worked in class. Jarod believed this was critical to his overall success. Taking the students' perspective during this process was critical for the teachers to do.

Teachers who were identified as demonstrating empathy to the study participants were seen as understanding the students and seeing their points of view with course demands and classroom assignments. They also took the time to listen to students, to pay attention to students' needs, and to understand that students had obligations outside of being in school. Time was a valuable commodity in the development of the trust that students developed for the teachers that understood them and listened to them. These teachers tended to endear themselves to students through the use of empathetic behaviors in the early development of the relationship. Empathetic behavior is key to trust development between teachers and students, the burden of which falls upon the adult in this relationship. Benard (1996) in

Williams (2003) describes a number of markers that exist in what she calls “turnaround teachers.” These teachers exhibit caring and support throughout their interactions with students. These behaviors include a message of being there for the students; a brief individual connection, a touch, encouraging words or notes, a smile or greeting by name, respect, and unconditional caring. Benard (1996) established a listing of behaviors by teachers that build resiliency in all students, whether they are at risk or not. Though the list is much longer, the following behaviors are specific to empathy;

- Creates and sustains a caring climate
- Aims to meet developmental needs for belonging and respect
- Actively listens/gives voice
- Shows respect

Creating a caring climate for students is the essence of what empathy means and also is the essence of the establishment of trusting relationships with students. At the core of empathy is the ability of the teacher to take the student’s perspective, to ‘walk in his shoes’ and to make instructional decisions based upon that experience. Teachers who knew how students were feeling about being their classes and participating in their instruction were seemingly more successful at building this relationship with the students in their classes. However, empathy is only one component of this relationship building and works in tandem with the other characteristics as was mentioned at the beginning of this section.

The study participants shared a number of experiences that indicated their teachers regularly displayed empathy, a sense of humor, a desire to know the students as well as to self disclose to let students know them. All the study participants, except Jarod, felt exceptionally confident that their teachers understood them or made a conscious effort to know them early in the year. Comments from Caroline about her teacher “doing the assignment too” or Randi, whose teacher really “understood” what students had to say clearly illustrated the positive effects of empathy in the relationship. Knowing their teachers and teachers knowing them helped the students to make decisions about their interactions with their teachers and provided them with a frame of reference for doing so. San Antonio (2007) further supports the idea that teachers should know their students and reported through her research that students want their teachers to “see them for who they are.”

Helpful

Closely related to empathetic as a subtheme was what students referred to most often as *helpful*. Interestingly, this behavior served both an interpersonal and academic purpose in the teacher-student relationship. The study participants perceived their teachers to be helpful when they were providing assistance to students during class and at other times to enhance student access to learning. As an interpersonal function, being helpful to students represented to them that the teacher was truly interested in their well-being as individuals and as students, and that their success and comfort in the school setting with new content and information was supported by the teacher's efforts to assist them. As an academic function, helpfulness was interpreted by the students as a behavior embedded in the act of teaching, the purpose of which was to assist students academically and ensure their success in mastery demonstration of content. The interpersonal function is informed by the teacher's empathy for the student's feelings and the academic function is informed by the teacher's understanding of the students' readiness for learning. Being helpful in both interpersonal and academic ways aided in building the relationship teachers had with students.

Diero (2003) describes caring as "not just a way of acting; it's a way of thinking." (p. 60) All of the study participants identified their teachers as *helpful* in some way. This helpfulness however, is intended to be useful to the students in a way that can help them to succeed in the school environment. Diero (2003) clarifies the helping role of the teacher in this relationship and defines it as the method through which change can occur in a student. This relationship is not formed for "mutual satisfaction" but to "promote learning and growth." The study participants described many instances when they found teachers to be helpful; including teaching students as they needed to be taught, taking the time to engage parents as partners in helping students, and supporting students when they were struggling academically. Diero (2003) explains that the teacher-student relationship is unequal and the teacher must ethically use the power granted the position to help students grow. Teachers who respect the way children learn are, "Treating children with dignity [which] means honoring their position and their abilities, and seeing them as worthy of esteem." (p. 61) Helpful teachers create an environment in which students can grow and learn.

Lex shared an interesting perception about the role of the teacher in reaching students of all degrees of ability and interest. Prominent in his mind was the notion that students are

different, and for teachers to know when students need help is a function of what teachers are supposed to do. He expected that teachers should be able to help different students but recognized the challenge for teachers in doing so. Lex suggested that teachers must be able to adjust to the needs of all students;

I know it's hard for a teacher to help all the different students, but um, for me a teacher who helps students when they need help. Someone who can teach in a way that helps me understand. (Lex, Interview I)

Jarod described the helpful behavior of his new math teacher and his perception about her teaching skills this year. He felt confident in her intention to help. A previous experience with a math teacher left him feeling abandoned. This new experience has helped him to relax and concentrate on learning the content;

It's very helpful the way she teaches cause it helps me to comprehend the lesson for the day...cause now it's actually starting to get difficult instead of just review...and that helps me a lot when I am in the classroom and she's actually writing on the board the examples and she does those for us and she gives us one to do and it's easier than last year...(Jarod, Interview III/response to diary)

Caroline described an experience she had with a teacher who was helpful, challenging, and demanding of her. It seemed that Caroline enjoyed this teacher's class very much, that she was just the right mix of these characteristics. Placing demands on Caroline to complete her work was very acceptable to her; she interpreted these overtures to be both caring and helpful. It appeared to me that if Caroline did not complete her work, this would disappoint the teacher, but the teacher did not condemn the student; she would not let her 'off the hook' and would still expect her to complete the work. I think Caroline appreciated that the teacher still cared about her even if she didn't fulfill the initial expectation. She described this experience;

Well, I had this one teacher and she was really, really nice. She challenged us a lot. She really did push all of us. But she also, like, was really nice and she helped you if you had a problem. Instead of just like ignoring it or something and if you didn't do your homework, she got mad at you but then she'd ask you why and try to understand why you didn't do it. And...during recess she'd take individual classes with kids that really needed help with this one area...(Caroline, Interview I)

Randi shared an interesting perception about a particular student in her grade whom she described as a “free spirit.” She simply did not believe it was within his capacity to learn in school the way she and others might learn. The burden this placed on the teacher to help him, as she perceived it, was really about understanding how he learns best. She detected that dealing with this student was very frustrating to teachers and while she believed teachers should try to help him, she thought he bore the responsibility of putting forth the effort to learn. She described this situation;

...there’s this one student named I-----. He’s not the type of person who likes school; he’s too much of a free spirit. So, I don’t think it’s in his capacity to; he just doesn’t like storing information and it doesn’t register in his brain. It really is mostly his responsibility to get back on the train of learning and success, because he’s the one who is not trying to learn, because the teachers they always have to stop the class and they have to come up to him because he’s been talking with his friends or playing along and she has to come to him and they either make fun of him or they have to stop and try to get him to learn but he’s too distracted... (Randi, Interview III)

Randi eventually concluded that helping this student would require that teachers select instructional strategies that would allow him to learn experientially. She firmly believed that he would only learn, and would learn best, when he *had* to know something. An example she gave of this kind of learning would require him to know the prices of items in a store, how much money he had to spend, and to experience the act of shopping to see how much money he would need. For a seventh grader, I think this is incredibly perceptive on many levels; to believe that learning is both the responsibility of the student and the teacher, and to perceive the need to instruct students in different ways is very analytical. Furthermore, to believe that every student can be helped was inherent in her message about her peer.

Helpfulness for some students extends beyond the classroom to engage other supportive people in a child’s life when he/she is struggling in the classroom. Colleen described what she believed teachers should do to extend their help outside the classroom in an effort to assist students who are having difficulty. She suggested that teachers should attempt to get to the root of a concern with poor student achievement by engaging parents and the student in problem solving;

Maybe it could have something to do with the relationship between the parents and the child and so I would have a talk with the parents to see

what's going on and stuff...make sure they realize their kid is failing and they're not doing their work cause they might not even be telling their parents what is going on. (Colleen, Interview III)

I thought Colleen's ability to see beyond the daily classroom experience of a child to identify other ways in which teachers could be helpful was terribly insightful. Colleen experienced a teacher's help outside the classroom when she had difficulty opening her stuck locker. Her history teacher told her to leave it open and that he would fix it for her while she was in class. When she returned, the locker was opening and closing smoothly. In gratefulness, Colleen purchased a bag of chocolate candy for her teacher. It was her way to thank him for his help. She created a metaphor about the teacher's helpfulness to her and described it as such;

Well, I actually think of it as kind of a metaphor. The stuck locker would be like me struggling with something and then Mr. S. opening the locker is him trying to help me to get out of that struggle. (Colleen, Interview III/response to diary)

Lipsitz & West (2006) suggest that schools are developmentally responsive when they engage in the provision of, "...access to comprehensive services that foster healthy physical, social, and intellectual development." (p. 60) This also implies that faculty and staff cannot fully provide all necessary support, so engaging parents and other services to aid students in successful learning are part of what helpful teachers do who are generally the first to recognize a child's need for other assistance.

The study participants believed their teachers should be helpful and indeed were helpful in many ways. They told stories of their teachers' helpfulness in the classroom when students needed help with understanding the content, when giving assignments, when explaining concepts more than once based on how students best learn, and outside the classroom in general, when assisting a student with a broken locker, allowing extended time for assignments when students were involved in co-curricular activities, and involving parents when students were struggling. Being helpful served both the interpersonal and academic needs of students and enriched the teacher-student relationship as a result.

Knows Students

Empathy building in the teacher-student relationship is largely the burden of the teacher and it requires that teachers demonstrate to students they understand and feel what the students are feeling in a particular situation. Demonstrating empathy with students takes genuine effort because in order for the student to know that a teacher understands and knows what they are experiencing, the teacher must tell them so or demonstrate by other behaviors or words that he/she does understand what students are experiencing. This action validates students; it sends a clear message that what students think and feel is important.

Getting to know students individually was a second important teacher behavior as perceived by students. Students describe this attribute as the teacher making an effort to know information about students apart from their names and performance levels in class. This also implies that the students *allow* their teachers to know them. The study participants shared multiple examples of how they experienced the ‘opening’ of this relationship and how teachers went about learning about their students. Generally in the first few days of school as students and teachers were settling into new routines and schedules, the teachers took the time to learn about the students in various ways. Some of the teachers played ‘name’ games and did other interactive activities, others asked students to write about themselves, some sought information from parents, and others fashioned an assignment that would require the students to self disclose a personal strength to their peers. Whatever the method, every teacher set aside time at the beginning of the year to become acquainted with the students. The study participants elaborated about these various getting-to-know-you experiences and each of them had something unique to say about the efforts by teachers to know them. Beyond the early days, the students reported feeling grateful that their teachers knew more about them than just their names; they knew about their personal experiences and this helped to bind the teachers with the students in a way of intimate knowing and empathetic understanding that can only occur with time, patience, and effort.

Caroline described the efforts of her teachers to get to know the students but more specifically how her science teacher tried to get to know the students in the first few days of school. I could tell that Caroline would have been satisfied to do some moderate amount of self disclosure, but as she described this teacher’s efforts, she seemed a little put off by the extent of them. In her mind, she really felt as though excessive amounts of writing in science

class didn't fit her perception of what was to go on there. Yet, she complied with the teacher's request and responded accordingly. It seemed to her like a lot of writing that was not necessary to the development of the relationship. More bothersome to her was the fact that the teacher sent home a sheet with each student to have the parents complete. Caroline did not like this very much at all. She thought the teacher was going overboard to learn about the students and really should just kind of "let it happen." It was hard for her to feel comfortable with all this effort. She explains;

...we did so much there, like the second day we had to come in and write an essay on something we did this summer or some topic she gave, It was like three paragraphs or something and then she actually sent a sheet home to the parents about an 'all about me,' the parents have to fill it out about you. So I think she's trying really hard to get to know us. (Caroline, Interview II)

I think Caroline felt burdened by this experience, perhaps like she was making more effort to let the teacher know her than the teacher was doing to get know the students.

Randi's experience of this teacher's efforts, however, was nothing short of ecstatic. She loves writing as an activity and prefers it to any other method of self-disclosure. More importantly, she was completely impressed by Miss T.'s efforts as she perceived them, to get to know the students.

...she really likes to talk to individual students...Miss T. does things like coming up to students and saying, "I read your essay; it's really interesting... you like astronomy, is that right?" Then the student just feels good she's really paying attention. She's not just reading it because she has to read it or she's not just looking at things because it's her job...she treats each student with kindness and she usually pays attention to that one trait she thinks will make them ease up. (Randi, Interview II)

Randi truly felt like the more writing assignments the students did, the more likely the teacher would get to know the students. She felt that her relationships with her teachers became more friendly as a byproduct of her written work and the more the teachers could learn about her through her writing the more open her relationship would become with them. Randi also attributed her teachers' familiarity with her to her involvement in activities outside the classroom. One of her passions is drama club, and although she was not assigned to that teacher's class this year, she felt confident and relaxed about the possibility of being

in her class since the teacher already knew her. She decided she would have been happy there even before the school year began. In the end though, Randi assigned the burden of knowing students to the teachers. She believed it to be the teacher's responsibility to connect with students so that they can get to know them. She avers;

If the teacher is trying to connect with the students more I think there's more of a relationship between them but if the teacher isn't trying to connect with them as much as they could be then their relationship isn't as strong. (Randi, Interview I)

Jarod described an experience he had with one of his teachers that extended beyond the initial days of school and involved some risk on his part to self-disclose to his teacher. He talked at length about having the experience of his dog dying and how this impacted his ability to participate in school. He had trouble concentrating, completing work, and generally felt disconnected – all normal reactions to his loss, but frightening nevertheless. This was really hard for him. It was his first loss experience and he was deeply saddened and affected by it. His mom sent him to school and he was faced with his grief and the demand of school before him. But, he shared his loss with his teacher and found her compassion and empathy to be a source of comfort to him. He talked about how letting his teacher know this about his life helped her to gauge his readiness to learn as well as his ability to engage in the classroom experience. She gave him permission to be sad and to return to the normal pace of class as he was ready. This was the most caring thing she could have done. Within a few days he was able to return to normal but without her caring, and knowing about his dog's death, it's likely the grief would have had deeper consequences to his school experience. He perceived that she did indeed want to know about his life and showed that she cared. He explains the importance of his teachers knowing him;

Well, most of the teachers I know, most of them like me. And I think the teacher-student relationship is when a teacher can help a kid and know him or her at the same time. Okay well, the teacher should know what's going on in your life...know when you're struggling with something...last year I had a dog that died and I told my teacher and she kind of let me have a break a little bit and be nicer to me. She likes knowing my personal life and helping with it kind of. (Jarod, Interview I)

Lex elaborated on what he considered to be important about knowing students. Though not about him personally, he explained his fascination with the interactions of

students and more importantly how teachers could influence that interaction. He seemed to think that teachers have the power to affect the way students behave with each other and that the student relationships are a reflection of how the teachers influence them. He posits;

You know, I think a big part of school is the kids and how they interact. That's always what interests me...but the teacher sort of again can influence kids, not particularly with their mood, but just how they think and what they think about and then that sort of goes into the um, kid-kid relationship... (Lex, Interview I)

Lex's perception that the teachers have an influence on how students relate with one another was, I thought, a significant observation and hinted at what Wolk (2003) refers to as a democratic classroom. He says, "Student-centered teachers educate the whole child, helping to mold students' moral identities and fostering democratic behavior and values." (p. 14) Wolk believes that "getting inside students' heads" helps teachers to win their students' hearts. By creating community in the classroom through learning and relating, the community then moves outward into the school. Weissbourd (2003) avers that teachers "influence students' moral development not simply by being good role models...but also by what they bring to their relationships with students day to day: their ability to appreciate students' perspectives and to disentangle them from their own, their ability to admit and learn from moral error, their moral energy and idealism, their generosity, and their ability to help students develop moral thinking without shying away from their own moral authority." (p. 6)

So Lex's instinct about what influence teachers have on students resonates with the literature. Students learn much by watching what teachers do, how they behave towards others, and how they engage students in learning. Osterman (2000) through her extensive study of the research posits that students who feel more accepted in schools will be in a better position to learn. She concludes, "In general, the experience of belonging or relatedness is associated with more positive attitudes toward self and others and these views are reflected in their interaction with others. When students experience acceptance, and where the culture values and encourages supportive interaction they are more likely to be supportive of others. In the school community, they are more helping, more considerate of others, and more accepting of others, including those not in the friendship group." (p. 334) Through their connections with teachers, students often emulate what they see. Essentially teachers can

have a profound influence on what students do and say, and how they behave both in the classroom and outside the classroom.

The relationships established between teachers and students are more comfortable for students when they believe their teachers show a sincere interest in knowing them. The beginning of the year presents the best opportunity for forging and encouraging this relationship. Engaging in classroom activities that encourage student self-disclosure add a dimension of comfort to the students' experiences in school and of their teachers.

Allows Students to Know Him/Her

In combination with empathy development and knowing students is the students' perception that teachers also disclose themselves to students in ways that could enhance a developing relationship. Students appreciated self-disclosure in an effort to allow students to know the teacher on a more personal level as well as attempts to make personal connections with students based on common experiences and understandings. Data from this category revealed and includes the efforts made by teachers to allow themselves to be known by the students. The students were naturally curious about their teachers and were open to learning about them in whatever ways the teachers would allow. There was a multitude of strategies the students perceived the teachers using either consciously or subconsciously to allow themselves to be known to the students. The use of stories, humor, and classroom displays were commonly discussed by the study participants as self-disclosing methods utilized by the teachers to enhance instruction or connect further with the students. Lex supplied a significant array of stories about his experience of this and clearly felt that he was able to learn a lot about his teachers. He talked in depth about what he termed an "overall theme" as he described how he was able to figure out his teachers. I was fascinated by his description of his experience of these developing relationships. He described this idea of "theme" as being related to the notion of identity;

I think everybody sort of has sort of an overall theme to the way they act and speak. There's something underlying there with the way they speak and so um, different people have like different themes and if I can sort of figure out the theme of things I can interact better with people. (Lex, Interview I)

Lex also talked at length about how important it was to him that his teachers use colorful examples to help him understand new information. He elaborated on an experience he had with his previous world language teacher and how helpful his stories were to making meaning of the content for Lex when he was in his class. Within those stories, however, were tidbits of personal information about the teacher that helped Lex to discern the ‘theme’ of this individual.

So um, but he tells a lot of stories and that helps me to understand what we’re learning better. Also, that teacher tells things about himself and that’s positive for me. (Lex, Interview I)

Lex goes on to describe how the classroom also told the story of the teacher. The displays, posters, and other paraphernalia on the walls, as well the configuration and use of physical space all spoke to Lex about the individual teacher. He gathered information about the person by observing and collecting data from his experiences in the classroom. When taken altogether, he used all these data to develop his understanding of the teacher. Then once he was confident with the truths as he decided them to be, he could interact with the teacher accordingly. All this information helped him to make decisions about how he would respond to the teacher personally and in his work. He described,

...I think the classroom’s interesting. Like when you go to different teachers, how they decorate their classrooms, I thought that really always fascinates me...how um, you can see the personality of the teacher on the classroom walls...and I think the actual physical space that you’re in sort of goes into the whole experience too, you know...and if you have like a teacher who is very diverse and has a diverse personality and can do a lot of things and you see the classroom and it is very diverse looking and very diverse feeling that sort of helps, I think, the kids too. (Lex, Interview I)

The feeling of connection to his teachers was encouraged by the various experiences Lex described and elaborated upon. He seemed to rely heavily on his intuition to make decisions about how he would engage with his teachers. Knowing them was accomplished by perceiving their personal traits and this helped him to feel comfortable about how he would choose to interact with them and perform in their classes.

Of the five students who participated in this investigation, I considered Jarod to be the least convinced of his role in the development of relationships with his teachers. Although academically compliant, he appeared to be more tentative in describing his experiences of

these developing relationships and would often talk about the teachers' interactions with him in a matter-of-fact tone. The relationship seemed decidedly to be very little in his control. He seemed to react or respond to his teachers but didn't offer much of himself in the form of self-disclosure. After a month of school, Jarod still perceived that his teachers really didn't know him any better than they did at the beginning of the year, and he also seemed to take the longest time to know his teachers. Jarod does not expound upon the use of his intuitive sense to discern the personalities of his teachers. However, his experience of getting to know them is about how he connects with them through believing he and the teachers have common likes and experiences. He did talk about figuring out their "style" which I determined meant what they expected of him in class. He seemed also to enjoy getting to know teachers with a sense of humor – something he previously valued with one of his fifth grade teachers. But, when asked about these developing relationships he responded with almost the same words in the beginning of school interview and the interview a month later. In the September interview, he described;

Well, I've only had them for, I think about five days or a little bit more than that...I don't really know them that well yet. I know that Mr. D's pretty funny and we share a couple similarities in like music and things like that...Mrs. B...I don't really know her yet, she's just been teaching and she hasn't really talked to me at all personally. The only teacher I really talk to out of class is Mr. D. so I don't really know my other teachers too well yet. (Jarod, Interview II)

Then one month later, he responded again to a query about the developing relationships and how they had changed. His description about how this relationship had changed seemed to have more to do with practicality and function – how he would respond to the instruction in the class and not on a personal level with his teachers;

I'm getting to know them a lot more and uh, I know their style better and that helps me know what's in store for class...most of the teachers have stayed the same, but the history teacher, he's getting a little bit better cause we're getting more into the book. Probably the amount of work we're getting. We're now getting three handouts per teacher or class and sometimes a lot more variety of things like in math she'll give us more problems... (Jarod, Interview III)

Although it seemed as though Jarod may not be getting to know his teachers on a personal level, he derived comfort from knowing what they might expect of him in class. This seemed to be of greater importance to him than a close personal relationship with his teachers.

Colleen explained what she would do to learn more about her teachers if they did not automatically disclose information to her. She would deliberately ask questions of her teachers so that she could learn about them. Like Lex, Colleen would consciously work to collect data about her teachers so that she could understand how they became the individuals they are now. She also believed knowing personal information about her teachers might give her clues to their personal attributes or virtues. She elaborated;

I'd ask them because if they don't tell me anything about them then I don't really know them that well and so it would be a bigger understanding of where my teacher came from and how it could how her [life] outside of school could influence her teaching. Like if they have a lot of kids then they, then I would assume that they have patience. Because then I know the teacher better than just their name. (Colleen, Interview I)

Like Colleen, Lex shared that his experience of teachers in his school is that they like to talk about themselves and thus do disclose much of themselves to the students. He sees this as a wonderful opportunity to get to know them and to respond in productive ways to them in class;

I like to get to know my teachers. And so when I talk to my teachers, I really try to sort of, I don't know, just sort of get to know them a little more and um you have a lot of teachers that like to talk about themselves here too as well as teach. And that's always nice. (Lex, Interview I)

Randi seemed to feel comfortable with the idea that she could engage in a productive teacher-student relationship if she had previous positive interactions with a teacher in another venue such as a school activity. She elaborated upon the idea about how fortunate she would be to have the teacher who was also the drama club sponsor since she already feels connected to her. She felt strongly that being involved in co-curricular activities provided an opportunity to get to know teachers you have for class or could have for class. She perceived these experiences to offer great benefit to the continued development of an already positive relationship;

I can tell people who don't have extracurricular activities are going into the school year not really knowing any of the teachers and they are going to be really frightened because I know that last year I didn't know any of the

teachers. I was really frightened to go into sixth grade. But maybe if they have an extracurricular with one of the teachers, that way they can kind of, you know, breathe a sigh of relief that whenever they go into their class going, “Okay, I *know* this teacher...I don’t have to be all uptight.” (Randi, Interview I)

Lex, Colleen, Caroline, and Randi thought it was critical that they know their teachers on a more personal level. It helped them to connect to their teachers and to find commonalities in their life experiences so that they could learn based on a common understanding in their interactions. Without knowing something personal about their teachers, it would be more difficult for the students to discern the teacher’s intent during instruction and personal interactions. Students knowing teachers and teachers knowing students are significant processes within the development of relationships with their teachers. Without this phenomenon, the relationship experience would be sterile, and void of the feeling of connectedness so important to a successful teacher-student relationship.

Fair/Equal Treatment of Students

These young adolescents had matured to the point where their egocentrism was less prominent in the way they perceived others’ feelings and needs. This does not mean they were not concerned about themselves; they were, but seemed to demonstrate the capability of interpreting and understanding relational intent in the classroom between teachers and other students. They also seemed to understand that what might be fair is not always equal in some ways but that fairness could be relative. Even still, I observed an indignant attitude at times from the descriptions the students gave about their perceptions of an occurrence between teachers and students. Treating all students with compassion and fairness was a critical behavior as these students experienced it. Though this category is defined in the affirmative sense, students experienced both what they termed fair and unfair and elaborated on these experiences through the data.

Buttner (2004) identified a number of other behaviors as showing respect. Included among these behaviors are recognition of student perspectives, showing sensitivity toward students’ concerns, treating students with kindness, offering help and responding to questions, affirming students’ contributions to class, being honest and truthful with students, and responding non-defensively to challenges and questions. In contrast, she also identified

behaviors that show disrespect to students. They include insensitive treatment, lack of help, defensiveness, failure to recognize student concerns including knowing students' names, classroom integrity, and failure to respond to students' learning needs with alternative learning assignments and making exceptions.

The perception that the teachers do not always display fair and equal treatment of students was a concern of the study participants. In particular, the use of humor to tease students that resulted in embarrassment was of paramount concern to some of the students. Caroline, Colleen, and Randi all felt empathy and a degree of anger on behalf of other students who, in their perception, experienced the teasing. Randi also assigned responsibility in part to students whom she felt may have provoked some of this treatment by their teachers themselves. In contrast, Caroline described her experience of another teacher who displayed patience and understanding toward students with lesser ability.

