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A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE EFFECT OF TEACHER/STUDENT
RELATIONSHIPS ON STUDENT ACADEMICS AND BEHAVIORS

By
Dionnya P. Pratt

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University School of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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Approval Page

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Abstract

A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE EFFECT OF TEACHER/STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS ON STUDENT ACADEMICS AND BEHAVIORS. Pratt, Dionnya, 2021: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

The purpose of this study was to review and analyze the strategies teachers use in order to develop positive teacher/student relationships in the classroom of a high-poverty, at-risk school district. The cross-case analysis was performed to determine teacher perceptions of their interactions with students and how they influence academics and behavior.

Determining the mindset changes needed to maintain positive relationships will provide information that will be used to build effective schools through teacher trainings.

Through analysis of teacher interviews, classroom observations, and journal entries, five predominate themes were determined. Relationships, culture, classroom management, high-quality instruction, and engagement were found to be the foundation of positive teacher/student relationships. Data determined that mindset changes are necessary to maintain positive relationships between teachers and students. These positive relationships are essential to successful learning environments. The data also showed that teacher perceptions of their interactions with students influence the academic and behavioral success in the classroom. In this study, identified specific factors associated with teacher/student interactions have provided strategies to improve the educational learning environment.

Keywords: poverty, relationships, cultures, high-quality instruction, classroom management

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this sociological perspective case study on contemporary education was to investigate and create an understanding of the impact of a positive teacher/student relationship on student achievement in a high-poverty, at-risk school setting. For this research, the teacher/student relationship was reviewed to determine the degree to which children develop social and academic competencies within the school setting. Larson et al. (2002) defined teacher/student relationships as being the formalized interpersonal collaboration with interactions on a day-to-day basis between an authority figure and a subordinate. Marzano (2003) further studied the practices of effective teachers and determined that an effective teacher/student relationship is the keystone of many positive aspects in the education field. The relationship between a teacher and student helps determine the success of a student's academic life and can impact the future life of that individual.

According to the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission (2015), different demands on 21st century education in their classrooms and schools have dictated new roles for teachers. The North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission stated,

Teachers can no longer just teach in a classroom, they must share the leadership role and own the vision and purpose of the school. Learning must be engaging, relevant and meaningful to the student's culture. Students may not be able to recall all content, but will be able to critically think, problem solve, and process skills in everyday learning. Teachers must facilitate instruction that encourages all

students to use 21st century skills that create the ability to learn, innovate, collaborate and communicate ideas. (p. i)

Global awareness, civic literacy, financial literacy, and health awareness are also vital parts of learning. Finlay (2008) shared that teachers must be reflective about their practice and provide assessments that are authentic and structured. Finlay also contended that teachers should demonstrate the value of lifelong learning by encouraging students to learn to grow.

Evaluation instruments created for teachers are designed to promote effective leadership, quality teaching, and student learning while enhancing professional practice and improving instruction. Principals use these evaluative instruments to judge the effective value of the teacher's ability to grasp the learning styles of all students within the classroom. The principal conducts the evaluation process and examines the student's ability to perform as a very important factor in the teacher's success as a leader in the classroom. The teacher's ability to teach is also judged by the scores students achieve on the end of the course tests. Test results are released from the Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS). According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2020), EVAAS is a customized software for sharing sources of data that present a teacher's yearly growth. Killion et al. (2016) stated in the report from the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium,

Teacher leadership as a means to improve schools is a powerful strategy to promote effective, collaborative teaching practices in schools that lead to increased student achievement, improved decision making at the school and district level, and creates a dynamic teaching profession for the 21st Century. (p.

14)

When teachers lead, they tend to take responsibility for what matters most to them and in their classrooms. Teacher leadership expands learning outside of the classroom. It creates an opportunity for teachers to develop strong relationships with students, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders.

The development of relationships as an educator is one of the most important aspects of an educator's job. Hallinan (2008) stated, "learning is a process that involves cognitive and social psychological dimensions, and both processes should be considered if academic achievement is to be maximized" (p. 271). For many decades, researchers have argued for the importance of social relationships among teachers and students. LaPage et al. (2005) described the matter of classroom management going from a recognition and punishment intervention-based paradigm to a focus on prevention through the development of classroom communities in which norms are established and academic routines promote constructive work. The teacher/student relationship within the school system pushes the focus of classroom management and discipline practices on teachers. Bransford et al. (2005) determined that effective teacher focus should begin with a meaningful curriculum and motivating and engaging instruction. Throughout my years in the educational setting, I have observed empowering and engaging classrooms that failed to meet the needs of all students. Many of these students felt disconnected because the teacher failed to put effort into getting to know and understand the individual child and the cultural environment from which they came.

Educators are trained to take charge and use an authoritative style in classrooms, which often separates them from the students. While helping to deliver beginner teacher

training, one of my colleagues stated that educators are to be teachers and not friends to students. Fay and Funk (1995) found that students who do not feel they have positive relationships with their teachers are more disruptive, less likely to be academically engaged, and more likely to drop out of school before graduating. Steinberg et al. (1996) also reported that when students enjoy caring and supportive relationships with teachers, they are motivated to learn.

Education has been an important aspect in the United States since the 1800s. In the early days, equal opportunities in education were nonissues. Many children struggled and continue to struggle in the classroom. For example, Reardon (2011) stated that the income gap continues to grow; and because of this, 20% of students live in poverty. This number has risen from 16% in the year 2005 to 25% in 2010 (DeNavas-Walt et al., (2011). Because of poverty, some students enter school an average of 4 years behind other students. These students are already at a disadvantage, and it is the responsibility of the educators to make sure they make progress each year.

According to Jensen (2016), educators can and must make a difference in the lives of students of poverty through education for the benefit of society in general. He also shared beliefs that blaming poor students for their underachievement is no longer acceptable. Jensen determined the focus must be on how to enrich the teaching from educators to foster the hidden talents of all students. In order for this to happen, teachers must build relationships with these students of poverty in order to understand their strengths and weaknesses.