Caroline was particularly vocal about what she believed to be unfair treatment of students by teachers. In particular she felt angry with one of her teachers in sixth grade whom she believed called undue negative attention to a peer by publicly criticizing and humiliating her in front of the class. She felt strongly that punishment should be meted out privately. She also perceived that the teacher really did not understand the student's thinking process and that the student didn't have an opportunity to explain. She explains her thinking;

I think it's just really stupid to do it in front of the whole class. I mean, yeah, they're being punished but can you do it a little more fairly by pulling them off to the side? I feel like they really don't deserve that cause you don't really know what's going on inside their head. Whether they hate the subject or they want to do bad or something's going on that they don't want to say in front of the class. They don't have a chance to defend themselves. (Caroline, Interview III)

Caroline's feelings about this interaction seemed to identify a lack of empathy on the teacher's part and she translated this into unfairness. Another interpretation of this is what could be construed as a misuse of power on the part of the teacher. Her experience of watching her peer be criticized affected her perception of the teacher and her feelings about him when she was in his class. Her relationship with this teacher was unrecoverable.

Colleen also felt empathetic towards students whom she perceived were treated unfairly. The difference between hers and Caroline's interpretation was that Colleen seemed to vicariously 'take on' the other student's experience as though she were actually

experiencing it herself. It was almost as if she took responsibility for the problem even though it was another student and this evoked an internal uncertainty and the acceptance of misplaced blame. Though not as indignant as Caroline, Colleen also believed that unfair criticism should be avoided. She claimed;

...I feel that they deserve like a second chance. Like it feels like they've done something wrong or something. And sometimes it may be obvious like "Oh I thought that was right!" and so you kind of feel like you're in that person's shoes. You're like, okay, what did I do wrong? And you try to examine the situation. (Colleen, Interview III)

I further pressed Caroline about what could be interpreted as unfairness with regard to making assignments to students of varying abilities. I asked if she thought it would be fair or unfair for a teacher to give an alternative assignment to a student. At first she thought it was unfair, but the more she examined the idea, the more palatable it became;

Well, if it's something completely different then it's a little unfair because it's like maybe we feel the same thing about this and we just do it because we want to get good grades but if it's like something that's really struggling with them like they really don't get it, then I think that's okay. I mean, we're doing fine...so maybe it doesn't really matter. (Caroline, Interview III)

Here Caroline is able to distinguish that some students struggle with learning and may require accommodations in order to succeed in the classroom. Her empathy for less able students was evident in her response to this question. She goes on to describe her experience of one teacher whom she perceived to be very fair with students of varying abilities.

Actually...the gym teacher; she doesn't not like the students that aren't as athletic as the other students. She still likes them cause they might be really nice and have personality. So I mean, I think she's fair to everyone cause she doesn't care if you get five minutes on the mile run or fifteen – like she does not care. She just cares that you did it. (Caroline, Interview III)

Colleen, Lex, Randi, and Caroline all personally or vicariously experienced teasing by a teacher. Each one of them seemed to interpret the teasing in a slightly different way. Wanzer et. al. (2006) identified multiple forms of humor within the classroom, among which were both appropriate and inappropriate forms of teasing. Appropriate forms of teasing were not harmful to students' feelings of self-worth. Inappropriate forms of teasing were

damaging to students' sense of security and well-being in the classroom. Nesbit & Philpot (2002) studied both witting and unwitting elements of subtle emotional abuse in classrooms. They recognized that not all teachers were aware that their behavior towards students could be interpreted as a form of emotional abuse nor did the teachers necessarily intend harm on the students. The most vulnerable students, however, were those with compromised ability and were most affected by subtle forms of teacher mistreatment.

Colleen observed teasing by a teacher of another student. While she was not personally involved, she most certainly vicariously experienced the teasing. Interestingly, I sensed that she felt uncertain about this teacher's behavior toward her peer, but believed that because the peer was laughing, the teasing seemed appropriate;

Well sometimes he picks on you just for fun. Like he um...on this one guy [names the student], he us picks on him a lot. He calls him 'little X---X---' and he like makes jokes out of things that he says cause he can always twist some things...other than that he treats everyone else the same. He just has that thing where you can twist someone's words but to make it funny. An even though he's [the student] um getting picked on, he still laughs.
(Colleen, Interview III)

Somehow I sensed the frequency with which Colleen identified the student to be 'chosen' was discomfiting to her. She interpreted his laughter as condoning the teacher's treatment of him but, it could also mean the student was uncomfortable and only he can say for certain. Nevertheless, Colleen recognized that this one student was more prominently selected.

Caroline also experienced a vicarious teasing incident with a student in her class. Yet her interpretation overall of the teacher's treatment of students is that "he treats them pretty equally." She described that the teacher does make fun of students but not about personal characteristics, "like you're fat or something like that." She describes a scenario;

Like if they did something stupid, like everyone knows they did something stupid, for example he told L---we're going to stand up on your chair and say something from your journal. He stood up and said something completely different. So he told every class and we all laughed about it and L--- knew that too, so he was laughing too so it wasn't like we were making fun of him. So I think sometimes students might get a little bored of it, like the students that are getting made fun of, like okay, me again...but uh... I think most of them laugh along as well. So I think he treats everyone well...(Caroline, Interview III)

Like Colleen, I interpreted Caroline's rendition of a similar experience to mean that she too was uncomfortable with the frequency with which some students are targeted for the teasing. In the end, it was interesting to note that even though students may feel uncertain about a teacher's intent and off balance while in the experience, their desire to still like their teacher and to accept this behavior as part of their experience overrides their uncomfortable feelings.

Lex, on the hand, was a target of teacher teasing, but was perfectly okay with the teacher's behavior towards him. The form of teasing being used here was not personal, but rather seemed like an attempt at a back-handed compliment toward him. Because Lex reported enjoying this teacher's humor, his being selected by the teacher was acceptable to him. His interpretation of the teasing endeared this teacher to him even more;

...he read my essay and um, he said, "I think someday that we're gonna hear about you, Lex," and then he said, "not in the police logs or anything." But I do, I want to be a writer um, so that's not really making fun of anything specific, but it's poking fun at me definitely. I don't perceive that as, whoa this guy's being mean to me...you know? (Lex, Interview III)

Randi also had the experience of being teased by a teacher, but felt as though she was treated more fairly than others who are continuously being teased by the teacher. She described;

I don't think that what he is doing is unfair. I think I've been treated more fairly than others like the people who constantly get ridiculed [she names them]. I think it's more unfair for them that he keeps returning to them. But they kinda do bring it on themselves...because they try to be the class clown or say too much whenever he just asks for one simple thing. And so, while I think they're being treated unfairly, they also bring it on themselves. (Randi, Interview III)

Randi seemed to judge the fairness of the teasing based upon the frequency with which it occurred, in her experience, for students in general. The students who received the most amount of teasing were perceived by her to be treated less fairly by the teacher than someone like herself who had only experienced the teasing once. She also seemed perplexed by the students' continuation of seemingly provocative behaviors because she sensed that in doing so, they were somehow responsible for the teasing they received.

Jarod was the only student of the study participants who reported overall fair treatment of students by one of his teachers. He provided his perception of how he experienced his math teacher's treatment of all the students. I sensed that Jarod was happy

with the way she treated students and that her demeanor seemed to be steady, focused, and even toward all the students in her charge as he perceived her;

She treats them all pretty much like one student. Like she doesn't have favorites or anything. She'll just, she won't really, she's not mean or she's not really nice either...she just like teaches us the thing and she gets it over with and she doesn't treat any kids differently. (Jarod, Interview III)

Jarod talked frequently about this teacher in particular throughout the investigation. Having experienced a rocky relationship with his previous math teacher, I sensed he felt relieved to have a teacher he could count on for support and encouragement. His interpretation of her ready nature to help all students and to be sure they understood the content was precisely what he needed when he entered her class. He experienced her as being extremely fair with all her students.

Fair and equal treatment of students as interpreted by the study participants is a very complicated concept. At the heart of this experience for students is their perception of what is fair or unfair behavior by their teachers directed at them or their peers. Fairness seemed to be perceived by the students when the teachers initiated playful teasing with the students, but this behavior could turn quickly to be perceived as unfair when the students themselves were offended or perceived that other students might be offended. This also was the case when the students perceived that the teachers were more critical of students as they disciplined them. If the teacher publicly reprimanded a student causing him/her embarrassment or humiliation, as perceived by the study participants, this was considered unfair treatment. A confounding influence in this experience is the depth of empathy evident in the stories of how Randi, Caroline, and Colleen felt in particular although this deep empathy doesn't appear evident with Jarod and Lex. In any case, it seemed that the students' assessment that teacher treatment of students was or was not fair and equal was primarily influenced by the students' perception of the degree of empathy exuded by the teacher towards the students during the teasing, followed by the students' interpretation of the teachers' intent. If the students interpreted the teachers' behavior to be playful teasing, with no harm intended, then the teachers appeared to be empathetic and to be fair. Teachers' teasing or reprimand of students is deemed acceptable if either behavior is perceived to be delivered in a fair way. In contrast, the teasing and reprimanding behavior is perceived to be unfair if it is perceived to be delivered without empathy or in an insensitive manner.

All of the study participants had experiences about fairness and equal treatment that created varying and dichotomous understandings in the students' minds. While they may have experienced or perceived unfair treatment personally or vicariously, they seemed to struggle with the notion that their teachers might treat students unfairly at times. They sincerely wanted to like their teachers and to have their teachers like them. Thus, it was an uncomfortable topic for the students to discuss.

Predictable

Advancing from one grade level to another presents a familiar experience to students as they move through school. Even so, these students could identify some level of anxiety about getting older, meeting new teachers, having a new schedule, changing locations in a school building, and anticipating what is expected of them as they advance in the grades.

These transitions are eased when students perceive the teacher's behavior as predictable. Predictability extends to what teachers expect in terms of student performance in the classroom as well as how teachers behave regularly. Though this category also is defined in the affirmative, students identified experiences that were both predictable and unpredictable.

All of the students discussed how the beginning of the school year provided opportunities for the teachers to get to know the students and for the students to get to know what the teachers expected. In large measure, the students believed that teachers impose expectations on them gradually at first and then become more demanding as the year progresses. Colleen talked about how her preparation for the middle school and her experience of her teachers was true to the expectation. Her elementary teachers predicted what she would need to be able to know and do when she arrived at the middle school;

Well starting in elementary school, they really pushed us to see how good we were and what we were capable of and that helped us in sixth grade. Like in fifth grade they said this is what you'll, this is some stuff that you'll need to know when you're in the middle school. (Colleen, Interview I) So we actually use that in middle school and it helped me a lot. Well every class that I started out, I knew it was going to get a little more challenging because I'm older. I need to be expected of more things and so I was right. It does get a little more challenging. But the first part is really easy because you just get to know everybody first, like know names and who's in your classes and everything...but then starting the second week it started to get into the actual work and so...(Colleen, Interview II)

In retrospect, Colleen confirmed that what her teachers told her was true. So her transition to the middle school was smooth and happened exactly as she expected. Her previous teacher predicted what her experience would be like and the prediction was accurate. The preparation Colleen received from her teachers seemed to enhance the trust she felt for them.

After several days, Caroline was still feeling a bit uncertain about her science class. She felt as though she couldn't predict yet what the class expectations were. This lack of predictability made it hard for her to feel motivated going to class;

Then when I'm in science I don't really know what we're gonna do and I'm just kind of like right there...just wondering what she's going to have us do today... a little more like not wanting to go to that class cause she usually has like papers for us to write all the time in the beginning of class and we're taking notes a lot more and so it's kind of more boring than language arts, but I mean it's not *that* bad...(Caroline, Interview II)

It was frustrating to Caroline that she couldn't predict the teacher's expectations or instructional behavior in class. This was unnerving to her since she likes to feel as though she has some control over her environment.

Jarod struggled with the unpredictability of the classroom behavior of his physical education teacher. He described this relationship as "odd" and explained that sometimes the "teacher can be a really good teacher and a really fun teacher, but some days you just walk in and he'd just be yelling at the whole class." He elaborated on this experience;

Sometimes I just don't think about it 'til I get there, but it can, yeah it can, like when I'm in the locker room getting dressed, think about what we're going to do and how he's going to act...one kid will just do some little thing and he'll just start yelling and like see what one kid can do and messes up everybody's day...(Jarod, Interview II)

Jarod believes that physical education class should be fun, and he resents that the teacher's unpredictability can ruin the experience. His feelings about that class are uncertain and the pleasure he gains from the experience is intermittent.

Wubbels, Levy & Brekelmans (1997) articulated in their Model of Teacher Interpersonal Behavior two characteristics that relate specifically to the categories Predictable and Pleasant Mood in this study. Admonishing, one of the terms, includes the teacher behaviors; get angry, take pupils to task, express irritation and anger, forbid, correct, and punish and the second behavior, Dissatisfied, includes the behaviors; wait for silence,

consider pros and cons, keep quiet, show dissatisfaction, look glum, question, and criticize. Teachers who behave in this fashion with students more often than not, tend to have resulting low achievement levels and poorer attitudes among their students. Important to note however, is that teachers behave in ways indicative of every category in the model, however the most effective teachers are those whose behaviors tend toward the right side of the model in the dominant, cooperative areas.

On the affirmative side of *Predictable*, study participants described their teachers as behaving as they would expect in the classroom on a regular basis. The examples they gave were indicative of what one typically experiences at the beginning of a school year; daily efforts to get to know students, establishing routines, and setting expectations. In addition, the students also experienced their movement into seventh grade as they predicted it would occur. On the negative side of *Predictable*, study participants described teacher behaviors that concerned them; showing anger for no good reason, and expressing irritation and impatience toward students. These experiences resulted in the students feeling uncomfortable and unable to predict the behavior of their teachers.

The students felt more comfortable when they could predict the classroom expectations, the teacher's management style, and teacher behavior during instruction. This is a process that occurs at the beginning of each year and provides an opportunity to establish patterns of behavior and interactions that students can rely upon every day. The predictability of this pattern is critical to the students' feelings of well-being, and readiness to learn and participate in class. In the absence of it, students indicated lower levels of motivation and enjoyment of school. Being able to predict these patterns causes students to feel secure and to some degree, in control of their learning environment.

Pleasant Mood

The students were keenly aware of the moods of their teachers and had a number of stories to tell regarding how these moods affected their experiences of their teachers. Teachers were perceived as pleasant when they manifested a sense of enjoying being with students, smiling, and displaying even, predictable emotions and behaviors. Different from *predictability* this category specifically refers to the mood of the teacher and its effect on the classroom climate. On the positive side of *Pleasant Mood*, the study participants reported

that a teacher in a pleasant mood makes the environment one that students want to be in. The opposite is also true when teachers are glum or critical of students. In both cases, the study participants unequivocally shared that the teacher's mood affects the classroom climate and the mood of the students. Likewise students learn best and feel most confident and comfortable with their teachers when they can predict with relative certainty what their daily experiences will be like in class. None of the study participants liked the idea of guessing whether or not a teacher was in a good mood. It is important to this group of students that their teachers have even temperaments and truly enjoy being in school with them.

The study participants had fairly strong opinions about how teachers should present their moods to the students and they assigned power and influence to that mood as it affected the classroom environment and students as they learn. Students felt that teachers should not typically display bad moods in the classroom and if they were having a bad day they should essentially pretend otherwise. Students perceived that a teacher has a great deal of power over the environment of the classroom. Lex described in detail what this meant to him;

I think if the teacher sort of tries to come in, at least to pretend that she or he is in a good mood um then that would sort of reflect on the classroom. But um like that's I've had a lot of cases that happened teachers in a bad mood and stuff and that's negative for me. Well sometimes I think that the teacher just needs to lighten up a little bit. Cause sometimes, like a teacher's mood if the teacher had like a bad day or a bad morning or whatever...sometimes it, well all the time I think the mood of a teacher reflects on a classroom. And...you know, then the classroom's gonna start getting like, you know, I don't want to do this and they're going to get just wild and more hyper cause that's what kids do...(Lex, Interview I)

Randi believes that teachers feel more motivated to perform in the classroom when the teacher displays a pleasant mood. She further explained that how teachers treat students is at the core of whether or not they want to be in school. Randi reported that meanness is a mood that students clearly do not enjoy because it makes them uncomfortable in the classroom. Another mood that the students did not appreciate was anger. Randi had a strong opinion about whether or not a teacher should display anger in the classroom and averred that there is no place for anger in the teacher-student relationship. She elaborated upon all these issues;

...if the teachers are nice then I should be nice and I should want to learn too. They make every student feel like they're really special...I think that made me want to come to school cause I know that some people when

teachers are mean to them they just feel like they don't want to come to school anymore...I think that teachers are allowed to be angry only they shouldn't do it all the time and they shouldn't do it for reasons that don't really matter...if students were first of all, kind of making fun of the teacher or the lesson or maybe another student, then that would be an actual problem. But if they forget their homework a lot of times maybe they just have a problem with organization and responsibility and the teacher would want to work on that with them without getting angry....if the teacher usually and generally has a happy outlook and is positive that means the student is going to be happier and is going to try and listen more. (Randi, Interview I)

Caroline becomes concerned when students display noncompliant behavior in class and this affects the teacher's mood;

...then the teacher gets in a bad mood and they have to like yell at him and stuff so you don't really feel like talking anymore so it's not as much fun like the rest of the class. (Caroline, Interview III/response to diary)

Jarod reported feeling particularly happy to go to the sixth period class of a teacher whom he enjoyed for his sense of humor and good mood. He liked being able to joke with the teacher and could count on the predictable good mood the teacher would display each day;

It meant that I could go to school and be happy rather than be bored all day cause I knew sixth period was going to be fun. (Jarod, Interview I)

All of the study participants but Colleen elaborated on this category; they are affected by the mood of a teacher and naturally prefer a good mood to the more serious or dark moods that can be displayed in the classroom. The study participants are compliant students; when others don't comply with teacher expectations the participants perceive this negatively affects the teacher's mood. This can create a stressful classroom situation for them. The way they feel in class and their levels of motivation are directly influenced by the mood of the teacher.

Sense of Humor

The students appreciated the teacher employing humor in ways appropriate to the developmental level of the students in interactions with the students, and while delivering instruction. While defined in the affirmative sense, humor can also be overused and can have adverse effects on the classroom environment.

Sense of Humor produced some interesting data. All the students expressed enjoyment at the sense of humor of at least one of their teachers. Having the teacher use humor during instruction was thought to be an effective way to convey important information to the students. However, if humor was offensive or overdone, the students tended to enjoy it less. Wanzer, Frymier, Wojtaszczyk, & Smith (2006) conducted a study of appropriate and inappropriate uses of humor in the classroom. Participants in the study were asked to generate examples of appropriate and inappropriate uses of humor by teachers. The analysis resulted in eight different categories of humor, four appropriate and four inappropriate. The evidence indicated that the variety and kinds of humor can both enhance and demean a classroom learning environment. They concluded, “To competently use humor as a teaching strategy, the humor must help achieve the teaching goal (effectiveness) and do so without offending students (appropriateness).” (p. 192) Inappropriate forms of humor that disparage students [are] considered highly destructive and most likely violate classroom norms and expectations, especially when the humor targets a student’s “...intelligence, personal life/interest, appearance, gender, or religion.” (p. 193)

During this study, the participants enumerated a variety of experiences with humor. Lex described how important a sense of humor is for him while attending class;

Funny is very important to me and he’s funny and he’s not – he’s sort of my kind of funny which means he’s very open and not really like he’s laugh out loud funny but ...it’s not sort of that he doesn’t try too hard to be funny. His style of teaching from what I can tell so far is sort of going to suit me. (Lex, Interview II)

Jarod made reference to a teacher he previously had in the elementary school as one who exhibited a sense of humor. He described;

This teacher, she would be able to kid around with me. But she would teach me a lot cause I had her for most of the classes – and I think that helped her get to know me more, cause I had her for five out of six classes. And she would expect a lot of me. (Jarod, Interview I)

Caroline described a funny teacher she had and pointed out the humorous parts of his interactions with the class. She perceives this behavior to be highly motivating to her and her peers;

He’s really funny and he like does voices in class and he does a lot of fun activities to make it like much better. (Caroline, Interview II)

Randi sees her teacher as funny also, but she seems concerned about his use of humor regarding the students in the class. She talks about enjoying his humor but is also cautious;

[The teacher] seems like really funny...yeah, he likes to do jokes all the time and I don't want to become the subject of his next joke! (Randi, Interview II)

Lex shared about a time he was disappointed in a teacher whom he thought should have used humor in a particular circumstance. He describes a time when the class was embarrassed about terminology in science class and felt as though the teacher could have used humor to lessen the impact of the embarrassment on the students;

My science teacher was going on and on about different types of [mineral] cleavage and everything and it was prismatic cleavage – it was really funny so but she didn't mean it in any kind of way and then she just, the whole class was laughing and you know a lot of girls were very mad too but the rest of the class was just laughing and then she just ignored it. [She] could of at least said something, you know...(Lex, Interview III/response to diary)

Caroline described an instance with a teacher whom she likes that she thought was overusing humor. She found this to be ineffective in the classroom and thought perhaps the teacher should not try to be funny so much;

...our music teacher, I really like him, like he's really funny, but sometimes he tries way too hard to be funny. He's a good teacher...I like him, but he kind of pushes himself too much on kids, like tries to make them like him too much... (Caroline, Interview III)

All the study participants enjoyed humor in the classroom when it was fun and enhanced the instructional environment. But if humor was overused, or it became a way to victimize students, it wasn't as well appreciated by them. In this regard, the use of humor had a connection to aspects of the fairness attribute. If humor was overused on a particular student, or caused undue embarrassment, then it was no longer considered fun by the study participants. Also, when teachers were perceived to be overusing humor to gain favor with the students, they did not appreciate the humor. Never-the-less, all the participants agreed that humor in the classroom can be an effective tool used in the process of instruction.

Chapter Six

THEME TWO – TEACHER FUNCTIONAL/MECHANICAL BEHAVIORS

Introduction

The essence of this theme speaks to the necessity of teachers to be masters of the classroom, to perform their duties as teachers in the utmost professional manner and, most importantly, in a way that allows students to be successful learners. Incorporating the use of appropriately challenging class expectations with creative methods of instruction tends to provide excellent learning opportunities for students. Additionally, demonstrating sound pedagogy, having mastery of content, and maintaining control of the classroom further support the successful functions of teaching. Blending theme two attributes with those of theme one serves to create the essence of the teacher(s) as perceived by the study participants as one that is caring and effective overall.

This chapter portrays what a teacher *does* in the classroom in order to *provide instruction*. These behaviors represent *knowing the content* and the *mechanics of instructional curriculum delivery* as perceived by students. This theme illustrates behaviors that the students observed and experienced in their teachers as they remembered them from previous relationship experiences and also while experiencing the development of their relationships with their current teachers. This theme integrates a variety of teacher behaviors that address instructional and curriculum delivery functions as they are applied in the classroom. These behaviors allow teachers to demonstrate an understanding of how varied students learn, while addressing the variety of student needs, and successfully teaching students so that they are successful at learning. Different from Theme One, these behaviors are specific to the task of instruction and curriculum delivery as an entity, are not necessarily to be considered interpersonal yet correlate well with the Theme One interpersonal behaviors described in Chapter Five. Both sets of behaviors as perceived by the students, are critical to successful teaching and learning and are necessary to produce a successful learning environment as they are integrated together into the teaching process. The behaviors are interconnected and occur simultaneously but are being discussed here more discretely.

A thorough examination of the behaviors identified in this theme provides a structure within which one can understand the essence of the functional/mechanical part of the teacher-student relationship. Excising these behaviors from all the others identified throughout this investigation provides an opportunity to view them as an entity, but care should be taken to see them as a part of the bigger picture.

Teachers, while in the action of instruction not only inject their personal selves into the process but also their technical skills. These technical skills are the behaviors that are used to assess student readiness for learning, to evaluate student understanding of concepts, and to make hundreds of decisions every day in every class about the minutiae of the *process* of instruction. These behaviors and decisions are made in rapid succession throughout the daily interaction between the teachers and the students in the classroom and are based upon the teachers' constant collection of these data while in this process. Though many of these decisions may appear to be made in the moment, they are frequently the result of both conscious and subconscious choices resulting from a technical understanding of the teaching act.

While listening to the stories of the study participants, these four behaviors seemed to emerge most frequently in our discussions. Most prominent throughout these interactions was the behavior *appropriately challenging*. Every student desired a balance of challenge and ease while learning in the classroom. If their experience was too challenging or too easy, this created anxiety for them, but if the challenge was just right, it seemed to stretch the students just beyond their comfort zones to learn something new. They enjoyed a new challenge, a new idea, a new experience – and they expected and wanted their teachers to provide this experience. Every other functional/mechanical behavior connected specifically to this one. The students desired and enjoyed teachers who were *creative*; perceiving this behavior in their teachers made the challenges less frightening and more exciting to them. Also important to the students was the need to perceive and believe their teachers had deep knowledge of their content as well as mastery of content delivery in class. The students strongly desired to perceive their teachers as *competent* in both *content and pedagogy*. Utilizing *creativity* to deliver the content message was a critical factor in students retaining new information and connecting it to previous learning. Being *in control* of the classroom as perceived by the students is equally a requisite behavior for successful curriculum delivery

and student success. These two behaviors are deeply connected to each other and also to the most prominent mechanical/technical behavior, *appropriately challenging*.

Appropriately Challenging

The notion of providing learning opportunities that appropriately challenge and engage students played the most prominent role in this theme. While this definition is in the affirmative sense, some data represent a contrast as well. The students really valued that the teachers could provide instructional opportunities that met their need for challenge and also were engaging either personally or through high interest presentation of academic content. Jarod discussed his experience of a project he did at the beginning of this academic year. The project required that the students had to share something about themselves that they were “good at.” The students were then obligated to share this talent with their classmates through a presentation and/or demonstration. When Jarod first described this assignment to me, he didn’t seem too enthused about doing it, but as the time drew near for him to commit to a plan, he decided to demonstrate his pitching skills to the class. He found that doing this assignment was more fun than he had originally anticipated. He described;

...it was pretty fun cause you got to do something that you liked and when you like something you can get more into it and get better at it so I pretty much brought some baseball equipment and demonstrated...(Jarod, Interview III/response to diary)

The opportunity for the study participants to make choices in the completion of their assignments was an important strategy teachers used to engage students in the learning process. In doing so, students were able to expose more of their personalities in the completion of class and project work. As in this one example, all of the study participants elaborated upon the first project they had to complete for their language arts classes. It was open-ended, allowed for personal choice and creativity, and showcased the individual talents of each of the students. Such an opportunity created an environment that was highly engaging and motivating to this group of students. As San Antonio (2007) avers, “Recognition of all sorts of skills—creative, mechanical, physical, and interpersonal—is important in helping students develop an overall sense of engagement in school.” Each student had a choice about how to share one’s individual talents.

Colleen expended a great deal of energy in the early going trying to understand exactly what her teachers were going to expect of her. She is highly motivated to do well in school and enjoys feeling as though she is in control of her effort while enjoying a challenge. Even so, she seemed worried at first about the level of difficulty she was facing in class until she was able to relax a bit and recognize that the pacing and challenge were manageable. She described her first experience with new and challenging material;

...I was surprised because I thought we'd be learning all this new stuff and I would be like um...trying to think it all through and I would be like [holds head] 'Oh my gosh! What am I doing?' but um, we actually started with a review and so I felt like, okay, we're going to take this slow, it's going to be alright...I can stop and relax! (Colleen, Interview III)

Once Colleen recognized that she was perfectly capable of keeping pace with her teachers and the level of challenge she was facing, she could settle into her classes and concentrate on her purpose. The feeling of being overwhelmed was gradually replaced with a feeling of confidence and a bit of excitement about new learning. One example of Colleen's effort to work through this process and recognize that she was ready for new challenges, was her initial impression of the science teacher's demand on the students. Early in the year, the science teacher explained that the grades students received in her class were earned and not granted. Colleen seemed to believe that *earning* grades was more challenging, possibly more so than she might have previously thought. It seemed to me that the teacher was essentially trying to help the students understand that their progress and performance were truly the result of their own effort. Colleen took this charge very seriously and saw this statement as a direct challenge to her and all the students to work hard;

[The teacher] always says that she doesn't 'give out grades,' you earn them. And so she pushes everybody so that you can be challenged. (Colleen, Interview II)

In the end, Colleen came to believe she was very able to keep pace with the instruction in this class and would most likely do well.

Unlike Colleen, Caroline indicated concern about the pacing of the science class and was hoping that the demands of the class would ease a bit. She thought the demands of the class were a bit overwhelming. Interestingly, she perceived that the teacher thought the students in her class were more capable than the other classes, and I believe she rather

enjoyed being seen in this way. In contrast, however, she did not enjoy the demand of the class and thought the challenge was more than she was able to handle right now. Caroline found that she needed to adjust to the expectations in her new science class. She described;

I'd like to relax a little...cause we have homework like every night cause I'm not really used to that in science. That's cause I got my homework finished in class last year....she *really* pushes the 4000 class and it kind of gets annoying for us and probably the 3000 class cause, 'oh they're doing that like three days ahead of us' and then we're like, can't we just stop for once? She thinks that means we're *way* smarter than everyone else... I'm [not] mad at her for it...(Caroline, Interview III)

Randi provided an interesting insight into her experiences with her teachers in class. She believed that the challenges teachers present to students in class are interactive. She perceived that teachers gauge the amount of challenge they should provide based upon student response and this essentially becomes a transaction between them. Randi suggested that teachers gauge their instruction and pacing on how students respond and the students' response to instruction sets the pace for the class. I found it interesting that Randi was able to perceive this exchange between teachers and students and, more importantly, believed that students have some power in this interaction. She explained;

I think they [the teachers] just try and in their own head they try and see things from your point of view and try to make the lessons easier sometimes or make it so you're going to understand them more and they could and maybe you could understand each other more...(Randi, Interview I)

Randi's perception of this transaction between teacher and students is, I believe, exceptionally perceptive on her part. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the "zone of proximal development" maintained, "...the child follows the adult's example and gradually develops the ability to do certain tasks without help or assistance." Randi's perception that teachers are the agent in this interaction is theoretically accurate. Once students are able to meet the teachers' demands, the teacher adjusts the level of challenge accordingly; the transaction between the two is a recursive process.

Brophy (1987) established that students are more willing to work in school when they appreciate the value of the classroom activity; when they believe they can succeed with reasonable effort and included a list of strategies and behaviors teachers should engage in to motivate their students. Practitioners should concentrate on creating a supportive

environment, providing appropriate levels of challenge, choosing clear and meaningful learning objectives, and varying motivational strategies to establish a learning atmosphere where students want to engage. Learning activities that provide appropriate levels of challenge and appeal to student affect further motivates them. Thus, programming student learning for success, and encouraging goal setting, self-appraisal, and self-reinforcement skills helps students to commit to learning. Helping students to link effort to outcome, and assisting reticent or discouraged students through performance contracts further supports students' needs for motivation. (p. 42)

Randi, Colleen, Caroline, and Jarod welcomed challenge and interesting assignments in their classes, but they believed the challenges should be tempered with understanding and knowledge of the students' abilities to maintain the pace of the class. Course challenges should also engage students in learning activities that are interesting to them and provide opportunities for personal choice in assignments and methods of demonstrating that one has learned the content. The study participants clearly enjoyed activities that were purposeful; they found these activities to be highly motivating and engaging. In contrast, if teachers did not provide appropriate levels of challenge, clear expectations and boundaries, the students' experience of the classroom in general was much less enjoyable. Wilson & Horch (2002) through their research have confirmed that in order for learning to be meaningful for young adolescents teachers can make learning so by guaranteeing relevance and rigor in the classroom. Furthermore, young adolescents learn best when they are challenged academically and most importantly when they see the connection to their own lives.

Creative

The students appreciated that their teachers were creative while employing developmentally appropriate, high-interest methods of instruction through classroom work, homework assignments, and other projects. The study participants gave several examples of creative teaching in the descriptions of their experiences with their teachers. These descriptions involved employing creative strategies and varied learning activities to help adolescents learn and to retain new information.

Wilson & Horch (2002) suggest that in order to maintain student focus and attention to learning new material, teachers should use a multi-sensory approach to instruction. The

use of music, smell, touch, and emotion can focus student learning. Additionally, the use of inquiry or problem-based learning as instructional practice further supports the learning styles of children this age. Using high interest content, essential questions to guide learning, and multi-sensory experiences will facilitate student involvement and interest as well as build connections within the brain. A multitude of instructional strategies are suggested for use with young adolescents in the middle school classroom. Colleen gave several examples of her teachers' use of creativity during instruction. One of her teachers used music and manipulatives to help students understand the concepts about human development he was teaching them in science class. Colleen seemed to recall those learning strategies when it came time for assessments. She described;

...he made learning fun...like sometimes he made up little songs...sometimes he showed physical understanding, like [when] we were talking about the bones in the human body and child development, and like he brought in a baby doll to show us about the childhood of a baby...if they make it more fun and be interacting to us then it would make us try harder because now we understand it in a fun way and like when we're studying for a test, we could use those like games or song or something to help us. (Colleen, Interview I)

Another method of maintaining student interest and boosting motivation in learning new content was to allow students freedom in the choices they made about projects. Colleen described how one of her teachers used open-ended assignments as a way of permitting students to use their imaginations;

He makes all the projects have no limit so far and I feel that he's going to continue that way throughout the whole year. (Colleen, Interview III)

Colleen excitedly described a teacher she had during her elementary years as being creative. Mrs. P. was a student teacher and had the daunting task of building the students' vocabulary through the use of the Wordmasters competitions. Colleen really enjoyed the teacher's methodology in providing instruction to the students. She described;

She did a lot of fun games. She even got to rent the gym for us to play a game where we had to memorize the wordmasters and when she'd shout out the definition then we would have to go and grab the ball in the center of the gym, race back to the line, and then she would ask for the word...[another time] she had a wall in the back of her room that had some words like flossynossyhilopilofication. And so she'd have these cards in the back and on the back of them would have the definition so in case you

wanted to extend your vocabulary you would have some words in the back...(Colleen, Interview I)

Colleen enjoyed activities that were different from the typical classroom experience. This was not surprising to me since two years later she still recalls words from the word wall, and the details of a word game she and her peers played for the purpose of learning higher level vocabulary.

A motivating factor for Lex was having a teacher he perceived to be creative. He defined this creativity as the teacher being fun to be around, as the teacher being interesting, having a sense of humor, and enjoying teaching. I interpreted this perception to be more about the personality of the teacher and even to some degree the nature of creativity as it manifested itself in the teacher's personality. For Lex, the idea of having a teacher that was not rigid was, in effect, a teacher who was creative and spontaneous. He particularly enjoyed teachers with an easy-going disposition. Lex described this perception of one of his teachers;

The theme for him is very creative; that's really important to me. He's not stiff and he seems like he enjoys his teaching...I love creative people; I think they're just fun to be around and they're interesting, and yeah, but um, and then he's also very funny which is also really good. There's not a class that goes by without the whole entire class laughing at least once, you know. Um...he has a very open sort of method sort of style of teaching and he uses it very well. (Lex, Interview II)

Caroline described an experience she had with a teacher she perceived to be very creative. The teacher would often use music while the students were writing; she also varied learning activities so that some days were more challenging than others. It seemed that Caroline enjoyed this variety immensely and it was a highly motivating experience for her. She described this teacher;

...and sometimes when you're writing she'd play music which was really fun...and she did really fun writing topics...and she had some relaxed days and some were really hard days. And she tried to like organize fun things for us to do, hard things for us to do. She was just the best teacher I ever had – she was so awesome. (Caroline, Interview I)

Randi described a number of her teachers from the elementary school as being bright and creative and funny. But the teachers were also serious about the instruction they offered and Randi and her peers took the teachers seriously also. So while the teachers manifested

creativity in ways that some would describe as funny, creative, and bright, Randi believed that their style was highly motivating to her and her peers. It seemed the teachers used these creative tactics to engage the students and hold their interest. Randi summarized her experience of this by saying;

...they wanted to make you want the lesson. (Randi, Interview I)

Creativity, as perceived by Randi, Lex, Colleen, and Caroline, seems to be more a manifestation of a variety of personality characteristics that translated into making the learning experience fun for the students. This highly engaging experience is what helped students to learn and to retain the content they were exposed to in instruction. By utilizing humor, fun, variety in lessons, tempered with a less formal, relaxed atmosphere, students came to define their teachers as creative. The study participants enjoyed creative opportunities in the classroom and in assignments; their teachers used a variety of methods to help them master the content and also provided opportunity for them to be creative in their assignment products. It's clear that creative delivery of instruction was highly motivating to these students.

Brophy (1987) suggests that motivating students with extrinsic or intrinsic rewards can be used to appeal to student acceptance of the learning opportunity being presented. Extrinsic rewards can vary from material to intangible such as time with the teacher or work displays. These too should vary depending upon the needs of the individual students. To capitalize on students' levels of intrinsic motivation, educators are encouraged to adapt tasks to students' interests, include novelty and variety, allow choices or autonomy in decision making, provide opportunity for active responses, give immediate feedback to student responses, allow students to create finished products, include fantasy or simulation through role-play or drama, and incorporate game-like features into the process/product. Teachers should also recognize that learning is a social activity by utilizing variety of questioning techniques to inspire high-level analysis and synthesis of what is being learned. (pp. 43-47) Colleen, Lex, Randi, and Caroline told several stories of experiences they had in classes where teachers employed game-like strategies and fun activities to help them learn difficult concepts. These strategies served to assist memory and cognition, while making connections to other learning.

Affectively, students are more successful with new learning when they have access to each other as they share in this process. Teacher support through purpose setting and being clear about the task also minimizes student anxiety and encourages motivation. The pace and intensity of the learning should vary by student and should depend upon the students' acquisition of the new learning being presented. Although this strategy requires a great deal of finesse on the teacher's part, it seemed to be a critical factor in the students' enjoyment of classes. Too much challenge created anxiety for some students; too little caused boredom. Finding the right balance for students the majority of the time requires a skilled technician in the front of the classroom.

Creativity in instruction for the study participants involved the use of many and varied strategies. The study participants elaborated extensively on their appreciation for the "fun" the teachers put into their instruction. The use of songs, manipulatives, and lively class discussion were frequently touted as engaging and motivating by these students. Allowing personal choice in projects and assignments was also illustrative of this point. In essence, classroom strategies for instruction have been used in a variety of classroom settings as reported by the study participants.

In Control

The students appreciated that their teachers should be in control of managing the classroom and commanding student compliance both with and without direction. Though defined in the affirmative sense, this attribute also includes student descriptions of contrasting experiences. Berliner (2003) suggested three strategies for practitioners to motivate students in the classroom. The first, "create positive learning environments" involves finding ways to congratulate and encourage students; minimize competition to eliminate the possibility of 'losing' in academic activities; establish collaboration, communication, and problem solving procedures within the school setting; and involve students in the development of respectful and reasonable rules that reinforce personal responsibility.

As individuals, the study participants were very responsible about themselves and their work. Therefore, they were very astute about circumstances in which they felt teachers were not in control, as they expected them to be, and this was unnerving to a few of the study

participants. Lex was concerned about an experience he was having in his Spanish class. He felt the teacher didn't exert enough control over the class and this was uncomfortable for him. He was not fond of learning Spanish and he found the content to be difficult. The teacher's methodology coupled with the climate in the classroom created concerns about classroom control and management that made this a miserable experience for him. He described the teacher's behavior in the class;

...I don't know if she's actually oblivious or if she just decided to be oblivious because basically everybody in her class just talks. We talk all the time and she doesn't really seem to know that we're talking so, I don't know, I don't think that's a good teaching method. (Lex, Interview III)

When I asked what other teachers would do in this situation, Lex reported that they would reprimand students for this kind of talking and he desperately wanted this teacher to do the same. This really bothered him. Interestingly he admitted that he, too, was a contributor to the talking. When I asked about why he didn't monitor his own talking, he simply shrugged, smiled, and said that everyone else was talking, so he guessed he would too. Even so, I suspect he would have been happy to comply with the teacher's request to stop, had she taken charge of the classroom and required that of her students. But the classroom situation remained the same none-the-less. I concluded that Lex truly wanted his teacher to take charge of the classroom environment.

Caroline reiterated the need for the teacher to keep control of the class by describing what she would expect of a teacher who was in control of the class. This person would be helpful, but stern, keeping students in line during instruction;

...an ideal teacher would be like someone that's helpful that's not mean but he keeps the class under control and he could be nice to everyone but still punish the students that are doing bad...(Caroline, Interview I)

Caroline seemed to work best in a climate that was demanding, yet purposeful. She wanted her teachers to be in control and in charge of the happenings in the classroom; she wanted clear expectations, but enjoyed having teachers that have a sense of humor. Striking this balance was critical to Caroline's enjoyment of the learning experience.

Randi tended to describe teachers who are in control as those who exude a sense of enjoyment about their work, but who are also purposeful and serious about the job they have to do. She liked teachers who knew when to take control, be in charge of the classroom, and

know how to direct students to take an equally serious view of the work before them. She described teachers whom she perceived to be in control;

...they're always smiling and getting right down to work and that's exactly how I like to do it. They don't hang around or anything, they get right down to business and that's what I like about school...

Randi also described an experience she previously had in the elementary school with a teacher who utilized a structured discipline plan with her students. Randi described her as being in control through the use of this plan which involved informing the student of the problem, using a tiered method of recording the infractions, from which she then meted out discipline in a structured way. This made behavioral expectations undeniably clear to Randi who knew instinctively what the limits to her behavior would be. Randi liked this structure because the mystery about how one might be disciplined was removed. She described how this worked;

I tried not to do anything that would get her mad or anything. But whenever a certain student may have gotten in trouble, she didn't really yell or scream. She had these little punishment cards just like the first time you did something wrong, she would [give you a card]...(Randi, Interview I)

It seemed clear to me that, although Randi was likely not the kind of student who chose to misbehave, she definitely knew what might happen if she did. This kind of structure provided her with a level of security about how the teacher might use her power to correct and discipline students who misbehave. Randi enjoyed being a classroom where she could count on the teacher behavior towards her and others as well as the teacher's reaction when students misbehaved.

Jarod reported his experience of a teacher he had in the elementary school. I sensed that the teacher exerted a great amount of influence on the students and their behavior choices. His description of her, succinct as it is, seemed to indicate that she had control and could command the class to be self-disciplined under any circumstances. It appeared to me that his sense of her was such that she did not use an elaborate plan to discipline students, but they knew by a look, a gesture, a gaze, or some other behavior that they needed to change their own. He described this teacher;

She could control the whole class to do something in the right way. (Jarod Interview, I)

Lex, Colleen, Caroline, and Jarod described their desire for a teacher who is in control of the classroom environment, the students, and their instructional delivery. Control is manifested in a number of teacher behaviors that include the sound delivery of instruction, clear expectations for both behavior and achievement, and an environment that is minimally distracting to learners. In the absence of this control, the students feel uncertain and worried about their experiences in the classroom. Wolk (2003) suggests, "...classroom management and student discipline work together, not in a traditional paradigm of control and punishment, but as central to the curriculum and classroom experience." (p. 14) Diero (2003) reiterates this notion when describing how teachers can show caring through discipline. She suggests, "Treating children with dignity means honoring their position and their abilities, and seeing them as worthy of esteem. Treating children with respect means showing regard for their basic human right to expression and believing in their growing abilities to manage their own lives successfully." (p. 61) When teachers are able to create an environment conducive to the needs of their students, expect them to behave respectfully with each other and perform to their best abilities, then productive learning takes place.

Content and Pedagogical Competence

The idea of knowing one's content copiously and delivering the content effectively is defined as *content and pedagogical competence*. The study participants who were concerned about this skill in their teachers were detailed in their descriptions and discussions about teacher content competence. They felt secure with the understanding that their teachers commanded the content well. What they discussed with relative regularity throughout the interview process was effective delivery of instruction and their concerns when the teacher was not effectively delivering the content. Some of the students shared their feelings about occurrences in the classroom as they related to pedagogical competence.

Jarod freely described an untenable experience he had in his sixth grade mathematics class. He frequently felt abandoned by the teacher and distraught at his inability to fulfill the teacher's expectations of the work. His criticism of the teacher rested mainly with what I would define as a lack of sound pedagogy. The independent work the teacher expected of

Jarod and what he was able to deliver were not congruent, I suspect, because what the teacher wanted students to do was beyond Jarod's ability to deliver at that time. Thus, his experience with the teacher was compromised because his learning needs were not being met. This year, he is most enamored of his math teacher's content and pedagogical competence. She instructs students by scaffolding their exposure to the content. She introduces the concept, provides examples, gives the students practice, guides their independent attempts, then sets them out on their own to do it. Jarod perceived this teacher as very competent and he described her in this way;

Uh...see I'm not a really big math fan...I don't really like it that much, but since she's a good teacher and helps me with it a lot, I think I'm going to do pretty well with math this year. Well, she's probably really good at it and she, like I said before, she helps us with it a lot and she guides us through all the steps. (Jarod, Interview II)

In contrast, however, Jarod remained concerned about his history teacher. He didn't perceive that the teacher was instructing the students well enough so that they could perform well on the classroom assessments. Furthermore, it also seemed as though the class was teacher-focused giving little time to the students to ask questions or assimilate the new content through highly engaging activities. Then the students would be required to complete work outside the class. He described this situation;

I know a lot of kids doing poorly in it [the class]. He's still pretty much talking and not really giving us work, like he'll talk the whole class and most of the time now, even about history and then he'll just give us homework to do. (Jarod, Interview II)

Jarod seems to perform best in classes where the teacher is highly directive and clear about student expectations. He feels as though this will occur in math, but perhaps not in history class.

Caroline expected that her teachers should prepare her well enough for what she might learn in the coming years. She believed the role and function of her teachers was to bridge her current knowledge to the next year. She described;

"I want them to be nice and I want them to help you, but I also want them to get you prepared for 8th grade." (Caroline, Interview I)

Lex remained concerned about his Spanish class and especially about his perception of the teacher's weak control of the class as well as the method of immersion she used to teach the language. He was frustrated with the amount of Spanish spoken, without explanation during class, and the incessant talking of the students during instruction further irritated him. He elaborated;

Immersing me in the language is really starting to annoy me. I don't think she's a very good teacher and I've known a lot of teachers...first of all, she could explain what she is saying to us in Spanish. She could write it down and you know, tell us what they mean and then second of all, she could at least reprimand us occasionally for talking. (Lex, Interview II)

Lex's intuition about the pedagogical reference here is probably representative of a number of students. The talking may be the class' indicator to the teacher that her pedagogy is lacking. She does not appear to be detecting the cue from the students that the talking is a response to possibly not feeling competent themselves with the language. The teacher's window of opportunity to bring the students back into her circle of attention seemed to be waning.

Lex, Jarod, and to some degree, Caroline, all had insights to share about content and pedagogical competence; Randi and Colleen did not. While none of the students expressed any concern or doubt about any of their teachers' content knowledge, there remained some concerns from Lex, and Jarod about effective pedagogy that affected the way they perceived the overall competence of some of their teachers. Perceived lack of competence had a negative effect on their experiences in the classroom. The good news in their perceptions was that the concerns of each of the two boys were restricted to just one each of their current teachers. Apart from the concerns they had about these two teachers, they seemed happy and contented with the content knowledge and pedagogical competence of their other teachers.

The National Middle School Association (2006) established five goals for the transformation and development of effective middle schools. Included in the five was goal number two: to ensure that all middle school students have access to highly skilled teachers and administrators. The National Middle School Association (2006) claims, "...teachers perform better in the classroom when their professional preparation combines comprehensive knowledge of the subjects they teach, a thorough understanding of effective instructional strategies, and extensive experience putting their knowledge and skills into practice." (p. 15)

It comes as no surprise that *content and pedagogical competence* are critical factors in what and how students learn in the middle school. Wolk (2003) extends this imperative to include classroom management and discipline as very much a part of the teaching process. Quoting a colleague, “The best discipline is a good curriculum,” (Dawson, 2002 in Wolk, 2003) illustrates this point.

The study participants were clear in their expectations of what a good teacher should do in the classroom. They described their teachers as bright, helpful, in control; task oriented and appropriately demanding; challenging, engaging, and knowledgeable. With two exceptions, the Spanish and history teachers, the students were satisfied that their teachers were highly competent in their content areas. In these particular cases, the students felt uncertain and lacked confidence in the teachers and subsequently in their own abilities to perform. It is important to note, however, that they believed the teachers to be highly competent in the content, but sorely lacking in pedagogy. How they delivered instruction was unacceptable to the students. Furthermore, the primarily teacher-focused history class and the seeming lack of control of the incessant talking that was described in the Spanish class was discomfiting to the students. For these students, this is a serious issue worth examining.

Chapter Seven

THEME THREE – STUDENT LEARNING BEHAVIORS AND RESPONSES TO TEACHER BEHAVIORS

Introduction

An examination of the behaviors identified in this theme provides a structure within which one can understand the essence of the students' motivation to learn and their reactions to their teachers' interpersonal and functional/mechanical behaviors in the learning environment. Excising these student behaviors from all the others identified in this investigation provides an opportunity to view them as an entity, but they should be viewed as a significant part of the process of the development of these relationships with teachers.

Young adolescents are very astute observers of behavior. They are just beginning to understand the nuances present in interactions and can be quick to judge the intent of the interactions between people as observers. Often they are very accurate in their assessment of a particular situation and it's possible equally as often they can be mistaken. However correct or incorrect assessments may be, they were used by the adolescents in this study to make decisions about how they would respond to or behave in the presence of their teachers. In my experience, teachers sometimes forget or are unaware of the instinctive powers of their students and are not reflective about how their behaviors affect their students' perceptions of them as well as the subsequent decisions students make about their learning behaviors. Also because the role of the teacher is so powerful in this interaction, teachers can use this power positively to build the relationship, or knowingly and unknowingly misuse this power in ways that are demeaning to students or the teacher-student relationship.

Of shared importance are the behaviors, *Motivation to Achieve*, *Building a Positive Relationship with the Teacher*, and *Critical of Teacher*. This theme encompasses behaviors that represent the students' *emotional and cognitive responses to Teacher Functional/Mechanical Behaviors and Teacher Interpersonal Behaviors*. The three significant behaviors that emerged from the participant interviews described specifically how students described their learning motivation and reacted to the teacher behaviors they observed and perceived while participating in classes with them. Unique from all the other themes, this one expressly identifies the behaviors of the study participants and not those of

their teachers. The reason for this discussion now is to illustrate the interchange between the participants in the teacher-student interaction so that it includes student reactions to their personal experiences of their teachers. This discussion will add depth and meaning to the other themes so that the reader can formulate an understanding of this interaction pattern from the students' points of view.

The discussion of this theme prior to Theme Four: Teacher Reactive Behaviors, implies the existence of a linear interaction between teachers and students (even though such a dynamic in reality would be rare) and places the student reaction where it appears to *begin* in the process of this relationship. In fact the students' reactions to teachers' behaviors occur in a recursive fashion, they don't actually *begin* here, but are continuous throughout the interactions in the relationship. For the purpose of describing the students' behaviors within the context of this theme and in reaction to teacher behaviors, the student behaviors are simply placed here within this discussion. The subsequent discussion of Theme Four: Teacher Reactive Behaviors, will serve to close the circle of interaction I refer to as the teacher-student relationship. The relationship paradigm is representative of a never-ending flow of interaction and transaction between students and their teachers. Therefore the placement of this discussion here is both necessary to understanding the interaction and necessary to defining the relationship and the interactions more clearly. All of the teacher behaviors, student reactive behaviors, and teacher reactive behaviors flow constantly within the dynamic of the relationship. They are not linear, but they are also not random. Each behavior is the catalyst for the appearance of each subsequent behavior.

Dually prominent in this theme were the notions of being *Motivated to Achieve* and *Building a Positive Relationship with the Teacher*. These ideas will be discussed independently of each other so that conceptually they can be made clear and also as they are related to each other since the students indicated a clear connection between their levels of achievement motivation and achievement outcomes as they were affected by their relationships with their teachers. This connection cannot be illustrated clearly without first discussing each of the initial ideas in detail.

Motivated to Achieve

The students' experience of learning is very personal, much like the teaching experience is for teachers. Students come to the setting with great expectations about what their school experience will be like, but most importantly whether or not they and their teachers will like each other. The study participants are known to be good students. They care about learning, about their grades, and about performing well – both by their assessment and that of their teachers. They are highly motivated by recognition of a job well done; pleasing themselves, their parents, and their teachers. At the core of this experience was the study participants' need for acceptance, nurturance, excitement, and opportunity.

These students' experiences of being liked by one's teacher or liking one's teacher play an important role in the teacher-student interaction and thus in the students' motivation to achieve. They make an effort to be liked by doing things that please their teachers and thus make conscious choices about how they act and perform in the class to meet this goal. Every student described being highly motivated to do well and to perform the very best that he/she could.

Interestingly, even though all students admitted to performing better when they felt liked by their teachers or when they liked their teachers, the motivation to do well existed regardless of how they felt about their teachers, how they perceived their teachers to feel about them, or how their teachers behaved in class. Their motivation to achieve was high, regardless of the perceived teacher-student relationship. However, their level of achievement was even higher when they felt liked by their teachers, liked their teachers themselves, and/or liked the content.

For this group of study participants, the desire to succeed and to perform well in any circumstance was influenced by the expectations of others including, parents, teachers, etc., that they would do well academically. Most of the students identified their parents as having high expectations for them, but they all also identified that they feel best about themselves and their achievement when they have performed to the highest standard as they defined it. These students are also motivated by the positive attention provided to them by the teacher. The degree to which these students *actually* perform well, however, is in large measure a function of how they feel about their teachers, their classes, their circumstances, and all the interactions that take place in their relationships with teachers and peers. The imperative to

perform at exceptional levels is the overriding influence in the choices they make about their academic performance.

In this study, the participants were selected based upon their levels of performance and achievement in the language arts. Throughout the study, these students continuously expressed their desire to achieve and to receive teacher recognition for their efforts. In particular, the students often identified wanting to please their teachers, wanting to perform well because they liked a particular content or teacher, and wanting recognition from their teachers for having done well. In fact, it was very important to all the study participants that they were viewed favorably by their teachers, and even most importantly, that they received recognition from their teachers. They liked being seen by their teachers as compliant students, high performers, and desirable to have in class. This is actually different than the idea of being liked by the teacher or having a positive relationship with the teacher. Even though being liked and having a good relationship may be related to receiving recognition from their teachers, the ideas are truly separate from each other. In the absence of the good relationship or being liked, the students will still seek the recognition and validation they crave for their efforts.

All of the study participants enjoy earning good grades and were highly motivated to achieve at high levels partially because of the good feelings they experienced with their teachers, partially because it is what they expected of themselves, and partially because of the good feeling they experienced as a result of a successful effort. When asked from where this expectation arose, the students reported their levels of motivation emerged from the expectations of their parents and those expectations subsequently translated into their efforts to perform in school. Having teachers that continued to have those expectations of them appeared to cause a natural transfer of highly motivated learning behavior from the home into the school setting.

Caroline passionately described herself as being highly competitive among her peers; she wants to perform at the top of the group. When she does well, she feels confident in herself and enjoys that others see her that way as well. She illustrated a perfect example of the expectations she has of herself relative to the class, the teacher, and the circumstances;

I like to get good grades and everything better than my friends...that's just how I am. I don't brag though, but, I don't think Spanish being like not the best subject for me will make me worse in that class. Cause I'll still pay

attention and try to answer and everything. And in Language Arts, I don't think that having the calmness and relaxed make me work less cause I'm so kinda relaxed in that class. I think it will make me work more because I really like the class and I want [the teacher] to be proud of me. I like how he teaches probably all the time. (Caroline, Interview II)

Lex believed that his success and good grades resulted from his hard work and understanding what the teacher wanted. As he had previously discussed, figuring out the 'theme' of the teacher is a task he undertakes when he is beginning to know his teachers. His accomplishment of knowing them well enough to be able to perform in their classes, as they would want him to, is important to his self-perception of adequacy. He prides himself on doing just that;

With my least favorite teacher I am not as motivated to learn because I'm not being somebody that I'd rather be with them. If I'm going to give straight factual answers it's not my favorite thing in the world to do. I'd rather give something a bit more exciting, creative so that sort of motivates me less. But with my favorite teacher, I can give a creative answer and that makes me want to do more which is good...(Lex, Interview II)

Lex had previously discussed his perception of the science teacher as a 'data collector' and he interpreted that to mean that data are dry, factual, and lacking creativity. So he responded to her in exactly that way, factually, and without a creative spin (as he would like) on his responses, both verbal and written. In contrast, he found the language arts class to be more conducive to his creativity in language and he was glad to use it. Interestingly, even though his motivation differed between the two classes and teachers, he still put forth his best effort because he enjoys high levels of achievement.

Jarod matter-of-factly stated that he works in classes and for teachers that he doesn't like because he likes getting good grades. Throughout this study, Jarod was quite succinct in his responses during the interview process. Again, he seemed to be more focused on the function of being a successful student, and less so on enjoying the process, the success or pleasing his teachers. The motivation to get a good grade is paramount;

...just the thought of getting a good grade on it. I just get it over with or else I just need to do it tomorrow night for late credit. (Jarod, Interview II)

Colleen is motivated by good grades to achieve at high levels all the time. Her motivation however, is fueled by her own success. She seems to have this internal drive to

perform and this is what motivates her achievement. Of the five study participants, Colleen was by far the most quiet and reflective in our discussions. She has an intense desire to please the teacher, in my estimation even more than the other participants. So while she describes performing well as ‘giving her energy’ to keep up the good work, I suspect this energy is also drawn from the approval she seeks and perceives she gets from her teachers. She described this scenario;

Okay well...when I get good grades then it makes me want to um do more to get more good grades. It just like gives me energy...it shows the teacher that I have a good understanding of the lesson and that I’m not getting left behind. (Colleen, Interview II)

Randi described a number of different motivations for her achievement in all her classes. This list of reasons why she works as hard as she does varies and includes a personal desire to do well, a desire to meet future goals, and a desire to be perceived by her teachers as a good student. She wants them to feel good about her – and that will set her apart from other students who seem to lack the motivation she proudly displays. Ideally Randi wants the teachers to both feel good about her efforts as well as like her as an individual. However, it seems, based on her goals, that she will elect first to have the teacher’s validation and recognition; being liked, though desirable, becomes secondary. She describes this list in detail;

There’s a different motivation for every class. For Algebra class, my motivation is that I want to do well so I can, in the end, make sure I get into an AP or honors or whatever it is math class. So that’s part of my motivation...and this is also for every class – I also want to make my teachers feel good about me...cause I know there are some people, students in our class who...it seems like they aren’t really trying very hard to impress the teachers and they’re always getting in trouble and the teacher always has to yell at them...well not yell at them per se – but you know separate them from the people they’re talking to all the time or whenever they say a bad word or [are] not participating in class. It doesn’t make me feel very good so...I don’t think they have the motivation and that’s why it’s part of my motivation – I don’t want to end up like that. (Randi, Interview II)

I thought it was interesting that Randi desired to separate herself out from the students whom she decided do not meet the criteria she has determined would cause teachers to be proud of her. Her way of doing that is to perform to her optimum, to achieve their approval, and also

her other goals. There also appears to be a strong competitive component to Randi's performance motivation here. She wants to achieve above and beyond the norm, be recognized as the "best" among her peers, and make her teachers proud of her as well.

Building a Positive Relationship with the Teacher

Diero (2003) suggests that the relationships teachers should form with students are *influential* in nature and are intended to affect change by promoting learning and growth. She specifically identifies respectful behavior as integral to the development of positive relationships between teachers and students and requires teachers to be ethically accountable to students in this regard. Teachers have enormous influence over these high functioning students and this influence appears to have an impact on student motivation and achievement. The students seemed to like the idea of having a good relationship with their teachers. Apart from knowing their teachers and their teachers knowing them, there becomes an intimate connection between the students and teachers each time there is a transaction of learning resulting in a student product. When the student completes assignments, projects, or any classroom related work at the direction of the teacher, it requires that the student take a risk in demonstrating his or her effort to produce a tangible result. Though these students are motivated to achieve at high levels, their motivation is affected by several factors; their internal drive to perform to the best of their ability simply because they *believe* they should, and the desire to please the teacher so that the outcome will be a good grade, good performance, or some form of admiration or recognition from the teacher, and meeting success at competing with peers for teacher recognition and position within the classroom setting. In this section, examples of students pleasing the teacher will illustrate the need and desire of the students to please teachers because they know that in doing so they will have demonstrated their understanding of the teachers' expectations, and thus will earn the mark and recognition indicating so. The secondary gain from this experience for the student is the development of a positive relationship with the teacher. For these students the potential for this positive relationship experience is a condition of their very best effort. If they like the teacher and/or the content, then they desire to please the teacher even more.

Caroline indicated her desire to please her language arts teacher because she wanted him to be "proud" of her. This comment seemed to fit the profile of the young adolescent in

the middle school environment as she begins to transfer her connections to non-familial relationships with adults in the school environment. This is an important developmental task that needs to be accomplished at this age (Dahl, 2003). She also expressed similar sentiments about wanting to work for teachers she likes. Her efforts to do well vary based upon her relationships with her teachers. If she liked the teacher or the subject, she worked hard to please him/her, if not, she still did well, but more for herself than for the teacher;

...language arts...I probably really perform the best because I really like the subject...cause I like the teacher so much, I don't want to disappoint him and so I really try...In Spanish I just do it to get a good grade, kinda...because I don't like to get bad grades and I just do it to do it.
(Caroline, Interview III)

Colleen also sees herself as having responsibility in her own learning, performance and achievement. She believes that if she is compliant, and completes her work with regularity, then the teachers will find it easier and more desirable to assist her when she struggles. She explained;

Well if you act responsibly with your homework and your assignments and you don't really act out or anything then it's easier for them to teach you and help you learn even if you have difficulties with it.
(Colleen, Interview I)

She goes on to say that she believes that in order for students to grow and learn, they must first have positive relationships with their teachers. She believes the good relationship is the motivating factor in students wanting to do well in school. I sensed that she felt a level of responsibility for building this relationship by her own demonstration of effort and responsible student effort. She explained;

Because if you have a good relationship with the teacher, you'll be more influenced to do the work for them and because, I mean if they're your favorite teacher there must be some reason why you like them. I like Mr. B. because he's funny and he puts the fun into the work even when you have to like buckle down and like study for a test [the teacher] makes it fun and kind of turns it into a game. I think it's basically the core of the relationship to have a positive attitude with the teacher. (Colleen, Interview III)

Colleen elaborated further upon her desire to please the teachers when she feels their enthusiasm for the content or for teaching. She also works especially hard for the teachers she really likes and although there are some she doesn't care for as much, she still desires to

work hard. She believes that if a student has a good relationship with a teacher, then the student will be more influenced to work hard for the teacher. For Colleen, the good relationship she may have with a teacher is instrumental in nature. This means that regardless of the presence of an interpersonal connection between her and the teacher, she will motivate the teacher's continued assistance toward her by her academic and behavioral compliance and will be a successful student because she has pleased the teacher. This means she can earn the grades she desires because she is able to successfully manage the teacher-student relationship in a way that both meets the needs of the teacher and satisfies the teacher's academic requirements of her. This makes for an effective transaction between her and the teacher. She describes this phenomenon;

...when they're enthusiastic I like to work for them and so I usually try my hardest but as it gets to the teachers that I don't like, I don't really like to do the work because there's not really any motivation, but I still do it. If you have a good relationship with the teacher, you'll be more influenced to do the work for them and because, I mean they're your favorite teacher there must be some reason why you like them. (Colleen, Interview II)

Lex had very little say about pleasing the teacher, although he did comment that he would feel compelled to comply with requests made by teachers, but his desire to please the teacher was different than that of the girls. He described this phenomenon for himself;

Well the influence is sort of you know, like a teacher for me as a person and not just as a student. Like, I'll listen to what the teacher says. If the teacher tells me to do something and to the best of my judgment it sounds pretty reasonable, well, you know, I'll do it. (Lex, Interview I)

Previously Lex had described that he tried to figure out what every teacher's 'theme' was and that once he had determined their themes then he could choose to interact with them accordingly. This meant that he would perform for the teachers in the way that he determined they would want him to perform. If this method suited his own personality, then he would find enjoyment in the relationship. If not, then he would do what the teacher asked, but nothing more. He illustrates this thinking;

I'm sort of a different person with each friend; I'm sort of a different person with each person. So I sort of mold myself to what they want me to be unless it's somebody – like my favorite teacher or some of my close friends – that I can sort of be what I like to be with them and not so much –

I mean that it's not that I don't *not* like to be what I am with my science teacher, it's just that it's something I'd rather not be... (Lex, Interview II)

I think what Lex is trying to convey here is that he finds he's more comfortable with some people (close friends, favorite teachers) than with others (science teacher) and that he can choose to behave in a manner that he likes rather than in a manner befitting his perception of what he thinks another person would like which is probably counterintuitive for him. I really don't think this is very different than for most people who select friends and acquaintances based upon comfort and common interests. Lex's analysis of how he is with his teachers is no different.

Randi also described the mental process she engages in before she even comes to school each day. She feels deeply responsible for her own choices and behaviors and recognizes that what she chooses to do and say can have an effect on the teacher and subsequently the classroom environment. She described this thought process;

Well I think that when I was coming there I just went, had the feeling in my mind that I really wanted to make today a good day and I really wanted to make my teacher happy. I really don't like to see my teachers unhappy or anything so I try not to upset them. I like to keep them in a happy mood and make them proud of our class. (Randi, Interview II)

As Randi described the effort she engages in to 'make it a good day' I was fascinated by what I would interpret as a perception on her part that she believed as an individual she could exert great influence on the whole of the classroom environment. This description can be likened to the efforts students and teachers make to produce a joint story line as is described in the concept of positioning theory (Barone, 2006; Davies and Harré, 1990). The idea here is that Randi could engage the teacher (and class) in interactive positioning where "what one person says [or does] positions another." By positioning herself to be the 'agent' of positive influence in her class, Randi is, in fact, working to establish a positive relationship with her teacher.

Bruya & Olwell (2006) describe the potential for high levels of motivation through Csikszentmihalyi's concept of "flow." They aver that there is a psychology to how people balance skill, interest, and challenge when engaging in new learning. They claim that when these three factors are in exactly the right balance, student motivation is high. If any of the three are not at an optimum level, then the task will be frustrating, resulting in low levels of

motivation and subsequently, low levels of performance. This finding does not hold true for these study participants since even though they may not *like* their circumstances their performance still remains high, perhaps not optimum, but high relative to other more compromised students. It would naturally follow in a setting where teachers have been successful at creating a highly motivating environment, that students would want to be there, would desire to participate, and would want to please the teacher. As the students described their favorite teachers throughout this study, it became increasingly clear that their experiences of the classrooms of their favorite teachers were places with good “flow.”

Key findings from a research study by Klem & Connell (2004) indicate, “teacher support is important to student engagement in school,” and “students who perceive teachers as creating a caring, well-structured learning environment in which expectations are high, clear, and fair are more likely to report engagement in school.” (p. 270) This study also provided proof of the link between “teacher support, student engagement, academic performance, and commitment,” as well as an “indirect link between student experience of support and academic performance through student engagement.” (p. 270) Equally critical results showed that as compared to elementary students, middle school students were “three times more likely to report engagement if they experienced highly supportive teachers...” (p. 270) but this result is highly influenced by the amount of contact time between teachers and students in schools. In a previous study by Connell & Welborn (1991) as reported within this one, it was hypothesized that more highly engaged students achieve at higher levels because their performance received greater attention from the teacher; thus these students tended to report higher levels of engagement. The hypothesis also included the contrast; that more disengaged students performed less well and received less attention from their teachers, leading the researchers to surmise that the higher the engagement of the student, the higher the level of performance and vice versa. It was apparent from the descriptions of their desire to please their teachers by Lex, Randi, Colleen, and Caroline, that they felt a deep and abiding commitment from at least one of their teachers and the support they felt from that individual was highly motivating to them academically and personally.

All the study participants appeared to be committed to do the best they can in all their classes both because of and in spite of the differences in their relationships with their teachers and/or their perceptions of them. Interestingly, though they stated they wanted to

earn good grades and perform well simply because it was important to them. All of them, with the possible exception of Jarod, seemed to deeply desire the approval of their teachers. Lex makes it his personal mission to respond to teachers, as he perceives they would want him to. Jarod does the work because he wants the good grade and wants to avoid the consequences of late work. Colleen wants her teachers to know she understands the concepts and she wants to please them. Caroline wants her teachers to be proud of her, and Randi desires to be perceived as ‘the best’ by her teachers. While it is true that the students strongly desire to please their teachers and see the need and practicality in doing so, each student, though they had difficulty defining it, could describe their deep-seated need to perform well simply because they *had* to. When probed further about why this was the case, all the study participants explained the desire to do well has always been there. They attributed this to the attitudes of their parents, other adults, and other teachers. They couldn’t explain this desire; it was just *there*.

All of the students reported enjoyment in performing well in school. They like earning good grades and perceive success in doing so as the mark of a good student. They also believe that earning good grades hinges on how well they perform to the teachers’ expectations of them, and thus put forth great effort to please their teachers in the process. It is helpful to the students if they like their teachers. Liking their teachers makes it easier to feel motivated and to perform well. It seems important to note here that Randi, Caroline, Colleen, and Lex particularly seek to please the teacher to garner recognition of their efforts and thus to gain their validation, approval, and ultimately a good grade. This desire to please seems most critical in the students’ perceptions of their positive relationships with their teachers. Of important note also is a desire to connect interpersonally with their teachers, to know them, to have their teachers learn about them (the students) as well and seem to truly want this as a condition of the relationship. However, their *motivation to achieve* is directly affected by the potential final outcome – with or without the personal connection - and seems to dictate the choices the students make in their learning behaviors. If the personal relationship with the teacher occurs then that is an added bonus to the overall experience. My sense of these students is that they *do* seek to have a personal connection with their teachers. With or without this connection however, they will *always* seek approval and validation for their academic efforts.

The Link Between Student Motivation and The Teacher-Student Relationship

This study included a very discrete and unique population of students with a very specific demographic, and among the characteristics of these students appeared to be this intense internal motivation to achieve at high levels. This drive is not to be confused with intrinsic motivation where students *choose* to achieve regardless of any and all influences around them. These students are undeniably motivated, but their motivation is driven by a desire to please others, their teachers, their parents, and ultimately, themselves. They also are driven to exceed the achievements of their peers, in a quietly competitive way, but frequently do so to gain the favor of their teachers.

I also detected a slight bit of hubris in some of the comments made by a couple of the participants. In particular, Caroline remarked during one of our interviews that she enjoyed achieving “better than [her] friends” and then followed up with “but I don’t brag” regarding this accomplishment. Randi seemed to envision herself to be quite powerful in that she perceived herself as potentially influencing the tenor and climate of the classroom by her own behavior and example to other students when she said that she “liked to keep [her] teachers happy and to make them proud of our class,” as though she alone could make it so. Colleen desires to gain teacher approval through compliance with homework completion, paying attention and participating in class, and being responsible. She says it’s the “core of the relationship to have a positive attitude with the teacher.” She feels an intense responsibility for the student-teacher relationship. The secondary gain for the girls in these examples is teacher validation for their efforts. They so desire to stand out and above their peers and to be recognized by their teachers that they will achieve beyond the norm to garner the teacher’s attention. It is in this recognition that they revel in the opportunity to build a positive relationship with their teachers. So while there is an intense desire on the part of the students to achieve well, their achievement is increased when they receive recognition from their teachers for their efforts and that, in turn, increases their positive relationships with their teachers.

Despite the fact that these students possessed an internal drive to achieve well, I felt troubled by the notion that they felt as though they must perform in a prescribed fashion to gain their teachers’ approval since they appeared to be dependent upon the praise and

validation of their teachers. The idea of pleasing the teacher seems to be of even greater importance than that of pleasing oneself. Lex elaborated on this point when describing how he chose to interact with his least favorite teacher. Because he did not like her “data collector” manner and his perception of her more sterile approach to instruction, he responded to her in the way he perceived she would want, limiting the injection of his more ebullient personality into his essays and assignments. By responding in this manner to her assignments, he attempted to please her at the expense of his own preferences, but also hoped to gain the validation he desired through his performance and by earning a good grade. In their own way, Caroline, Randi, Colleen, and Lex, and to a lesser degree, Jarod, all desired to please their teachers seemingly in spite of their own needs and also because of their desire for earning teacher validation ultimately resulting in good grades. In the end, these students are exceptionally astute at ‘reading’ their teachers, knowing what they must do to meet their teachers’ expectations, and following through accordingly. They know how to ‘play school’ and play it well.

Kohn (2005) elaborates at length about the negative effects of what he refers to as conditional acceptance of students in schools and describes the dangers inherent in exactly the kind of acceptance the study participants talked about with regard to two conditions; performance and obedience. The study participants talked frequently about meeting teachers’ expectations through compliant behavior or demonstrating academic excellence, the results of which could be the earned recognition, praise, and conditional ‘acceptance’ of them by their teachers they so desired. Kohn avers that rather than the teacher placing him or herself in the powerful position of granting rewards and valuing students for doing what is expected, the teacher should be working *with* students to collaborate on problems to be solved. He suggests that “accepting students for who they are as opposed to for what they do, is integrally related to the idea of teaching the whole child.” When a teacher is able to convey unconditional love and concern about the personal and moral development of a child to that child, there is no need for the child to have to *earn* the teacher’s recognition and praise through achievement and compliance related behaviors. What is concerning to me in this regard, is that this particular group of students, especially Caroline, Randi, Colleen, and to some degree, Lex, are reliant upon meeting their teachers’ expectations to elicit the recognition they need and thus reinforcing the ‘value’ they perceive themselves to have.

Essentially, these students regularly experience what Kohn would term conditional acceptance; if they perform to the teacher's expectations or obey the teacher's rules then they will receive the validation and praise owed them by the teacher because of their efforts. These students are especially efficacious about meeting the teachers' conditions for approval and validation regularly and thus expect to have a positive relationship experience with their teachers. This acceptance may or may not occur within the parameters of an interpersonal relationship between the students and their teachers, but most assuredly occurs as a result of the students' efforts at compliance with teacher expectations for what they are expected to do in class. The personal relationship becomes a separate matter yet, however untoward Kohn may find this behavior by teachers, it does in fact create what these particular students would define as a positive relationship experience.

Critical of Teacher

Critical of Teacher represents the students judging a teacher's interaction with students or the teacher's functional/mechanical performance in the classroom. Each of the study participants was able to talk about teachers they either did not like or couldn't understand based upon the teaching methods they used or the expectations they had of students in general. It appears to me as though this category is a function of a variety of things. Among these may be unmatched teaching and learning styles, confusing pedagogy as perceived by the students, conflicts in personality between students and their teachers, perceived unfair treatment of students by teachers, and a misunderstanding of the learning needs of students who appear non-compliant or reticent. Often times difficult situations such as these create conflict between the students and their teachers that result in teacher behaviors that could be perceived negatively by students. The study participants shared their experiences of these situations.

Lex talked in detail about his science teacher. For him, this teacher represents a personality type not congruent with his. Throughout our discussions, he frequently elaborated about the idea of not enjoying what he perceived to be rigid, factual, and uninteresting learning experiences being provided by a teacher with similar delivery methods. From the start he sensed his experience in this science class would run counter to his learning style and that the teacher would remain uninteresting to him.

This is the one I [talked about] before who's the data collector. And so this is basically the opposite of my favorite teacher. It's someone who isn't very creative who doesn't think of newer and more inventive ways to do a subject which I believe can either be very stiff and have a lot of quantity in it or can be something that can be really open with a lot of quality in it. And that's sort of a fine line to walk with science so but she sort of edges on the stiffer side. (Lex, Interview II)

Lex seems to enjoy the kind of teacher that encourages his linguistic skills more readily than his technical skills and does so in ways that he enjoys. I believe his response to his perception of the teacher's personality plays more in this experience than does the content.

Jarod was critical of a teacher with whom he has had a number of disconcerting experiences. The teacher seems to display an uneven disposition and Jarod is uncertain about what each encounter might be like. Several times in our discussions he made reference to this teacher as being critical of students and displaying a lack of patience and somewhat volatile response to student behaviors as a way of controlling the environment. In this discussion, Jarod elaborated upon a time he felt this teacher treated him unfairly;

Well from the gym teacher this one time, we were doing those presentations for language arts and I was helping a kid take a, get a ping pong like table back in the gym and he just shows up, like yells at me, "What are you doing in here? Get outa here!" And then I just started walking and I just looked back like that and he said, "Get outa here!" So that kind of felt unfair. I've always really not liked him and now I dislike him more. (Jarod, Interview III)

This perception extends to what Jarod refers to as the teacher playing favorites as well. So he perceives that the teacher won't 'yell at them' or will see them as his 'favorites' and this bothers Jarod. He described;

I know a lot of kids that he's favorites and those kids will tell me like, 'I was teacher's pet' to him. Like they'll know like they're his favorite. Other kids like he won't even yell at them or even say anything. (Jarod, Interview III)

Jarod's criticism of his teachers also extended to his perception of their teaching. For example, he regularly criticized his sixth grade math teacher when referencing the good feelings he has about this year's teacher. His criticism seemed to stem from feelings of abandonment when the teacher required him and his peers to do what he thought was excessively independent work; lots of prereading of content and attempts at math concepts he

had not yet been exposed to. In contrast, he is feeling much more at ease with his current teacher who provides a lot of direct instruction. And this is what Jarod needs. His current history teacher as yet appears to Jarod to be continuing his overuse of humor. Jarod claims he simply wants him to, "...just teach once in a while and stop trying to make jokes." Jarod takes his learning very seriously and wants his teachers to do the same. He learns best with direct instruction and fair treatment by his teachers, as he perceives it.

Caroline carefully observes her teachers and their treatment of all students when she is present and feels strongly about how the teacher should behave towards students. She seems to have an innate sense about the power teachers can wield in the classroom and that they should take great care when dealing with students, especially those who have marginal skills or who struggle regularly. She described the behavior of a teacher whom she perceived to be unfair with students in class;

I think the teacher should be kind of like a mentor cause they're like a teacher in education, but they should also set a good example about how to treat people...some of the teachers are mean to other people who don't do as well so that can teach you, 'Well you don't do as well so you aren't as good as me...' I think they should be nice to everyone and treat them with equality...(Caroline, Interview I)

As Diero (2003) points out, "A teacher's respect and an ethical use of power are key to students' perceptions of caring. With respect, teachers can communicate caring to students when disciplining them, correcting their assignments, lecturing, or playing with them." (p. 63) Caroline perceived this teacher to be misusing power in an oppressive way with students who struggle. Regarding how she felt about this interaction, Caroline stated;

Well it just makes me really mad to the teacher because I mean there's no point to doing that and I feel really bad to the other person and it doesn't really effect like my grades or anything, but my relationship with the teachers doesn't get any better. (Caroline, Interview I)

When I asked Caroline if the teacher was able to redeem him or herself when she observed these instances, she replied in the affirmative. Yet she also qualified the response by saying, "...the experience is always with me." In the end, she remains hopeful the teachers will not engage in such behaviors in the future and that it *is* possible they won't.

Randi expressed criticism and concern about how her teachers dealt with students who are difficult and noncompliant. She illustrated an example of a one boy whom she

believes cannot learn in the traditional classroom setting. Her experience of the teachers when he is in their classes is that they are frustrated, that they don't understand how he learns, and this causes them to dislike him. Randi suggested that this child might best learn in some other way and goes on to talk about how teachers should deal with this;

The teachers don't really like him because they don't understand that's how his brain works cause everybody, I think they have an individual brain, and that's their learning type. They don't understand that's the way he works. They don't understand why doesn't he behave like other students and why doesn't he love school too? I know some kids don't love school, they at least give it a try. Why doesn't he do that anyway? So they [the teachers] are continually mad at him and they are wondering why. As soon as they realize that his brain is maybe not the brain for school, maybe it's more for outward experience, then I think maybe they can accept him better. (Randi, Interview III)

Once again, I am intrigued by Randi's assessment of a classroom situation and the relationship between a student and the teachers. She perceives the anger and frustration on the part of the teachers and suggests that part of the solution is to take another view of him and his learning style, and to determine another course of action for teaching him.

Caroline, Randi, Lex, and Jarod could elaborate upon experiences they had with teachers whom they did not like or could not connect with positively. Sometimes this was a result of their own interactions with the teachers and other times the negative feelings resulted from observing a negative interaction between the teacher and another student. Whatever the case, the students' opinions about their teachers when their experiences were upsetting settled into their memory and possibly influenced future interactions with their teachers.

These students are clearly *always* observing and assessing teachers' behaviors with them and their peers. During this assessment, the students make decisions about their teachers, how they feel about them, how their relationship is affected by their observations, and how they will choose to participate in a relationship with their teachers. Teacher- student relationships are affected by a multitude of behaviors and observable interactions. How a student feels in the teachers' presence and in the teachers' classrooms very likely directly impacts how they will perform in school.

Throughout this study, the participants recognized the influential nature of their teachers and were openly critical of behaviors they felt were counterproductive in the

classroom setting. In particular, Jarod and Caroline elaborated on stories of their experiences of unkind behavior by their teachers. While their performance was not personally affected by the teachers' behaviors, their relationships with them were reportedly less trustful and more distant, and Caroline most assuredly was offended on behalf of her peers who were, in her perception, the victims of teacher criticism and lack of respect. Since the study participants are highly motivated to perform well in all their classes, they continued to put forth the effort to succeed because of and in spite of their perceptions of their teachers' interactions with them and their peers. It was interesting to note that while Caroline and Jarod experienced a negative interaction with a teacher, they both iterated that they have a high level of tolerance and forgiveness for the teachers' transgressions toward them or their peers. In other words, they seemed to accept the human condition and human relationships as fundamentally flawed, and that teacher-student relationships do not exist without occasional consternation.

Chapter Eight

THEME FOUR – TEACHER REACTIVE BEHAVIORS

Introduction

This theme represents the *emotional and thinking responses* engaged in by the teachers as perceived by the study participants in response to the **Student Behaviors**. Three significant behaviors emerged from the participant interviews that describe specifically how teachers reacted to the student reactive behaviors as the students observed and perceived the behaviors to occur while participating in classes with their teachers. These three behaviors will be addressed in detail. This fourth and final theme adds further depth to the understanding of the teacher-student relationship and the dynamics present in this interaction.

In theme three, discussion centered around how the students reacted to the behaviors of their teachers as the teachers instructed and interacted with them. The behaviors in this theme extend this interaction back to the students from the teachers in a transaction of behavior. It is important to reiterate here that all these behaviors are interactive and run concurrently throughout the process of teaching and learning. They are not linear, and thus do not begin and end in a predictable linear fashion. The process of exchange is recursive and continues to occur, repeating as the interaction unfolds.

An examination of the behaviors identified in this theme provides a structure within which one can understand the essence of the teacher reactive behaviors in the teacher-student relationship. Excising these behaviors from all the others identified throughout this investigation provides an opportunity to view them as an entity, but care should be taken to see them as a part of the bigger picture.

As this theme emerged during my interactions with the study participants, there were some clear and undeniable connections to be made between these behaviors. First, the students unequivocally perceived their relationships with teachers to be conditional; meaning as they understood them to be, teachers do not and possibly cannot accept students unconditionally. Every student believed they must perform at high levels or behave as their teachers expected in order to receive their approval and acceptance. The girls appeared to be more engaged in approval seeking with regard to their teachers; the boys appeared to see the relationship as more businesslike and less personal.

Second, there appears to be a strong connection between conditional acceptance and trust of students. Trust appears to be a factor in teacher acceptance of students whereby the perception of the students was once trust between them and the teachers was established, teacher acceptance appeared to follow. Colleen, Lex, and Randi provided detailed descriptions of their experiences of trust with their teachers in this regard. Being trusted by their teachers allowed them to feel valued and important in that transaction.

Critical of students encompasses behavior by teachers as perceived by students to be critical of student behavior and performance but also may include inappropriate forms of humor which appear to have a connection to teacher control or power over students in the classroom. Jarod experienced some excessive teacher criticism that resulted in a negative influence on his perception of the teacher. Caroline vicariously experienced teacher criticism of her peers that elicited an indignant feeling in her and colored her perception of the teacher. Randi experienced negative humor both personally and vicariously and influenced her feelings about the teacher as well as her performance in class. These behaviors are directly related to conditional acceptance of students and play a significant role in the students' experiences of their relationships with teachers. The core behavior in this theme is *Conditional Acceptance of Students*. The behaviors *Trusts Students* and *Critical of Students* directly connect to the first.

Conditional Acceptance of Students

The behaviors that imply a *Conditional Acceptance of Students* represent how teachers' caring behaviors toward students are related to student performance, achievement, or acceptable student behavior. The students perceived their acceptance by teachers to be contingent upon their fulfillment of teachers' expectations and not the result of an unconditional love for them. For this study, an unconditional relationship was defined as one where the people in the relationship are able to accept each other without any conditions or limitations. So, the data represent what students believe to be true about their acceptance by teachers. When asked about whether or not teachers could *unconditionally* accept students, the study participants struggled with this idea even though it was pretty clearly defined.

Kohn (2005) discusses the imperative of unconditional teaching and the impact of this practice on students in the classroom. He claims, "Unconditional teachers are not afraid to

be themselves with students – to act like real human beings rather than crisply controlling authority figures.” The teacher-student relationship is an opportunity to treat students with respect and acceptance and to view this relationship as holistic. He further states,

“Accepting students for who they are – as opposed to for what they do – is integrally related to the idea of teaching the whole child. That connection is worth highlighting because the phrase “whole child” is sometimes interpreted to mean “more than academics,” which suggests a fragmented education. The point isn’t just to meet a student’s emotional needs with this activity, her physical needs with that activity, her social needs with something else, and so on. Rather, it is an integrated self to whom we respond. It is a whole person whom we value. And to do so in any way that matters is to accept children unconditionally, even (perhaps especially) when they screw up or fall short.”

Jarod suggested that parent relationships with their children and teacher relationships with children are fundamentally different. He attributed this difference to the longevity of the two relationships. He explained that parents are with their children from birth and teachers only have a one-year relationship with children. This distinction in Jarod’s mind, makes it difficult for teachers to unconditionally accept their students. He explained;

I think that’s what their goal is, but I don’t think it’s possible. Cause your parents have been with you from the very beginning and that’s their job to raise you and love you, but the teacher’s job is just to teach you for one year. (Jarod, Interview III)

Initially Caroline believed it was possible that teachers could accept their students unconditionally. But the more she discussed the idea, the more she seemed to think that teacher-student relationships were conditional and that teachers could not accept their students unconditionally. She then qualified her thinking by placing a condition on the relationship. She described the relationship in an if-then format and then judged the teacher’s acceptance of students to be possible *if* the teachers were able to take a risk on the students. She described this thinking;

I think it’s possible...but I don’t think a lot of teachers do that cause they have what they like. Everyone has what they like and some students are just complete opposite and they’re like, wow I just don’t like this student but I think they should give everyone a chance. Sometimes they don’t cause they have different perceptions of what a student should be in their class. Like I think they should always, *always* give the student a chance.

They might not like them at the moment but they should always, kinda like parents, they should always love you; they might not like you, but they should always love you...something you did, but they still love you. If like a teacher's really accepting and gives everyone a chance, then that's a lot better. They're really putting themselves out there and letting students be who they are I guess...(Caroline, Interview III)

In the end, Caroline really did not think that teachers could accept their students unconditionally. I think she wanted to believe it was possible, but couldn't ignore the idea that teachers might prefer some students over others. Yet she felt that teachers were obligated by their roles to give every student a chance. This expression of her thinking conveys the message that she perceived teachers choose to like some students and not others.

Colleen did not seem to understand the definition of unconditional acceptance even though it was defined for her in this discussion. Her initial response to the question of whether or not teachers can unconditionally accept students was yes, but then she qualified her response with a list of conditions. She described her thinking;

Yeah, it's possible...if they do their work, if they pay attention in class, and they keep a positive attitude and they're open to what the teacher is going to do or how they're gonna help them to learn, then I think, yeah it's gonna be possible. (Colleen, Interview III)

Colleen's thinking about the possibility of unconditional acceptance seems to be related to students pleasing their teachers. If students are successful in pleasing their teachers, then teachers will accept them 'unconditionally.' It appears that Colleen's thinking about true unconditional acceptance is confused.

Colleen is not alone in the confusion about unconditional acceptance. Caroline likened this acceptance to meeting project criteria. She drew the comparison between students meeting the criteria of a project for a specific grade as though using a rubric, to students meeting some predetermined set of teacher criteria to win their acceptance. She described this thinking;

...just like on projects you have to meet certain criteria for your project to be good...as a student you have to meet certain criteria in their class for them to think, 'Oh this person's hardworking. I like this person because they do...*this* or they're more outgoing than this other student, and I really like that in a person.' (Caroline, Interview III)

Again, much like Colleen, Caroline described the conditions under which some students may be accepted by their teachers and these are based on teachers' preferences or on the students fulfilling the criteria for teacher acceptance.

Osterman, (2000) discusses both the human need and educational necessity of a sense of belongingness in schools. Through her evaluation of several studies, she concludes that,

...when children experience belongingness or acceptance, their perceptions differ in predictable ways and these perceptions are associated with psychological differences. When children experience positive involvement with others, they are more likely to demonstrate intrinsic motivation, to accept the authority of others while at the same time establishing a stronger sense of identity, experiencing their own sense of autonomy, and accepting responsibility to regulate their own behavior in the classroom consistent with social norms.

There is considerable evidence in the literature that unconditional acceptance of students is an important concept in the relationship between teachers and students. During the process of data collection, serious consideration was given to defining this concept for the students so that they could understand unequivocally what kind of acceptance of students by teachers we were discussing. However, it was unanimous among the participants that unconditional acceptance of students by teachers was perceived to be a virtual impossibility. The reasons the students gave for this belief are largely based upon their experiences of school, achievement, motivation, and certainly recognition by their teachers and parents over their 12 or 13 years of living. As high achieving students, these young adolescents pride themselves on 'meeting the teachers' expectations' and performing to a level that earns the recognition of a high grade. Jarod did not perceive that the teacher's 'job' was to *like* students, but was supposed to *teach* them for only a year. It's simply a job. Colleen, while initially believing that teachers could accept students unconditionally, proceeded to enumerate the list of conditions under which students could be 'unconditionally' accepted by their teachers. Caroline at first thought it possible, but then quickly compared the acceptance of a student by a teacher to meeting the criteria of a project. Lex did not see unconditional acceptance as a possibility where teachers are concerned because he perceived the bond between parents and their children to be more likely associated with unconditional love and acceptance. Randi believes that there are "ranges" of students who are more accepted by teachers than others. These ranges tend to be defined by varying degrees of student

compliance and successful performance in the school setting. In effect, none of the study participants seemed to believe that they or any other students were or could be unconditionally accepted by their teachers.

Lex's thinking about unconditional acceptance was similar to Jarod's in that he suggested there are different 'rules' about parent versus teacher acceptance of students. Lex referred to the parent-child bond as something simply unattainable between teachers and students, and uses that belief to support his argument that unconditional acceptance of students by teachers is impossible. He also described the difference in the purpose of the adult-child relationship for parents and teachers. He explained;

I don't think that a student can be accepted unconditionally. I think the reason why parents accept [them] unconditionally is because a child is part of the parent literally and I think having a baby is probably an experience that sort of bonds a little bit. A teacher and student it's not the same plus a teacher has a, I don't want to say a job to do, cause of course, parents have a job to do too, but a teacher is trying to...has a curriculum to do it. A teacher has to obey certain rules ... (Lex, Interview III)

Randi painfully parsed the realm of possibility with regard to the kinds of students teachers could choose to accept 'unconditionally.' She suggested there is a "range of students" that are acceptable to teachers and that students who fall outside either end of this range are less preferable in their teachers' eyes. She elaborated upon this line of thinking;

There's the student who doesn't really like school but he goes or she goes anyway and just gets it done and they love them just because they're getting it done. There are the whole people in between, the people who like school and get it done, and there are people who like school but aren't getting it done and they love them just because they like school and they want them to do better. Then there's the person at the top who absolutely loves school and is doing a good job and in between that range, those are the students that the teachers usually love. (Randi, Interview III)

I believe Randi sees herself as a "person at the top" and enjoys the approval and acceptance of her teachers. Even so, she is performing in ways that she might perceive her teachers to desire so that she can continue to enjoy their acceptance of her.

Osterman, (2000) discusses both the human need and educational necessity of a sense of belongingness in schools. Through her evaluation of several studies, she concludes that,

...when children experience belongingness or acceptance, their perceptions differ in predictable ways and these perceptions are associated with psychological differences. When children experience positive involvement with others, they are more likely to demonstrate intrinsic motivation, to accept the authority of others while at the same time establishing a stronger sense of identity, experiencing their own sense of autonomy, and accepting responsibility to regulate their own behavior in the classroom consistent with social norms. (p. 359)

There is considerable evidence in the literature that unconditional acceptance of students is an important concept in the relationship between teachers and students. During the process of data collection, serious consideration was given to defining this concept for the students so that they could understand unequivocally what kind of acceptance of students by teachers we were discussing. However, it was unanimous among the participants that unconditional acceptance of students by teachers was perceived to be a virtual impossibility. The reasons the students gave for this belief are largely based upon their experiences of school, achievement, motivation, and certainly recognition by their teachers and parents over their 12 or 13 years of living. As high achieving students, these young adolescents pride themselves on ‘meeting the teachers’ expectations’ and performing to a level that earns the recognition of a high grade. Jarod did not perceive that the teacher’s ‘job’ was to *like* students, but was supposed to *teach* them for only a year. It’s simply a job. Colleen, while initially believing that teachers could accept students unconditionally, proceeded to enumerate the list of conditions under which students could be ‘unconditionally’ accepted by their teachers. Caroline at first thought it possible, but then quickly compared the acceptance of a student by a teacher to meeting the criteria of a project. Lex did not see unconditional acceptance as a possibility where teachers are concerned because he perceived the bond between parents and their children to be more likely associated with unconditional love and acceptance. Randi believes that there are “ranges” of students who are more accepted by teachers than others. These ranges tend to be defined by varying degrees of student compliance and successful performance in the school setting. In effect, none of the study participants seemed to believe that they or any other students were or could be unconditionally accepted by their teachers.

In their experience, all of the study participants agreed that teachers conditionally accept students and this acceptance is contingent upon the students’ compliance with teacher

expectations. They shared a number of experiences of their teachers that illustrated this point. Because of their perception that teachers only love students who comply or perform well, they do everything they can to meet their teachers' demands and seek their teachers' acceptance of them, even when it is challenging for them to do so. These students fear the possibility of rejection by their teachers and so will do whatever is in their power to remain in the teacher's good favor as they perceive it.

I found it interesting to note that Jarod and Lex indicated the differences in the relationships between students and teachers, and the students and their parents are based upon the bond between parents and their children, and the length of time children are known by either adult. They both perceived that there are different rules under which these two relationships occur. Teachers have this 'job' for only one year; parents have this responsibility for much longer. It could be inferred from their understanding of these two relationships that the parent relationship is 'personal' and the teacher relationship is 'business.' Diero (2003) would likely agree with the idea of a businesslike relationship between teachers and their students. She avers that the teacher-student relationship is "influential" and is formed for the purpose of "affecting change" or causing growth in the student. These relationships are also terminal, meaning that once the change is accomplished, the teacher's job is done and the student moves on. The parent relationship, on the other hand, continues throughout the lives of the students. As their teacher relationships terminate, the parent-child relationship continues.

All three of the girls, Caroline, Colleen, and Randi, indicated that the acceptance of students by teachers hinges on several factors. To gain teacher acceptance, students must first meet the 'acceptance criteria' determined by teacher expectations, and they also must maintain a high level of performance to meet those expectations. In other words, there is no room for error. Only when the girls meet the conditions, implied or expressed, do they see the possibility of being 'unconditionally' accepted by their teachers. Kohn (2005) describes this kind of acceptance of students as "debilitating." He elaborates upon the dangers of teachers accepting students based on their performance or their obedience and decries the dangers of both. He avers that children are entitled to experience unconditional acceptance by teachers *regardless* of their levels of performance or obedience. It is unconditional

acceptance that encourages healthy self-confidence and the belief that one brings value to whatever circumstances one finds him/herself. He says;

My point is not that we shouldn't value, or even celebrate, accomplishment. But paradoxically, unconditional teaching is more likely to create the conditions for children to excel. Those who know they're valued irrespective of their accomplishments often end up accomplishing quite a lot. It's the experience of being accepted without conditions that helps people develop a healthy confidence in themselves, a belief that it's safe to take risks and try new things. (p. 22)

It was deeply concerning to me that the study participants did not feel unconditional acceptance by their teachers as it was defined in this discussion. Equally concerning was the degree to which I sensed the girls, in particular, determined their self-worth by how well they were accepted by their teachers based upon their performance and compliance.

Critical of Students

The notion *Critical of Students* represents teachers judging a student's performance or behavior in class. Students elaborated about situations in which they observed or were part of the criticism by a teacher toward a student.

Caroline was passionate about how she felt about this when she observed it. It was terribly upsetting to her that a teacher would convey to a student, as she perceived it, they were less valued or important in the teacher's eyes. She believed that the teacher should not show disdain or impatience when students were struggling, but rather should be more helpful to them. She described;

...one of my teachers would look down on the students who weren't doing good. Instead of like really trying to help them just like help them to do something, sometimes he'd like point it out in the middle of class and make fun of them kinda which was kinda mean, I thought. (Caroline, Interview I)

Caroline's perception of how teachers should offer help and support was clearly different than how she perceived this teacher to be with her peers. She views this teacher's behavior as unfairly critical of students.

Randi was concerned about the way one of her teachers treated students in class. She repeatedly discussed liking this teacher's sense of humor, but also was concerned that she or others could become the butt of one of his jokes. She did, in fact, personally experience that

situation. She has remained concerned throughout our discussions about the frequency with which this teacher brings attention to her peers and her friends through the use of humor.

She described what I would define as sarcasm in this interaction;

The only reason why I don't like him is because he makes fun of kids, not just me, it's just that he makes fun of other kids and for some people he does it repetitively. Like my friend Wally...he is really a bright kid and he likes to give long answers so [the teacher] has a joke about him that nobody else gets that joke, it's that if he keeps talking like that he's never going to get a date! And all the girls laugh at him. He's very embarrassed and I feel bad for [him]. (Randi, Interview III)

About this experience for the selected students, Randi perceived that they laughed along with others because they were trying to cover for their feelings of embarrassment and uncertainty.

She described her experience of this phenomenon;

I can tell they [the students] just do what I did, they just laugh cause the rest of the class is laughing at them and inside they're really hurting cause it's not their fault...he has an individual joke for everybody...for other students he keeps picking on them whenever they do something wrong. (Randi, Interview III)

Gauging the reality of how others feel in these circumstances can be difficult for even the most perceptive individual. True or not, Randi is vicariously experiencing what could be termed subtle abuse by the teacher so this is her reality. Though she might deny this definition, her uncertainty about how she responds to this teacher has colored her choices in the classroom. She is unwilling to take an academic risk that might result in her own embarrassment as the victim of his humor. In her diary, Randi used the word, "wary" when describing her personal experience of this teacher and claimed to be quiet when observing this humor with other students. She said, "I'm always watching him so intently," as a way to protect herself from his criticism, and also because she is afraid of doing something wrong. She described that she would no longer respond in class unless she was absolutely certain her response would be correct to avoid the teacher's embarrassing criticism. In her final statement about this discussion Randi made reference to her own embarrassing experience with this teacher;

...ever since then I have made an effort to become invisible. I don't mean to just become totally invisible. I just don't want to say anything without being exactly sure that this is the right answer. (Randi, Interview III/response to diary)

Nesbit & Philpot (2002) described the concept of emotional abuse in the context of classrooms and claim that teachers can be unaware of the impact of their own behavior upon impressionable children. They aver, “Emotional abuse is rarely defined by a single incident or remark. Although individual acts can be abusive, emotional abuse usually describes an ongoing pattern of interaction.” (n.p) In classrooms, students are a captive audience and have little power in the context of the relationship. These researchers go on to say, “Classroom interaction with teachers is a powerful shaping influence, and emotional abuse can seriously undermine the process of psychological development.” (n.p.) The degree to which these students have experienced damaging humor in the classroom either personally or vicariously can potentially have long lasting effects on how they feel about themselves and on their psychological welfare.

Though Jarod has experienced criticism by a teacher, he doesn’t put a lot of stock into that experience. He described a situation earlier where he was criticized by a teacher while returning a ping pong table to the gym, but seemed to have the capacity to dismiss the experience as the ranting of a teacher. He didn’t seem to take the experience personally and thus seemed largely unaffected by it. Even though his feelings about the teacher are not positive he makes a conscious choice to not let this bother him. He says;

I just feel what I felt when that happens to me, like, oh well, it’s just a teacher. Just yelling at you once isn’t really going to affect you for the whole school year.

I can’t explain how it is that some students are more vulnerable than others to teacher criticism or humor, or how some students may be better equipped to manage these behaviors by teachers when they occur. For a few of these study participants it may be an important concept to be addressed with teachers when any reports of potentially damaging behavior toward students occur.

This belief is further supported by what the students frequently observed as criticism of students by teachers. This criticism, often delivered in the form of humor, could be construed as biting or damaging to a student’s welfare. Caroline, throughout our interviews was concerned about the criticism of her peers by teachers and, although she herself was never a target, she experienced a defensive and empathetic reaction to what she observed. Randi, a victim herself, was deeply affected by being teased by a teacher and subsequently

consciously decided that she would withdraw from the relationship, and now only will take calculated risks in the class. Her fear of embarrassment at the hands of the teacher has become the deciding influence in her verbal participation. Lex, while also not a victim per se, sees this humor as fun and does not construe it as victimizing students. He takes a less empathetic view of the experiences of others in this regard. Jarod accepts that “it’s only a teacher” delivering the criticism and that he will not be permanently damaged by it. Even so, any form of humor or unfair treatment that can be potentially damaging personally or vicariously is problematic in the classroom. It creates an imbalance of power between teachers and students and disrespects students.

Sylwester (2001) reports that students typically seek to find both a sense of humor and fairness in their teachers, but have difficulty defining both of these qualities. Acceptable humor can be a difficult thing to gauge when considering the various developmental levels of middle school children. He posits that there is more to humor in a teacher than just telling jokes and can be used as a safe and acceptable way to bring control back to a situation or to assist a student in his/her need to return to a normal range of behavior while saving face. He writes, “A sense of humor in a teacher involves more than simply telling jokes. Rather, it seems to deal more with a teacher’s ability to pleasantly communicate that current behavior is approaching the edge of what’s considered normal and/or acceptable.” (n.p.) Using humor to maintain classroom control is quite different than using humor as an instructional tool. Sylwester (2001) refers to two other forms of humor often used in the classroom, kidding and sarcasm. “The term kidding is often positively associated with a teacher’s sense of humor. Sarcasm isn’t. To be effective, the indirect language and intonation of kidding must imply a genuine love of and respect for the person being kidded, even though the actual words may suggest negative connotations.” (n.p.) This is the form of humor that the study participants frequently made reference to. Even though they are mature and bright for their ages, developmentally they interpreted this behavior in their teachers in very different ways, causing them to be critical of the teachers. Humor in the classroom at the expense of a student’s feelings creates a hostile learning environment and causes students to feel unaccepted or unloved by their teachers.

Of the five study participants, the most passionate about this phenomenon in their experience were Randi and Caroline. They were deeply affected by how this teacher

behavior affected students and felt strongly about their perception of this as unjust. Jarod was less affected by this teacher behavior and seemed to be able to let go of the potential negative effects of the behavior. Lex and Colleen did not talk at all about their experiences of this in their classes and therefore seemingly did not have an experience to report during the interviews. The sensitivity of students to potentially damaging ridicule or sarcasm must be taken into consideration by teachers when dealing with students of all ages but in particular with students at this developmental level where they need and desire acceptance by their teachers and peers and are easily embarrassed by negative attention brought to them, especially in the form of teacher criticism.

Trusts Students

The degree to which students perceived their teachers trust them is defined as *Trusts Students*. These behaviors represent teachers allowing students freedom in the classroom based on previously acceptable behavior or performance. Being trusted by the teacher appears to be important to the majority of the study participants. This trust seemed to manifest itself in the form of freedom within the classroom and in independent activity. The students shared various examples of their experiences of trust.

Trust, the more affirmative category in this theme merited a good bit of discussion from the study participants. Colleen held this quality in very high regard from the start of the data collection process. Her interpretation of trust development between her and the teacher was related to her having earned it from the teacher and she sees it as the “core of the relationship.” Once she felt trusted by the teacher, her trust of the teacher increased. It was very important to Colleen that she earned this trust early in the relationship. Randi interpreted trust in the teacher’s actions to allow a group of students to participate in a classroom activity that was unplanned. Jarod believed that his teacher caused him to be more independent because he trusted him to do more work at home. Lex described freedom within the classroom in the form of trust – that students could make good decisions about their behavior given the freedom to do so.

Haskins (2000) discussed the relationship between ethos and pedagogical communication in the classroom. He defines ethos as, “the perceived degree of character or credibility that a person believes exists in another person or object.” (n.p.) Developing this

ethos requires that teachers communicate effectively with their students. The first dimension of ethos is trust,

...in a classroom, both student and teacher need to operate in a climate of trust where each can place confidence in the other, as is the case when a student elects to confide in a teacher. The student may trust the teacher to refrain from disclosing particular information or may trust the teacher to provide sound guidance on personal or academic matters, for instance. Trust must be earned through the pedagogical communication process that teachers display with their students. Any violation of this trust can potentially rupture the professional relationship that teachers need to maintain if honest dialogues are to occur. (n.p.)

Trust is further enhanced between teachers and students when teachers tailor their messages to the developmental level of students and do so with sincerity and honesty. The degree to which trust was felt and shared varied by participant regarding their teachers. Most of the study participants reported feeling trusted and trusting with at least one of their teachers throughout the data collection period.

Lex described how his teacher trusted students to sit on the couches in the back of the room to read and to remain on task while doing so. He enjoyed the idea that his teacher provided this opportunity to students to break free of the constraints of a traditional classroom setting to enjoy some independent reading. I think Lex truly felt as though his teacher trusted his ability to remain focused during this activity with minimal intervention and direction from the teacher. He described this experience;

Well when you go to sit and read on a couch...it's...that's where I always go when I want to read or lay in bed, but, um, if you, if you're sitting in a chair, it's and the chair's hard, they're metal and they're hard and rigid; I've never liked them...I always think we should have chairs like these [points to the soft chair he is sitting in] so, but when you sit on the couch it's warm and comfy and it makes for a better reading environment and if you look around and you look up and you can see that everybody's absorbed into their books and there's not even a little background chatter and there usually always is; everyone's absorbed and everyone's just sitting there reading...(Lex, Interview III/response to diary)

Randi described an experience with her science teacher who chose to forego the daily lesson to allow students time to play with the class pets, two turtles. Randi perceived that because the class successfully negotiated the class without harm to the turtles, that the teacher now trusts the students more;

I think now that means she is going to let us do more hands on stuff cause most teachers are just out of the book teachers and I think that...well my opinion has stayed the same, I really, really like her...but now I think we are going to do more fun activities because she trusts us...she probably trusts us enough to do other hands on things too. (Randi, Interview III)

Randi also judged this teacher's actions to be among the "kindest things a teacher has ever done." Allowing students the freedom to explore and to demonstrate they could be trusted may likely have played into the teacher's decision to give this freedom to her class. Randi's perception of the goodness of this experience has elevated this teacher to a higher level in her mind. She eagerly awaits other positive experiences in this teacher's class and believes she has earned the teacher's trust.

Colleen believes that, "...good positive relationships with the teachers [are] basically built on trust." In one of her classes, the teacher allows the students to self-assess their performance when reporting their grades to him. She sees this behavior as trusting her to be honest with him and with herself about her performance. She elaborated further on this idea;

In [the teacher's] class when we do our homework, he lets us grade ourselves like he gives us a ten, he lets us give ourselves a grade. If we think we did a good job we would give ourselves a 10 out of 10 or if we had a couple of mistakes we would give ourselves a 9 out of 10...(Colleen, Interview II)

In a previous interview, Colleen elaborated on her beliefs about the development of teacher trust for students. In that discussion, she posited that if teachers trust students, then students will be able to trust teachers in return. Again, she alluded to performing well as a way to earn this trust from teachers. She explained;

...if you get good grades or you interact with the teacher responsibly they can trust you to do little errands for them. If they need like some paper or something or they would ask you like...they're trusting you. Well then if they trust me, then I would obviously trust them because they're the teacher and adults usually keep their words longer than children. (Colleen, Interview I)

Only Caroline and Jarod did not elaborate on the issue of trust in their relationships with teachers however, the other study participants did share a variety of situations where they perceived the development or evidence of trust in their relationships with their teachers. The issue of trust is important to the degree that students can predict what their teachers

expect of them and will allow them to do independent of their direction. For these students, this is important in a positive school experience. Their performance is directly influenced in part by how well they perceive their teachers to trust them.

Within the context of this experience for the students is the desire to both trust and be trusted by their teachers. Trust by itself, however, is developed as an end result to a number of conditions these students described they must meet in order to earn it. As they perceived the development of trust, they saw themselves as responsible for meeting the teacher's expectations first. Once this was accomplished, they believed trust would follow. This trust is fed by their continued trustworthy effort as perceived by the teachers. None of the students seemed to believe that teachers could naturally trust their students first. The students seemed to think it was within their realm of responsibility to earn it first.

Willie (2000) describes confidence, trust, and respect as three preeminent goals of educational reform. In his writing, he defines the three terms and places them within the context of a classroom and teacher-student relationship. The three cannot exist without each other. He posits that students cannot learn from teachers they do not trust and teachers cannot teach students in whom they have no confidence. He describes all three and their interconnection to each other;

Confidence is an activity based on faith—a faith that each student can learn something of value if one is taught in a caring way. Confidence and praise generate a sense of significance in students, enhance their motivation and contribute to a bond of loyalty between the dominant teacher and the subdominant pupil that is both supportive and sustaining. Trust is based on reliable evidence that the other accepts one as one is before attempting to initiate change in behavior, that the other respects one's whole being and is interested in one beyond a specific utilitarian purpose. When the other, by word and action, demonstrates that one has been accepted just as one is, the accepted person or group can depend on the other without fear of betrayal. Respect... is an outcome of how confidence and trust are implemented. Teachers who have unconditional hope that their students can become all that they are capable of becoming genuinely empathize with them through their adversities and failures and through their victories and successes. These teachers are respected by trusting students because of the way teaching services are rendered. Students who have unconditional faith that their teachers will not abandon them despite their level of achievement are more inclined to perform at their peak to show their appreciation for the teacher's confidence. Students who keep trying and accomplish as much as they are able are respected by hopeful teachers for their genuine efforts.

It is through the relationships of respect, confidence and trust that we transform a learning environment into a genuine learning community.(n.p.)

Esquith (2007) eloquently talked about the imperative to build classrooms based on trust and not fear. After many years of teaching in a Los Angeles neighborhood filled with fear and violence he concluded that building trust within his classroom was central to student success in learning. He shared,

I've recognized that by improving the culture of my classroom, the ordinary challenges are navigated far more easily. It's not easy to create a classroom without fear. It can take years. But it's worth it. While most classrooms are based on fear to keep the kids in line, our classroom is based on trust. The children hear the words and like them, but they are only words. It is deeds that will help the children see that I not only talk the talk but walk the walk. (n.p.)

Trust is clearly a necessary component in the development and sustenance of a positive teacher-student relationship. The students need and desire to be trusted by their teachers, and in turn perceive that teachers also want to be trusted by them.

Chapter Nine

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

The overall purpose of this study was to uncover a deeper understanding of how high performing students experience the phenomenon of building relationships with their teachers in school. Decades of research on this topic provided a wealth of background information and offered a springboard to this investigation. The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the understandings of the student experience of the teacher-student relationship from the perspectives of the students, to discuss what was learned as compared to the current research, to elaborate upon the potential implications of the study for the teacher-student relationship, and to provide direction for possible future study of this phenomenon.

Research Question One: Meaning, Structure, and Essence of the Teacher-Student Relationship

Research question one examined students' perceptions and understandings of the teacher-student relationship experience. This question was answered through the use of semi-structured interviews conducted by me. The students also completed entries in a diary over a month long period to further elaborate on their experiences.

As experienced by students, the meaning, structure, and essence of the relationship between students and teachers is elaborate and complicated. The students perceive this relationship to be influential in the academic development of students based upon a number of factors. It was important to these students that teachers know them and things about them; that they know their teachers to the degree that would enhance learning; that students understand what is expected of them in the classroom; that teacher behavior and expectations are predictable; that teachers are helpful; and that treatment of students is fair. These interpersonal behaviors as perceived by the students, seemed to form the structure around which students could develop a relationship.

The meaning of this relationship seemed to place the teachers and students together in a functional role; there is a purpose to the relationship, it begins and ends in a specified

amount of time, and throughout the process of the relationship the students expect academic growth to occur. The students essentially see the role of the teacher in this regard as preparatory – to get them ready for the next steps in their learning.

The essence of the relationship was more difficult to define. The students seemed to identify this as a ‘feeling’ about their teachers. Sometimes the feeling was a good one and other times, not, but it was a sense they had about their teachers – a way of knowing how to interact, what to expect, what to do, and how to connect in a meaningful way with their teachers. This essence is understood early in the relationship and motivates the students’ learning behaviors in and out of the classroom. It was critical for these students to know their teachers, for their teachers to know them, and to use this familiarity with each other to influence the students’ performance in school. It was also important for the students to be able to trust their teachers in ways that make them comfortable in the learning environment. In other words, students developed trust of the teachers by being able to predict how to act based upon knowing their teachers and this provided the opportunity to have a positive relationship with them and be successful.

These findings confirm the evidence available in the literature about the purpose of the teacher-student relationship and the finite nature of the relationship. (Buttner, 2004; Diero, 2003; Wubbels, et. al., 1997) Knowing their teachers and teachers knowing them gave the students a frame of reference to make decisions about their interactions with their teachers. San Antonio (2007) further supports the idea that teachers should know their students and reported through her research that students want their teachers to “see them for who they are.” (n.p.)

Diero (2003) posited that the teacher-student relationship is not established for mutual satisfaction or for self-fulfillment. “Rather, teacher-student relationships are formed to promote learning and academic growth within students. Relationships formed for the purpose of affecting change in one party are called *influential* relationships. [italics in original] Appropriate caring in these relationships is demonstrated quite differently.” (pp. 60-61) The students seemed to believe the teachers’ behaviors and interactions with students were the most important components of a successful learning relationship and the students saw their teachers as catalysts of change. The influence of the teacher in this relationship creates the impetus for students to learn.

Diero (2003) cited the work of Bennis et.al. (1968) in support of this discussion and identified several characteristics that distinguish this influential relationship as different from other caring relationships. The first is, the teacher-student relationship is planned and learning activities are intentionally designed to encourage student academic growth. Second, at the successful conclusion of this relationship, (usually at the end of a school year) the relationship ends. Third, the power between students and their teachers is “asymmetrical.” The teachers hold most of the power and how they use that power determines how students perceive them in the relationship. “Influential relationships define the connection between change agents and their recipients, as in doctor-patient and lawyer-client relationships.” (Diero, 2003, p. 61) Teachers are the change agents in the students’ experience of school. However there is a limit to how well teachers and students should know each other. Although the students expressed a desire to know details about their teachers, their purpose for knowing was to enable them to know how to interact with the teacher as well as to be able to perform as best they could. It was important for them to know enough about the teacher to succeed in the class. Helpful teachers also create an environment in which students can grow and learn.

Diero (2003) explains that the teacher must ethically use the power granted the position to help students grow. Teachers who respect the way children learn are, “...treating children with dignity [which] means honoring their position and their abilities, and seeing them as worthy of esteem.” (p. 61) Being helpful to students was critical to engaging them and ensuring success for those who needed and received help. A contrast to helpful bordered on criticism of students and would occasionally appear as a lack of patience or low tolerance by the teachers when students did not perform well or appeared confused. Evidence in the literature confirms the positive and negative aspects of these characteristics in the teacher-student relationship as well as the effects of both on the learning environment.

Buttner (2004) identified a number of other behaviors as showing respect in the teacher-student relationship. Included among these behaviors are recognition of student perspectives, showing sensitivity toward students’ concerns, treating students with kindness, offering help and responding to questions, affirming students’ contributions to class, being honest and truthful with students, and responding non-defensively to challenges and questions. In contrast, she also identified behaviors that show disrespect to students. These

include insensitive treatments, lack of help, defensiveness, unfair treatment of students, and failure to respond to student learning needs. Throughout the study, the students identified a number of their teachers' behaviors as both respectful and disrespectful to them or their peers. The students elaborated upon a number of examples where they personally experienced the kindness and sensitivity of their teachers; from extended timelines on homework assignments, to sensitivity about the loss of a pet, to validation about student work and effort – these behaviors caused the study participants to feel particularly respected and valued by their teachers. In contrast, the students also shared a number of stories of concern when they perceived their teachers to be insensitive to them or their peers by publicly humiliating them, embarrassing them in class, or being unfair to students. These behaviors were perceived by the study participants to be disrespectful and potentially damaging to the students.

Wubbels, Levy, & Brekelmans (1997) concluded that, "...a teacher's interpersonal skills are crucial to creating and maintaining a positive working climate. Essentially, effective teachers have to be excellent communicators as well as fine technicians." (p. 82) Teacher respectful behavior in the classroom establishes a learning atmosphere most conducive to student success and is the source of a trusting and caring relationship with students so essential to student growth. The teachers that the students perceived to be respectful were liked more than those who were perceived to be disrespectful. Throughout the study the students elaborated frequently about their *preferences* for teachers who were empathetic and helpful, who created a positive climate, and emanated an air of respect for students in the way they treated them. They also preferred teachers who were skilled technicians; who could deliver instruction to a variety of learners, and had command of the classroom. As high performers, these students were less affected by these characteristics than less successful students might be and they performed well all of the time. However, their performance motivation was *enhanced* if they felt positively about their teachers' interpersonal and technical skills and they could describe how differently they would perform in such cases with stunning clarity.

Research Questions Two and Three: Teacher Characteristics and Positive or Negative Impact on the Teacher-Student Relationship

Research questions two and three examined students' perceptions of the characteristics of teachers in their relationships with them. These characteristics could be positive or negative as perceived by the students and could have positive or negative effects on the teacher-student relationship. This question was answered through the use of semi-structured interviews with me and the students also completed diary entries over the course of a month to further elaborate on these experiences of their teachers.

The students identified a number of characteristics they expected to find in their teachers and discussed the behaviors associated with these definitions at great length. Characteristics such as providing appropriately challenging instruction, being in control of the classroom, using creativity in instruction, and demonstrating pedagogical and content competence were identified by the students as behaviors they would expect of teachers in the execution of the *act* of teaching. In connection with the interpersonal behaviors most associated with the development of the relationship one other behavior holds importance in the students' perception of good teaching. The employment of a sense of humor played heavily in the students' perception of the classroom experience. The students identified both positive and negative characteristics of most of these behaviors in their teachers.

The opportunity for the study participants to make choices in the completion of their assignments was an important strategy teachers used to engage students in the learning process. In doing so, students were able to expose more of who they are in the completion of class and project work. As one example, the first project all the study participants had to complete was open-ended, allowed for personal choice and creativity, and validated the individual talents of each of the students. This creative opportunity supported an environment that was highly engaging and motivating to this group of students. As San Antonio (2007) suggests, "Recognition of all sorts of skills—creative, mechanical, physical, and interpersonal—is important in helping students develop an overall sense of engagement in school." (n.p.) Each student had a choice about how to share his/her individual talents and each became deeply engaged in this particular assignment.

Brophy (1987) established that students are more willing to work in school when they appreciate the value of the classroom activity; when they believe they can succeed with reasonable effort and suggested a list of strategies and behaviors teachers should engage in to motivate their students. Learning activities that provide appropriate levels of challenge, and appeal to student affect further motivates young adolescents. All the students could identify assignments and projects that were highly engaging or painfully boring. Young adolescents seek high interest learning activities that engage their sense of adventure and natural curiosity (Lorain, 2006). The study participants were no exception. If their teachers invited them to participate in meaningful projects, the students were highly engaged and enjoyed participating. The example of the first language arts project where all of the students had the opportunity to describe some skill or talent about themselves was an example of a meaningful and highly engaging project. Meaningful learning requires that students are able to immediately connect it to their lives in ways that make sense to them.

Contrasting the positive characteristics, the study participants identified a number of negative characteristics that impacted the students' perceptions of their teachers and the learning environment. Among these characteristics were the perceptions that teachers could be critical of the students in negative ways. Concerns about teachers showing their frustration or impatience at students' lack of understanding or success; inappropriate or damaging sarcasm and humor directed at students also contributed to the concerns students had about their own school experiences or those of their peers. None of the students experienced what has been defined in the research as *unconditional acceptance*.

Literature from several sources suggests that teachers should work to provide unconditional acceptance to their students (Diero , 2003; Kohn, 2005; Noddings, 2003; Osterman, 2000; San Antonio, 2006; Wolk, 2003) Kohn (2005) also describes unconditional teaching and the impact of this on the classroom; "Unconditional teachers are not afraid to be themselves with students – to act like real human beings rather than crisply controlling authority figures." (n.p.) The teacher-student relationship is an opportunity to treat students with respect and acceptance and to view this relationship as holistic. There was no confirming evidence within this study that these students experienced unconditional acceptance by any of their teachers. However, based on their compliant and obedient nature

and their academic success, they very often felt liked by their teachers and subsequently accepted as a result.

Sylwester (2001) reports that students typically seek to find both a sense of humor and fairness in their teachers, “A sense of humor in a teacher involves more than simply telling jokes. Rather, it seems to deal more with a teacher’s ability to pleasantly communicate that current behavior is approaching the edge of what’s considered normal and/or acceptable.” (n.p.) In circumstances where students may have been ‘approaching the edge’ of what is normal, the study participants observed instances where teachers inappropriately used humor and subsequently embarrassed or upset the students. According to Caroline, Randi, and Colleen, using sarcastic humor is never an acceptable way to deal with students or to affect a change in student behavior as perceived by the students. Although frequently effective in changing student behavior, it becomes a misuse of power that is damaging to the student personally as well as the teacher-student relationship.

Research Question Four: Student Motivation and the Teacher-Student Relationship

Research question number four examined the concept of motivation from the students’ perspectives and the impact of the teacher-student relationship on the students’ performance in school. To answer this question, I used semi-structured interviews with the study participants and student diary entries to gain an understanding of the students’ experiences.

This particular group of study participants is motivated to achieve at high levels but their internal motivation is borne out of a sense of duty to themselves and others. They derive great pleasure from earning high grades and achieving well. They also tend to seek approval from their teachers as a result of their performance. Interestingly, this approval seeking seemed to have a direct connection to what I defined in the study as the conditional acceptance of students. The reality for the students in this study is that they perceived their acceptance by teachers as conditional and as needing to meet certain criteria before their teachers could accept them. The literature was replete with evidence supporting the need for unconditional acceptance in classrooms. (Diero , 2003; Kohn, 2005; Noddings, 2003; Osterman, 2000; San Antonio, 2006; Wolk, 2003) What the students described in this study was indeed the opposite of that.

Kohn (2005) discusses unconditional teaching in the context of "...accepting students for who they are as opposed to for what they do..." (n.p.) and is separate from the performance of other behaviors in the classroom that encourage learning. However, accepting students unconditionally is extraordinarily important to the enhancement of the classroom environment. Students are imperfect individuals; accepting them as they are permits them to make mistakes in a safe environment and is far more desirable than an environment of criticism.

Osterman (2000) frames unconditional acceptance in the form of belongingness. She posits that, "When children experience positive involvement with others, they are more likely to demonstrate intrinsic motivation..." (p. 343) In schools where students are accepted, or have approval from others, they are more likely to achieve at higher levels, and in effect, are happier at school and with themselves. Osterman also suggests that one of the biggest obstacles to belongingness in schools from the perspective of teachers is the belief that belongingness has to be earned, and that teachers make a mistake when they believe that belongingness follows achievement as opposed to the other way around. This study confirms that these students experienced exactly this false belief. In fact, it would seem that these students have been operating under this belief for many years, very likely since they have entered school. It is quite possible this thinking is generational. As the students described how their parents had expectations of their performance in school, I wondered if perhaps they might have been priming their children to comply with and obey teachers' expectations. Then as the students received positive feedback for having performed this way, their behavior was conditioned over the years to continue in the same way. Thus, the students *learned* this behavior first from their parents, then it was reinforced in school and so they have continuously earned their belongingness over the years until they have become quite efficacious at meeting their teachers' needs as well as their own achievement goals. These students therefore, have fallen into the thinking that their belongingness is the result of their achievement. The students in this study did not believe their teachers could accept them unconditionally as this concept was defined for them. Thus, approval seeking through the choice behaviors of compliance and high performance became the hallmarks of acceptance seeking behavior by these students. There was no confirming evidence in this study that these students believed their teachers accepted them unconditionally.

Regarding motivation, the students, as was previously mentioned, enjoyed being motivated to do well in school. In fact, none of them will accept anything less than high grades from themselves regardless of the classroom circumstances, their relationships with their teachers, and any other influences that may surface in the course of their work. Lack of high performance is simply unacceptable. Klem & Connell (2004) indicate, “teacher support is important to student engagement in school,” and “students who perceive teachers as creating a caring, well-structured learning environment in which expectations are high, clear, and fair are more likely to report engagement in school.” (p. 270) Most of the time these students saw their teachers as caring and supportive in the school environment and thus they responded to the teachers with high levels of motivation and attention to their class work. However, Connell & Welborn (1991) posited that more highly engaged students achieve at higher levels because their performance received greater attention from the teacher. Receiving attention from the teacher frequently was mentioned as having a highly motivating influence on these students. These students enjoyed receiving the attention from the teacher for their efforts and this further motivated them to continue the good work.

According to Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (1990), “Every person is a psychologist” [and] “...we all relate to one another based on personal theories of human behavior.” (p. 15) They further suggest that these theories are products of an individual’s unique life experiences. In schools, teachers as well as students apply theories of behavior to relationships. In social psychology, and in attribution theory specifically, the interpreter of behavior assigns meaning to social behavior. Cognition, feeling, and behavior as a triad within this theory must be in balance. When cognitions change, so do the other two. When teachers interpret student behavior positively, they assign esteeming labels to the students. The students in this study read their teachers for clues about the expectations on their social behavior and deliver accordingly so that this cycle of encouragement continues. For other students whose behavior is interpreted negatively, teachers may assign demeaning labels, and thus students respond accordingly. For those students, a cycle of discouragement becomes a daily social experience. Changing these patterns requires an adjustment in cognition, a reframing of thought or a recasting of an idea from a negative attribution such as ‘stubbornness’ to ‘persistence’ in order to change the cycle. The students in this study are

clearly caught in the cycle of encouragement; their positive behaviors are reinforced by their teachers, thus causing them to continue to perform in positive ways.

A Theoretical Understanding of the Interaction Pattern Between A Teacher and Student:

During this investigation, it became apparent that teachers and their students form interaction patterns in their relationships with each other. These patterns are established early in the relationship and become predictable within a short period of time. Throughout the interview process, the students talked at length about getting to know their teachers for the purpose of informing their own decisions about how they would behave, comply, and perform in the teacher's class. During this process the students would employ a number of already refined strategies involving perception and intuition to help them make these decisions. Once accomplished, the interactions between the teachers and the students would be practiced and refined, much like the steps to a dance, in a fairly short amount of time and then would become the basis for informing all future interactions between them.

Gladwell (2005) studied a phenomenon he refers to as "Thin Slicing," also defined as rapid cognition. This behavior is what people engage in when making snap decisions about numerous topics, but for this discussion in particular, about human behavior. Thin slicing specifically engages the use of the individual's subconscious mind or intuition in making decisions. These decisions may involve a multitude of relational life choices such as whom to be friends with, how to 'read' another individual, or to determine what one would want to see or have in a relationship with another person. Gladwell (2005) claims that the most common and important forms of rapid cognition are "the judgments we make and the impressions we form of other people." (p. 194)

Gladwell (2005) avers from his extensive study of this phenomenon, "The giant computer that is our subconscious silently crunches all the data it can from the experiences we've had, the people we've met, the lessons seen, and so on, and it forms an opinion." (p. 85) The student-teacher encounter in schools is the perfect example of this phenomenon in the early development of this relationship. In every case, the study participants made a decision about their impressions of their teachers during their first encounters with them at the beginning of the year. I was surprised to discover the impressions they developed in that

first week continued to hold true at the time of the third interview. Very little had changed between them a month after school began. When I met with the students for member checking in late January and February, a full five months after the start of the school year, they reported their impressions of their teachers still had not changed much from the start of the year. The initial impressions held true even at that point and became even more refined and detailed. The relationship each student had with his or her teachers was developed from the first experience of that interaction between them at the start of the relationship. In other words, the students probably made a decision about each of their teachers and how they felt about them within the first week of school, maybe even in the first few days. The decisions they made were based upon the sum total of their life experience brought into the school setting as the year began. That initial impression of their teachers continued to fuel the interactions in the relationships. Thus, the interaction patterns were developed in the first few exposures and were established quite early. At the most basic level of human understanding, students (and their teachers) make decisions about each other as a result of their first encounters utilizing the unconscious mind to ‘thin slice.’ These initial decisions motivate all future interactions.

Hamre & Pianta (2006) illustrated a conceptual model of Student-Teacher relationships previously developed by Pianta (1999) based upon developmental systems theory. This model includes three major components; the features of the individuals in the relationship (teacher and student), the processes by which they exchange information, and the external influences of the larger system within which this one exists. They summarize the model accordingly;

...in student-teacher relationship, both parties bring an assortment of goals, feelings, needs, and behavior styles that will ultimately affect the quality of the relationship they form and, in turn, influence the value of their experiences with one another in the classroom. These relationships may be further enhanced or constrained by external factors such as the climate and physical features of schools and classrooms. (p. 62)

As teachers and students interact in the classroom, a predictable pattern of interaction emerges from daily contact. These patterns of interaction established between students and their teachers become the roadmap for all other future interactions and are established early in the relationship. While there are predictable patterns in each relationship they are unique

because each relationship establishes an individual pattern. Even though there were five individuals in this study, four of these students interacted with a majority of the same teachers daily. Their common experiences yielded some similar and some varied reactions to the teachers, but each of their relationships is unique and thus, they have their own patterns of predictable interaction with their teachers. The predictability of their interactions motivates their perceptions of their teachers and thus, their perceptions of the relationships they have with their teachers.

In the classroom this interaction plays out most clearly within the structure of a lesson. During the lesson, a *transaction* occurs between the teacher and the student whereby the teacher provides instruction, the student learns during the instruction, the teacher perceives the student's learning and readiness to proceed further, and so on. From the students' perspective another thing occurs. The student *reads* the teacher for clues; clues about how to react, how to behave, how to perform, and what to do. Complying with the perceived expectation is what the students in this study do well. They have perfected the "*read*" and thus have learned how to quickly determine what it is the teacher wants. In transacting this way, the students earn the teacher's validation, further motivating their continued engagement in the learning until the interaction re-engages the next time. This pattern is established early in the relationship, very possibly within the first week of knowing one another. So, while the teacher assesses student readiness, learning, and progress, the student also assesses the teacher and what must occur in order to have a successful transaction. The successful transaction, as defined by the students in this study, is a resulting good grade for their efforts.

Discussion of Findings

As a result of this investigation several ideas have come to light and cause me to reflect upon their importance in the development of teacher-student relationships. These ideas are both surprising and provocative and a few were not at all what I expected to learn from the students during this study. Even so, these ideas are vital to understanding how this population of students experiences the development of these relationships with important adults in their lives and further impresses upon me the critical nature of this relationship in

the lives of children. It is my intent in this section to discuss my interpretation of these findings.

The first of these findings is the notion of rapport development between teachers and students. Rapport is an important concept and necessary to the establishment of a seemingly successful teacher-student relationship. In my teacher training experience and professional years of service, rapport development has always been at the forefront of relationship development with students. That said, my experiences have always varied from one to the next, as some children have been easier to negotiate relationships with than others. As a young teacher, connecting with kids right away seemed of critical importance to me and this idea was certainly reinforced throughout the discussions I was privileged to have with the study participants. But the connections here seemed to result in more functional or transactional relationships, not relationships of affiliation, as I would have expected. The students, though they desired to be affiliated with their teachers on an interpersonal level could forego that kind of relationship as long as they could meet their academic and achievement needs. For me this was an interesting and unexpected outcome.

I have often heard that first impressions mean everything, but as a construct, I have always seen the idea as simply that – an idea and nothing more. In fact, try as I might, I resist the temptation to make decisions about the people I meet or the feelings I have about people upon first encounter to define my thinking about them but I believe it is truly impossible to do so. It is a social reality that we all experience; the interview, the first meeting, the daily “face” we wear, all represent an impression that we try to present to others. Schools are no different. They are filled with ‘first contacts’ resulting in ‘first impressions.’ In fact, probably no other institution in the world stages more first contacts than schools on their first days. What an opportunity this represents! The students in my study were keen observers of their teachers on the first days of school. They watched, perceived, and listened for all the clues they would need to succeed in their classes. They paid attention to how they felt and how they reacted to their teachers, and their teachers to them. They instantly began to gauge the interaction as it was occurring, collecting bits of data, interpreting and making meaning of the whole of the experience so that they could be successful. What was stunning to me was how quickly they decided what effort would be required of them in order to meet their academic achievement goals. Though I couldn’t put

an exact timeline on the resulting decisions they made, it was certainly within the first few weeks of the school year. These decisions certainly confirm findings in the literature regarding how cognitions impact choices and behavior (Brendtro, et.al., 1990; Gladwell, 2005). What I learned to be true for this group of students was that their achievement driven motivation was the force behind their behavior and not the relationship itself. The relationship, while also important, is secondary to learning how they need to function in the classroom. For these high achieving, highly academic students, the relationship is a means to an end. Being a high achieving student, with the ability to learn fairly easily, places these students in a position quite different from other, less academically able students.

The second idea emanates from the notion of the teacher-student relationship being a transactional one for this group of students. A transactional relationship is really quite businesslike. I think of a transactional relationship as a relationship of conditions. ‘If you do this, then I will do that,’ simply illustrates how this transaction occurs. It also implies some balance on either side of the transaction and that both actions have equal merit or equal weight in the final analysis. It is also not necessarily a ‘goods for services’ transaction where a purchase is made because the expectation is always that the goods will equal the value of the purchase price placed upon them and if the product does not meet expectations, then it can be returned for replacement or repair as an agreement within the transaction. In interpersonal relationships, the transaction is built on trust. The trust is established based on what each party understands to be true about the other party’s behavior so that the reaction to each other is a risk taken based on trust. An example of a simple transaction probably sums it up best. You are walking towards the door from the outside. A perfect stranger approaches the door just ahead of you. Common courtesy and the mores of society dictate that the person who approaches the door first generally opens and holds the door for the other, in this case, you. Your response is to smile, say thank you, and walk through the door being held for you. The person holding the door waits for you to pass and says, “You’re welcome.” A simple transaction has just occurred. No interpersonal relationship is established as a result (usually) and no further expectations occur. Yet, both parties gave or received something in that brief moment.

In the classroom, the study participants and their teachers learn about each other in ways that help them to develop trust about how each of them will act in the presence of the

other. Based upon this trust, they will expect things of each other; the students will expect teachers to teach – to explain content, to provide direction, to entertain, to be humorous, to command the class; and the teachers will expect the students to learn – to do homework, to be compliant, to obey, to behave. As long as both the teachers and the students meet each other's expectations, the transaction will occur and provide a positive experience for both parties.

Edel (1985) elaborates extensively on the idea of the “pedagogical encounter” between teachers and students and places the relationship between the two along a continuum of increasingly independent learning behaviors. He references philosophical descriptions of this relationship from the perspectives of Oakshott, McClellan, Bruner, Skinner, Socrates, Aristotle, and others, and makes the case that the relationship is a transaction between an adult and a child that likens itself to that of a parental influence in the younger years to a more equal adult relationship in the later years as students progress through the educational process. In the end, however, the result is a *transaction* between teachers and students resulting the transmission of information, knowledge, and a way of living that is literally handed down to the next generation. The questions he raises, however, revolve more specifically around *how* this transaction will occur in the future, how its purpose will change, and by what means. Though somewhat sterile, this description fits the kind of relationship the students in this study are experiencing with their teachers. There is a purpose to the relationship; the end becomes defined as the outcome of the learning or the grade; the means is the process of interaction through which it occurs.

The idea of a transactional relationship is in stark contrast to what I expected to learn from this study. I expected that the students would be interested in a strong affiliation with their teachers, and to have an interpersonal relationship with them as an important part of their school experience. This is not to say that being affiliated is not important - it is, just not the primary goal. What this tells me for this group of students is that their adult relationship needs are very likely being met by other adults in their lives, and that teachers, while important to them, are not the only important adults in their lives, so they can afford to be even more discriminating than other students might be in the establishment of these relationships. So because these students are bright, and come from highly supportive situations with involved and engaged parents, their need to seek affiliation with teachers is

slightly less than their need to meet their academic goals – which can only occur with a successful transaction between them and their teachers. If a relationship of affiliation occurs, then that makes the achievement experience even better, but it is not the primary goal.

If I think about the multitude of students I have come to know over the years, I would be hard pressed to think that all of them would feel this way. In fact, the students with whom I typically have the most contact are those who struggle, who feel helpless, who are less able, and consequently less successful in school. They also come to school with less ‘relationship capital’ than the high achieving students and thus are very distrusting of adults in general. Yet, they so desire to have relationships with adults and frequently seek out these affiliations in the most unpleasant ways – negative attention seeking, trouble making, and uncooperativeness are the hallmarks of their behavior. But I am almost always surprised at the depth of their insights about people in general and their teachers in particular. They are extremely perceptive too but because they do not see themselves as efficacious students, they expend their energies having personal conversations in the principal’s office or in the counselor’s office, where someone will listen and attempt to help them connect to positive activity. They know their relationships with their teachers are conditional, which is why finding even one adult to connect with can be so critical in helping them to build internal assets and resilience. The high achieving students already have access to a number of internal assets, and are extremely efficacious students, so their need for the adult relationships in schools is comparatively less than that of the marginal students.

The Search Institute (1995) provides a wealth of research-based information to parents, communities, and schools about what efforts and activities are necessary to building internal assets and resiliency in youth. Scores of articles, stories, community groups, websites, and faith-based literature have cited, in particular, The 40 Developmental Assets crucial to healthy youth and the empowering ability of establishing these assets within them. In particular, the students in this study seem to already possess a number of the assets that can be identified with the categories of good parenting practices; providing *Support*, *Boundaries*, *Structured Activities*, *Modeling Educational Commitment*, *Positive Values*, and *Helping [their children] to develop Social Competencies*. The study participants frequently referred to the expectations of their parents and other adults when discussing their achievement expectations. They also felt supported by their parents who often helped with

homework, encouraged their participation in healthy school activities, and valued learning. It's truly no surprise that the *need* for relationships of affiliation with school adults is less prominent for this group. Thus, they can choose to expend the majority of their energy and focus on their school achievement. In contrast, the students with historically less academic success come to school with significantly less support and thus seek those relationships of affiliation first. Schools are in the undeniably difficult position of having to develop those protective factors in the students who come there lacking them. Thus, it would seem fair to say that the study participants are products of a highly supportive home environment that encourages their continued high levels of motivation and achievement.

Benard (2004) in her study on *The Project on High Performing Learning Communities* discovered specifically how the teacher-student relationship can provide the kind of nurturing children need in order to develop resiliency. This study suggested "...well documented support for an educational approach based on meeting young people's basic psychological needs – for belonging and affiliation, a sense of competence and meaning, feelings of autonomy, and safety." (p. 66) For these students, having an affiliation with a teacher who demonstrates *caring*, who *maintains high expectations with a 'no excuse' philosophy*, and *demonstrates a belief in the student while providing mutual trust and respect* - while it will not replace what may be missing from the home - will encourage resiliency development. Naturally, the students with less relationship capital and fewer internal assets would first seek the affiliations with adults so desperately needed before they can even begin to expend energy on learning. The idea strikes at the very heart of meeting what Maslow (1908-1970) so keenly defined as a child's safety and belonging needs long before one can begin the move towards self-actualization.

The third idea is one that I have known all along, and the results of which really did not surprise me in the outcome of this study. It is the notion of how students perceive the treatment of other students by their teachers. I learned many years ago that students watch *everything* we do; what we say, our moods, what we wear, how we talk, even what we eat. They are very curious about knowing 'things' and tidbits of information about their teachers. The classroom is a community. Students live there for a period of time every day. They live with their peers who sit on one side of an imaginary line within the community while the teacher who leads this community is typically seen as sitting on the other side of the line. As

these students have moved into young adolescence, they have formed a common bond; they are of the same ilk, a culture of their own. Even though they may be very different from each other, they are also very similar in their feelings, fears, and vulnerabilities and they see the teacher as having the ultimate authority within the community of the classroom. Having ultimate authority is a very powerful position and the students ascribe this position to the teacher. Teachers should not take this position of power lightly. It can be used to humor and engage children or shame and humiliate them. Both of these extremes were observed by all of the students in this study.

One of the things that I learned from these students was the depth of empathy and feeling they had for others. They were passionate about their ire at seeing their peers being mistreated by teachers. As they perceived the interactions occurring, and the criticisms or humiliations of students being performed by teachers, this had an extraordinary impact on how the students felt about their teachers. Their passion and the depth of their empathy also touched me. But I was equally surprised and heartened by the depth of their forgiveness. Even though they despised this behavior by their teachers, and were angry at the moment, they also were able to forgive it and to see it as part of the human condition. Even so, vicariously experiencing this wielding of power over students was unnerving for them in the moment that it occurred. I think teachers need to be ever mindful of the power they have in the classroom and over children in general. Being astute to how students are responding to what one says and does is extremely important to fostering positive relationships with students whether they are relationships of transaction or affiliation.

Furthermore, it would be well for teachers to take the time to reflect on how their behaviors impact the welfare of students – both those whom they criticize and those who watch. Also connected to the behavior of criticism of students is that of the use of humor in the classroom. Humor can be a powerful tool in instruction and in classroom management but should be used cautiously and judiciously by teachers. I could empathize with the feelings of the students who were embarrassed or hurt by the misuse of sarcasm by their teachers. Biting, personal sarcasm has no place in the classroom. When a teacher uses his/her power to be sarcastic with a student it effectively breaks the relationship as well as the hope for a future affiliation with the student. Trust is lost as well is the hope for getting the most out of the student. It is not always easy to know who among one's students might be

most sensitive to criticism or humor, but it would seem the best practice for teachers is to act as though every student is the most sensitive and make instructional and relationship decisions based on that belief.

Possible Implications for Teachers

It was hoped that the results of this study could be used in the training of educational professionals. In particular, pre-service teachers, current practicing teachers and administrators could benefit from developing their awareness and understanding of the importance of the teacher-student relationship and its impact on students. As such there are several potential ideas that can be gleaned from this study and may be used in action research, professional discourse, and exploration in an effort to improve the quality of the teaching/learning experience for children and for their teachers. They would be best applied in a hypothesis testing mode designed to determine if the implications hold true in other settings with different populations of students.

First of all, it is important to note that even though this population of students appears to seek the transactional relationship ahead of the interpersonal affiliation relationship with their teachers it does not diminish the fact that teaching and learning is a personal human experience and these students do enjoy having that affiliation when it occurs. This was a very discrete sample of students defined by a very specific demographic. Thus, the ideas described here are not able to be generalized to the larger population. Also, it is important to remember that other students may or may not have similar needs to those in this study. That said, the following suggestions are merely intended to further develop a teacher's ability to increase awareness of his/her effect on students in the classroom, to further develop the reflective skills within teachers necessary to professional self-improvement, and to cultivating interpersonal efficacy with children.

Since rapport development and 'first impressions' are key to the initial development of the teacher-student relationship, what might occur first is a discussion among teachers as professional development to examine the concepts of rapid cognition and thin-slicing introduced by Gladwell (2005) in order to increase awareness of the thinking and decision-making that occurs in the minds of students and teachers in the critical first days of relationship development. With that thinking in mind, professional staff and administration

may choose to plan and execute a student-friendly opening of school with developmentally appropriate activities that invite the flow of communication between teachers and students, teachers and parents.

Examples of student friendly activities include thoughtfully planned stress reducing transitions (i.e. from elementary to middle schools) meetings in small groups with parents, students, and teachers; personal communications from teachers to students such as post cards, letters, and phone calls prior to the first day; orientation activities and opportunities for conferences; all for the purpose of being available to students and parents, and making the first experience a welcome one. Thereafter, teachers might reflect daily on their relationships with their students and to work at maintaining the developing relationships through continued communication and openness to the students and parents they serve.

A second suggestion for teachers to gain insight into their personal impact on students is to employ a data-gathering tool. This form of action research allows the teacher to collect baseline data, make adjustments based on the results and collect the data again over time. A survey such as the Questionnaire for Teacher Interaction (Wubbels, Levy, & Brekelmanns, 1997) used extensively in research for the last several decades has proved extremely useful in helping teachers to know how well they are doing both interpersonally and technically as perceived by their students. Administering such a tool periodically throughout the year may help teachers to monitor and adjust their own behavior in the classroom and with their students. Teachers who do this kind of personal research on their effectiveness also send a clear message to their students that their improvement is as important as the students.’

Another option that has gained tremendous notoriety in the recent decade is that of the *Responsive Classroom* (Rimm-Kaufmann, 2006). The *Responsive Classroom* approach to instruction involves the use of both academic and social-emotional learning, is research based, and, as the research suggests has made an enormous impact on both interpersonal relationships in schools and student achievement. Widely used in elementary schools, a middle school model also exists. Even using the Class Meeting component has been known to increase interpersonal relationships and conflict management between students, between students and teachers, and within the classroom community. *Responsive Classroom* offers professional development and training throughout the summer months but requires a significant commitment on the part of school leadership and the school community to

undergo the training and to implement programming. It is a school-wide climate intervention and when done well, will yield tremendously positive results. This idea is a bold commitment. Certainly much professional discussion and solid discourse among staff should be encouraged if such a commitment were to be made to explore this philosophy and to integrate it into a school's culture.

One of the most compelling concerns raised during this investigation resulted from the perceptions of students that were shared regarding the notion of conditional vs. unconditional acceptance by their teachers. Without exception, every student believed that acceptance by their teachers was conditional and that they had to *earn* this acceptance by displaying compliant behavior and meeting teachers' expectations. Kohn (2005) aptly discussed the resulting view of students in this high stakes environment as diminutive, that some students are valued more than others when their inherent value is determined by how they may score on the latest high stakes test. It seems sad to me that if the high performing students in this study perceive their acceptance by teachers to be conditional, and that their acceptance is based upon compliance, obedience, and performance, then it causes me concern about how teachers may be thinking about students as people, and as individuals.

In the context of the interpersonal characteristics identified by these students it would seem to me that teachers already have the skills to be the kinds of caring individuals our students need. They have demonstrated empathy, a desire to know the students, fairness, predictability, helpfulness, a sense of humor, and they have also demonstrated their skill in delivering instruction to students by challenging students appropriately, being in control, creative, and competent. If teachers possess these skills, it makes sense that employing them in the development of the relationship with a child would encourage the *knowing* of a child, and the *understanding* of a child's needs. Following naturally would be the acceptance of a "whole" child as he is; what he does and does not know, what he can and cannot do. If teachers can integrate these characteristics into their own being as part of their teacher identity then they could more fully view the needs of individual children, and as Kohn says, "...create the conditions for [all] children to excel." (n.p.) The inherent value then of all children would be taken at face – and unconditional acceptance would occur more prominently and not based upon student compliance, obedience, and performance.

In terms of professional discourse, this point merits at the very least, a serious discussion among school professionals. An examination of the writings of researchers and philosophers on this topic (Kohn, 2005; Noddings, 2003; Osterman, 2000) might provide the impetus for further examination of the idea of unconditional acceptance and at the very least may cause some teachers to think critically about how they may pass on this message of acceptance to their students. Whether or not unconditional acceptance by teachers is an achievable goal could be examined through professional study and action research.

Suggestions for Further Research

The purpose of this study was to elucidate an understanding of the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of five high performing young adolescent students. Considering the purpose of the study and the wealth of information learned from the students, I believe I can attest that this research was successful. However, while some ideas learned from the students confirm current evidence in the literature about the teacher-student relationship, a number of questions remain unanswered and can provide potential new avenues for exploration. Before this can occur a number of considerations must be made prior to any future investigation.

First, this study involved a very small sample of five students from a specific demographic and thus the results are limited to these particular participants. This group provided very specific insights into the student-teacher relationship. Thus, these insights and perceptions are valid to only this population. Identifying other demographic groups of students and employing the same methodology may yield different insights not currently present in this study or in the literature.

As one example, the contrasting demographic to the group in this study might include students who possess marginal academic skills, are less compliant and obedient in the classroom, and have little internal motivation to succeed. Performing the same study with a group of students fitting this demographic, I would speculate, might yield a very different perspective from the students' points of view, and very likely one that would appear less favorable than the one resulting in this study. Suffice it to say that any other group, even a mixed or random sample of students would likely produce varied results. In this study, these students were particularly efficacious at determining what they needed to do in order to

succeed in their classes and earn the acceptance of their teachers. Students in a mixed demographic group or who are less efficacious students, I suspect would seek first to determine what they must do to survive in the school setting. This could mean seeking to have a relationship with their teachers regardless of grades, or it could mean finding solace in peer relationships and keeping adults at bay. Based on my own experiences with students who find school difficult, they will do what they can to ensure their own comfort and to meet their own needs. So essentially, while any group may yield different results relative to the teacher-student relationship, the one thing that will ring true for them all would be to find ways to meet their own needs, either by achieving at high levels, as the study participants have; seeking meaningful relationships with adults or peers, or connecting with activity that is meaningful in a way that meets one's needs.

A deeper understanding of this phenomenon can only occur with further study across other demographic groups. Some specific research questions that might be addressed in future studies of this nature include the following:

- How do different demographic groups of students describe their interactions with their teachers?
- How are vulnerable students' motivations affected by the teacher-student relationship when learning is difficult or when students feel frustrated in the learning environment?
- To what degree might the relationship affect student achievement of different demographic groups or not?
- Is the student-teacher relationship important, less important, or more important than achievement?
- Can high student achievement or positive teacher-student relationships exist exclusive of each other or does one affect the other?

Utilizing similar methodology to this study but extending the duration to a year may provide more detailed information about the phenomenon of the development of this relationship with other populations of students.

Second, the conflicts that arose within attributes where both the positive and negative behaviors of teachers were identified require some further investigation and possible further delineation to tease out other meaningful and identifiable behaviors. This would require

more time and may result in greater depth of analysis. In particular, the participants perceived divergent interpersonal and functional/mechanical behaviors in their teachers at various times. Teachers being predictable or unpredictable; having pedagogical competence or the lack thereof; being in control of the classroom or not in control; treating students fairly or not; and using humor appropriately or not, were observations and perceptions frequently shared by the study participants. For the participants, reconciling these conflicting experiences was challenging, frustrating, and at times, disheartening. Understanding more deeply how students reconcile (or not) these observable dichotomies in the behavior of their teachers might add a dimension of understanding to the development of this relationship. A number of questions may provide the impetus for a future study examining the students' experiences of these dichotomous behaviors in more detail and may include the following:

- What feelings are elicited in students while experiencing an unexpected divergent behavior in a teacher?
- How do these unexpected behaviors affect the students' perceptions of the teacher and to what degree do these perceptions affect the relationship between the teacher and the student?
- What effect, if any, do divergent behaviors in teachers have upon the achievement motivation and performance of high achieving, average achieving, and low achieving students?
- What are the cognitions, feelings, and behaviors of students who are repeatedly exposed to teachers displaying dichotomous behaviors?
- How are other facets of the students' education, i.e., attendance, peer social experiences, affected by the students' experience of these behaviors in teachers?

Third, this study was introductory in nature and had just begun to follow the development of the teacher-student relationship over time. While I can posit that student perceptions of their teachers and their relationships with them have changed little in that amount of time, I am unable to be certain that more time will not affect those perceptions. Thus, while the methodology is sound, more time could be added to the study and more contacts with the students to determine what changes in perceptions, if any, might occur over a longer period of time. In particular, questions addressing the teacher-student relationship

over time may provide insight into the perspectives and experiences of students not currently addressed in this study or in the literature. Some specific research questions that might be addressed in such a study include:

- If the perceptions of students by their teachers did not change much in the first month of school, what might the perceptions of students be of their teachers later in the year?
- How might the relationship change at the end of each month or grading period?
- How much might the student perceptions of their teachers change; how much might their perceptions remain the same?
- What factors would affect potential changes?

Apart from the aforementioned limitations to the study, a number of concerns emerged in the interviews that merit further investigation. First, I am deeply curious about the phenomenon of unconditional acceptance and the impact of teacher acceptance of students in a classroom. While some research seems to indicate that this is possible, (Johnson et. al., 2005; Klem & Connell, 2004; Kohn, 2005; Osterman, 2000) it makes sense that this should be investigated further with both students and teachers especially since none of the students felt this unconditional acceptance from any of their teachers. If the teacher-student relationship is finite by design as much of the research suggests, (Buttner, 2004; Checkley, 2004; Diero, 2003; Noddings, 2003) I wonder if it is possible for unconditional acceptance and teaching to actually occur in the amount of time typically afforded within most school structures. Specific questions for study around this phenomenon would focus on the possibility of unconditional acceptance of students by teachers in schools. Questions regarding this phenomenon may include the following:

- Under what circumstances is it possible for teachers to develop an unconditional view of students?
- What evidence would need to be present for students to perceive unconditional acceptance by teachers and for teachers to actually provide it?

Second, I am very concerned about the circumstances of children choosing to perform in approval seeking ways, even when they choose to perform because that is what they expect of themselves. While most of us enjoy the recognition we receive on occasion from

colleagues and peers for the fruits of our labors, a number of the study participants seemed to rely significantly on adult approval for their efforts and would be disappointed if they were not recognized for their work. I would be curious about learning at what age this becomes completely intrinsic and/or does not and what implications this has for healthy self-concept in the later adolescent years or young adulthood. I also would be curious about this particular phenomenon with other less efficacious populations of students.

Kohn (1994) likens the use of rewards and punishments to affect the behavior and performance of students to a form of manipulation where the short-term gain in the change of behavior remains exactly that and that once achieved, the child no longer aspires to meet adult demands without some form of reward. Since *intrinsic* motivation should be the ultimate goal here, Kohn suggests that teachers should be asking, “...not how motivated their students are, but how their students are motivated.” (n.p.) These high achieving students actively seek approval for meeting their teachers’ expectations and see their grades as a direct outcome of doing so. However, even though they appear to have yet to develop *intrinsic* motivation – the desire to learn for learning sake – I suspect that their compliance coupled with their effort and ability will gain them the choices of study in the future that will inspire their intrinsic motivation to learn. Since choice in assignment (as was previously discussed) has already indicated high levels of internal motivation in these students, I think the evidence exists for a projected healthy approach to future learning for the study participants. Though there may be moments of disappointment, I am hopeful they will make the transfer from the need for extrinsic validation to personal satisfaction for their own learning and achievement. I remain concerned, however, for the students who are less resilient, have seemingly less academic ability, and are less compliant or less successful in academic settings.

All that said, a number of future research questions come to mind and could fuel an in-depth study of the phenomenon of achievement motivation and the influence of extrinsic rewards for all types of students. In addition studying the impact of conditional vs. unconditional acceptance by teachers of students as related to achievement motivation could add a dimension to such a study that would provide a plethora of insight into the powerful influence of the teacher-student relationship. Some specific research questions that might be addressed in such a study might include:

- Can students who do not typically perform well in the school setting develop internal motivation to perform?
- If they can, at what point in their school career might this occur and under what circumstances?
- What influence, if any, do their relationships with their teachers have to do with this development?
- What are the long-term affects of students' intrinsic motivation to perform well when there is not unconditional acceptance by their teachers?
- What are the long- term affects on students who seek or need recognition for their work and seek to please others before themselves?

Finally, I am also curious about the study of humor with this young adolescent age group and the implications of the use of humor in the classroom as well as the affects of dark humor or sarcasm in teaching. As is mentioned in the literature, (Sylwester, 2001; Wanzer, et. al., 2006) I believe there is a place for humor in instruction, but there is also not a place for the kinds of humor that can damage or harm students' esteem, self concept, or psychological health. A future study of this phenomenon is warranted.

Specifically, some research questions that might be addressed include:

- According to young adolescents, what forms of humor are identified as appropriate for the classroom and deemed psychologically safe for students in the classroom setting?
- For what purposes might humor be utilized by teachers in the classroom, and how does the use of humor enhance or detract from the learning environment?
- Under what circumstances should humor in the classroom be employed and under what circumstances should it be avoided?

Finally, some additional research questions that could prove to be interesting areas for research in the future include the following. These questions address other topics touched upon in this chapter, some as a direct result of the outcomes of this study. They offer other credible opportunities for study of this phenomenon as it relates to professional staff development, issues relating to school climate, and improving the overall quality of the relationships between teachers and students in schools.

1. What professional development opportunities can be created to help teachers form the most positive relationships possible with their students? What can teachers do to forge positive, productive relationships with students right from the outset upon first meeting? How can this professional development be differentiated to meet the individual needs of each teacher? What tools may be used to measure students' perceptions of the degree of teachers' unconditional acceptance for them?
2. How can school administrators employ the use of teaching and learning style inventories to determine which students and teachers might work best together? If time is a critical factor in the development of teacher-student relationships and unconditional teaching is a goal, how much time would be needed to establish an unconditional relationship between teachers and students? How would this be measured?
3. How is the process of building relationships with high performing students perceived by the teachers and discussed from their point of view? How is the process of building relationships with low performing students perceived by the teachers and discussed from their point of view? How would teachers characterize their relationships with students of contrasting demographics and how do they make instructional and interpersonal decisions about these students and these relationships from those perspectives?

Conclusion

The overall purpose of this study was to uncover a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of teacher-student relationship building as perceived by high performing students and how students experience their relationships with their teachers in school. In addition, it was hoped that this research would help to further elucidate the essence of this relationship through the experiences of the students in the building of this relationship. It was hoped such information could prove invaluable in increasing the levels of understanding and awareness about this relationship for current practicing teachers and administrators, teacher preparation professionals, and researchers who study classroom climate and teacher-student relationships.

A number of understandings and provocative questions emerged from this study. First of all, the high performing students in this investigation were able to offer a perspective on the interpersonal and technical behaviors of their teachers not currently present in the literature and also were able to elaborate as well upon their experiences of the development of this relationship over time, from the first encounter to the conclusion of the study with clarity and depth. These insights provided a surprising point of view on an unexpected development, that for these students their achievement motivation and achievement outcomes were the overriding influences in the development of the teacher-student relationship, and not a relationship of affiliation with the teacher as I had thought would occur.

Second, that these relationships, while they occurred over an extended period of time, established patterns of interaction and expectations quite early in the development of the relationship. Although the duration of the study presented as a limitation, evidence over a period of months indicated that little had changed in the students' perceptions of their relationships with their teachers, leading me to believe that the possibility exists that the opportunity for teachers to connect positively with students is quite limited and occurs in a very short amount of time; the implications of which mean that recovery from a negative relationship might be difficult to overcome.

Third, of special importance to the students seemed to be the predictability with which the study participants could determine how teachers would behave in class and in interaction with students, how well they would perform their duties, how they would treat the students, and how they might administer the use of humor with them and their peers. In conjunction with the ability to predict teacher behavior was the need for students to determine teacher expectations in order to earn the acceptance of their teachers through compliance and performance. The conditional nature of the teacher-student relationship as perceived by the study participants elicited a number of questions for further investigation into the phenomenon of this relationship.

Finally, taken altogether, the valuable information learned from this investigation has provided the impetus for a variety of future studies as well as a number of opportunities for teacher training and professional development. As an introductory study, it has provided a framework for further research and opened the door for deeper inquiry into this phenomenon for other students.

APPENDIX A

District Permission Letter

March 14, 2007

Dr. *****
***** School District

Dear ** *****,

As you may know, I have been participating in graduate level programming at The Pennsylvania State University toward the completion of a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Leadership. I have completed my coursework and am ready to embark on my dissertation research. My study, A Phenomenological Study of middle School Students' Experiences of their Relationships with Teachers, will be qualitative in nature. For that reason, my focus will be narrow, requiring the participation of only two students in the research process. Please consider this a formal letter of request to perform my dissertation study at The ***** Middle School site. In order for me to begin the research process, I must acquire written district permission to perform the research on this site.

I have included copies of the study recruitment materials and consent forms for your examination. The details of the study are outlined in these documents. The research study will begin at the end of the school year and will involve two students, one boy and one girl, who have just completed their sixth grade year. They will participate in a single (initial) interview at the end of the school year. Subsequent interviews will occur in the fall of 2007. They also will be asked to maintain a diary or online journal as part of the research process.

Feel free to contact me for clarification should you need to. I can be reached at my office phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX, cell phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX, or my home phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX. Thank you very much for your consideration of my request. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Christy A. Clapper

APPENDIX B

IRB Training Certificate

This is to verify that

Christy A. Clapper

has successfully completed the

IRB Training – Penn State University at

University Park

February 26, 2007

APPENDIX C

Study Recruitment Script

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT TO BE READ ALOUD

Hello! My name is Christy Clapper. I am a graduate student in the School of Education at Penn State University. Today I am seeking research volunteers to participate in a brief research project entitled: “A Phenomenological Study of High Performing Middle School Students and Their Experiences of The Development of Their Relationships with Their Teachers.” This research is designed to learn more about the students’ experiences of their relationships with teachers and could serve to benefit the culture of classrooms by contributing to the knowledge and understanding of impact of this relationship on student learning. As a research volunteer, you would be asked to answer some questions in 3-4 interviews and keep a diary. It should not take longer than 6 hours for you to finish the research. You must be 18 years or older to participate. If you are not 18, please do not agree to participate, unless you have parental consent to do so. Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. Please be assured you do not have to participate unless you wish to do so. If you have any questions, please make sure to ask me. If you would prefer to ask me questions privately, feel free to reach me at xxx-xxx-xxxx or xxx-xxx-xxxx. Thank you for your consideration.

Christy A. Clapper

Xxx xxxxxxx xxx xxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxx, xx xxxxx

christyclapper@xxx.xxx

xxx-xxx-xxxx or xxx-xxx-xxxx

APPENDIX D

Student Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: A Phenomenological Study of High Performing Middle School Students and their Experiences of the Development of their Relationships with Their Teachers

Principal Investigator: Christy A. Clapper
Xxx xxxxxxx xxxx xxxxxx
xxxxxxxx,xx xxxxx
cac1068@psu.edu
xxx-xxx-xxxx or xxx-xxx-xxxx

Advisor: Dr. James F. Nolan
The Pennsylvania State University
204G Rackley Hall
University Park, PA 16802
n78@psu.edu
1-814-865-2243

1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to learn about and to understand more deeply the relationships between students and their teachers. The researcher will attempt to define the essence of these relationships as well as what students believe affects these relationships in positive or negative ways. This study will require a sample of only two students, one boy and one girl.

2. Procedures to be followed: You will be asked to participate in a series of interviews about your relationships with your teachers. These interviews will be video or audio taped and will occur over the course of three to four months. In addition, you will be asked to maintain a diary of your experiences in the student-teacher relationship. The diary will be used in the development of questions for successive interviews.

3. Discomforts and Risks: There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. Some of the questions are personal and might cause discomfort.

4. Benefits: The benefits to you include an opportunity for you to reflect upon your relationships with your teachers. You also may learn some things about yourself; in particular you may develop a greater understanding of yourself and of how you relate to your teachers. The benefits to society include an opportunity for research on this topic that may help prospective and currently practicing teachers and school administrators to become more aware of students' needs with regard to their relationships with their teachers.

5. Duration/Time: Participants will be asked to undergo three to four interview sessions with the researcher. Each session may last from 30 - 60 minutes. Participants also will be asked to maintain a diary or

journal of thoughts and feelings they experience when they interact with their teachers. These will be shared with the researcher during and between interviews.

6. Statement of Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is confidential. Only the person in charge will know your identity. The data will be stored and secured at the residence of the researcher in a locked/password protected file. Your data will be assigned a number and pseudonym (alias) to protect your identity. Penn State’s Office for Research Protections, the Social Science Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protections in the Department of Health and Human Services may review records related to this research study. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared. Each participant will be identified only by a number and an alias and will have their identities protected.

7. Right to Ask Questions: Please contact Christy Clapper at (xxx)xxx-xxxx or (xxx) xxx-xxxx with questions, complaints or concerns about this research. You can also call either number if you feel this study has harmed you. Questions about your rights as a research participant may be directed to Penn State University’s Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775. You may also call this number if you cannot reach the researcher or wish to talk to someone else.

9. Voluntary Participation: Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise.

You and your parent or guardian must provide consent for you to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Participant Signature

Date

Person Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX E

Parent Informed Consent Form

Parental Consent Form
Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: A Phenomenological Study of High Performing Middle School Students and their Experiences of the Development of their Relationships with Their Teachers

Principal Investigator: Christy A. Clapper
Xxx xxxxxxx xxx xxxxxx
xxxxxxxx,xx xxxxx
cac1068@psu.edu
xxx-xxx-xxxx or xxx-xxx-xxxx

Advisor: Dr. James F. Nolan
The Pennsylvania State University
204G Rackley Hall
University Park, PA 16802
n78@psu.edu
1-814-865-2243

- 1. Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research is to learn about and to understand more deeply the relationships between students and their teachers. The researcher will attempt to define the essence of these relationships as well as what students believe affects these relationships in positive or negative ways. This study will require a sample of only two students, one boy and one girl.
- 2. Procedures to be followed:** Your child will be asked to participate in a series of interviews about his/her relationships with teachers. These interviews will be video or audio taped and will occur over the course of three to four months. In addition, your child will be asked to maintain a diary of his/her experiences in the student-teacher relationship. The diary will be used in the development of questions for successive interviews.
- 3. Discomforts and Risks:** There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. Some of the questions are personal and might cause discomfort.
- 4. Benefits:** The benefits to your child include an opportunity for him/her to reflect upon the relationships he or she has with teachers. Your child also may learn some things about him/herself; in particular your child may develop a greater understanding of the teacher/student relationship. The benefits to society include an opportunity for research on this topic that may help prospective and currently practicing teachers and school administrators to become more aware of students' needs with regard to their relationships with their teachers.

5. Duration/Time:

Your child will be asked to undergo three to four interview sessions with the researcher. Each session may last from 30 - 60 minutes. Participants also will be asked to maintain a diary or journal of thoughts and feelings they experience when they interact with their teachers. These will be shared with the researcher during and between interviews.

6. Statement of Confidentiality: Your child's participation in this research is confidential. Only the person in charge will know your child's identity. The data will be stored and secured at the residence of the researcher in a locked/password protected file. Your child's data will be assigned a number and pseudonym to protect his/her identity. Penn State's Office for Research Protections, the Social Science Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protections in the Department of Health and Human Services may review records related to this research study. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared. Each participant will be identified only by a number and pseudonym and will have their identities protected. Please note that the investigators are obligated by ethical standards to report to the appropriate agencies any concerns for a child's well-being.

All data will be collected, stored, and analyzed solely by the principle investigator. Data will be coded by number and pseudonym, identifiable only by the researcher, and will be stored in a password protected file or in a locked container at the researcher's residence. The data will be analyzed by transcribing the interviews into text and will be further interpreted with the use of qualitative means. All data, transcripts, video/audio tapes, and field notes will be destroyed upon successful completion of the dissertation defense.

7. Right to Ask Questions: Please contact Christy Clapper at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or (xxx) xxx-xxxx with questions, complaints or concerns about this research. You can also call either number if you feel this study has harmed your child. Questions about your child's rights as a research participant may be directed to Penn State University's Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775. You may also call this number if you cannot reach the researcher or wish to talk to someone else.

9. Voluntary Participation: Your decision to allow your child to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. Your child does not have to answer any questions he/she does not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits your child would receive otherwise.

10. Use of Video/Audio Recording Equipment:

For the purposes of this study, digital videotaping will be employed to capture the interviews for exact transcription. Permission to video/audiotape the interviews is being sought.

May the researcher use an audio and video recorder to collect data related to this research?

_____ I give my permission for my child to be (audio/digitally, or video) taped.

_____ I do not give my permission for my child to be (audio/digitally, or video) taped.

May the researcher use your photograph or voice records in the future?

_____ I do not give permission for my child's recordings to be archived for future research projects. The photographs and videos will be destroyed upon successful completion of the dissertation defense.

_____ I do not give permission for my child's recordings to be archived for educational and training purposes. The tapes will be destroyed upon successful completion of the dissertation defense.

_____ I give permission for my child's recordings to be archived for use in future research projects.

_____ I give permission for my child's recordings to be archived for educational and training purposes.

A parent or guardian must consent to allow one's child to take part in this research study. If you agree to allow your child's participation in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

I give permission for my child, _____ to participate in this research

print child's name

study.

Participant Signature

Date

Person Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX F

Interview Protocols

Interview # 1 Protocols

- Describe your relationships with your teachers in general.
- Talk about a positive relationship experience. What made this a positive relationship experience? What did the teacher do or say that gave you a positive experience? What feelings did you experience during this interaction with your teacher? What happened in your interaction with the teacher that caused you to feel this way? What did this relationship mean to you?
- Talk about a negative relationship experience. What made this a negative relationship experience? What did the teacher do or say that gave you a negative experience? What feelings did you experience during this interaction with your teacher? What happened in your interaction with the teacher that caused you to feel this way? What did this relationship mean to you?
- Describe your ideal student-teacher relationship. Describe the influence and responsibility the teacher has in this relationship. Describe the influence and responsibility the student has in this relationship.
- Think about a favorite teacher you have had over the years. Describe this teacher's relationship with you. What characteristics of this teacher made him/her your favorite teacher?
- Describe how your relationships with your teachers have shaped your school experience.
- Talk about your motivation to learn as it relates to the relationships you have with your teachers.
- Think about your upcoming school year. Do you know anything about the teachers you will have this coming year? What expectations do you have about these teachers? How are you feeling about your potential relationships with the teachers? Do you have any predictions about how your year will go?
- What should I have asked you that I didn't think to ask?

Interview #2 Protocols

The second set of interview protocols were administered one week after the participants had begun the next school year. These protocols were strikingly similar to the first set of protocols but were administered in the present tense.

- Describe your experience of your relationships with your current teachers.
- Right before the year began, you had some ideas about what your school experience would be like. Describe the accuracy of your expectations and the reality of your experience as it is today.
- Do you have a favorite teacher this year? What makes this a positive relationship experience? What does the teacher do or say that gives you a positive experience? Describe the behaviors of the teacher that make this relationship a positive one. What feelings do you experience during this interaction with your teacher? What happens in your interaction with the teacher that causes you to feel this way? What does this relationship mean to you?
- Do you have a least favorite teacher this year? What makes this a negative relationship experience? What does the teacher do or say that gives you a negative experience? What feelings do you experience during this interaction with your teacher? Describe the behaviors of the teacher that make this relationship a negative one. What happens in your interaction with the teacher that causes you to feel this way? What does this relationship mean to you?
- How do these two relationships shape your performance in school? When you think about your school performance, what influence does your relationships with these [two] teachers have on your learning behavior?
- Talk about your motivation to learn as it relates to the relationships you have with your teachers.
- Describe how your current relationships with your teachers have shaped your school experience this year.
- What should I have asked you that I didn't think to ask?

Interview #3 Protocols

Protocols for this interview were developed after the second interview and emerged from the interview data previously collected. The focus of these protocols was to develop a deeper understanding of the experience of the student-teacher relationship previously described by the students and also on the data collected from the students' diaries.

- Describe how your relationships with your teachers have changed since the beginning of the year. Describe how your feelings about your teachers have changed since the first week of school. Tell me a story about the biggest change you have seen and felt.
- Do you have a favorite teacher? Describe what this teacher does that makes him/her your favorite teacher.
- Do you have a least favorite teacher? Describe what this teacher does that makes him/her your least favorite teacher.
- Compare how you perform in your favorite class with your least favorite class. Describe your feelings about your effort in these two classes. What are your thoughts and feelings while you are in these two classes?
- How does your favorite teacher treat other students?
- How does your least favorite teacher treat other students?
- Have you ever felt like you were treated unfairly by one of your teachers? How did that affect your relationship with that teacher?
- Talk about how you feel when you think your teacher treats other students unfairly. How does that affect your relationship with that teacher?
- What makes you do the work for class when you dislike the class or the teacher?
- In your opinion, do all experiences with teachers have to be positive in order for a student to grow and learn? What about you?
- If the student does not try or do his/her daily work, how much responsibility belongs to the teacher to bring that student along? How should the teacher do that?
- In an unconditional relationship the people in the relationship are able to accept each other without any conditions or limitations. Parents typically provide unconditional love and acceptance to their children. This means that no matter what their children say or do, even if it's wrong or incorrect, the parents will continue to love them. Is it

possible for teachers to accept every student they have in class unconditionally?

Explain why you think what you do.

- Is there anything else you would like me to know about your experiences with your teachers that I did not ask you?

APPENDIX G

Diary Protocol

Diaries

At the conclusion of the second interview at the end of the first week of school, the participants were asked to maintain a diary about their experiences in their relationships with their teachers. A protocol for the diary was developed to seek the students' reactions to their ongoing experiences with their teachers. The protocol was written to provide focus for the students to write about as they experienced their relationships with their teachers and because students of this age find it easier to write to a prompt than to formulate their own. The diary protocol was the same for each of the four entries as follows:

Write about a specific experience you are having with your teacher(s). This experience can be positive or negative for you.

- Provide details about when this experience has happened and how you feel while you are in the experience.
- How does this experience affect how you feel about your teacher(s), your motivation to learn, or your experience of school?

The participants were asked to make at least one entry per week about a specific experience they might have had with one of their current teachers based on this protocol. The diaries were collected right before the third interview. I read them, and began the third interview with a review of the diary for each of the participants. I asked the students to simply tell about they wrote and to describe their feelings about the experiences they described in the diary.

APPENDIX H

Themes and Categories Chart











Themes and Categories Derived from Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Behaviors

Theme Number One	Theme Number Two	Theme Number Three	Theme Number Four
<p>Teacher Interpersonal Behaviors: These behaviors represent how a teacher <i>behaves</i> in the classroom while providing instruction and while <i>interacting</i> with students as perceived by students.</p>	<p>Teacher Functional/Mechanical Behaviors: These behaviors represent what a teacher <i>does</i> in the classroom in order to <i>provide instruction</i>. These behaviors represent <i>knowing</i> the content and the mechanics of instructional/curriculum delivery as perceived by students.</p>	<p>Student Behaviors: These behaviors represent students' <i>emotional and cognitive responses</i> to teacher functional/mechanical behaviors or teacher interpersonal behaviors.</p>	<p>Teacher Reactive Behaviors: These behaviors represent teachers' <i>emotional and cognitive responses</i> to students in the classroom setting.</p>
Categories	Categories	Categories	Categories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Empathetic</u>: Understands the personal needs of students; knows how to best instruct each student individually based on learning styles and preferences • <u>Helpful</u>: Provides assistance to students during class and at other times to enhance student access to learning • <u>Allows Students to Know Him/Her</u>: Self-discloses in an effort to allow students to know the teacher on a more personal level; attempts to make personal connections with students based on common experiences and understandings • <u>Fair/Equal Treatment of Students</u>: Treats all students with compassion and fairness • <u>Knows students</u>: Makes an effort to know information about students apart from their names and performance levels in class • <u>Predictable</u>: Regularly behaves in a manner that students expect • <u>Pleasant Mood</u>: Enjoys being with students; smiles; displays even, predictable emotions and behaviors • <u>Sense of Humor</u>: Employs humor in ways appropriate to the developmental level of students in interactions with students, and while delivering instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Appropriately Challenging</u>: Provides learning opportunities that appropriately challenge and engage students • <u>Creative</u>: Employs developmentally appropriate, high-interest methods of instruction through classroom work, homework assignments, and other projects • <u>In Control</u>: Manages the classroom; commands student compliance both with and without direction • <u>Content and Pedagogical Competence</u>: Knowing one's content copiously; knowing how to successfully deliver instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Motivation to Achieve</u>: Choosing to achieve at a personally acceptable level regardless of teacher interaction behaviors or functional/mechanical behaviors • <u>Building a Positive Relationship with the Teacher</u>: Choosing one's behaviors and interactions to please the teacher • <u>Critical of Teacher</u>: Judging a teacher's interaction with students or the teacher's functional/mechanical performance in the classroom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Conditional Acceptance of Students</u>: Caring for students based upon performance, achievement, or acceptable behavior • <u>Critical of Students</u>: Judging a student's performance or behavior in class • <u>Trusts Students</u>: Allowing students freedom in the classroom based on previously acceptable behavior or performance

APPENDIX I

Study Participants' Perceptions of Teacher Behaviors Chart

Identification of Themes and Categories by Study Participant

Themes/Categories	Caroline	Colleen	Randi	Lex	Jarod
Teacher Interpersonal Behaviors					
Allows students to know him/her	*	*	*	*	*
Empathetic	*	*	*	*	*
Helpful	*	*	*	*	*
Sense of Humor	*	*	*	*	*
Knows Students	*		*	*	*
Pleasant Mood	*		*	*	*
Fair/Equal Treatment of Students	*	*	*	*	*
Predictable	*	*		*	*
Teacher Functional/Mechanical Behaviors					
Content/Pedagogical Competence	*			*	*
In Control	*		*	*	*
Creative	*	*	*	*	*
Appropriately Challenging	*	*	*	*	*
Student Behaviors					
Critical of Teacher	*	*		*	*
Build Relationship with Teacher	*	*	*	*	*
Motivation to Achieve	*	*	*	*	*
Teacher Reactive Behaviors					
Critical of Students	*		*		*
Trusts Students		*	*	*	*
Conditional Acceptance of Students	*	*	*	*	*

 = data not evident * = categorical data evident

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Professional Organizations

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American School Counselor Association
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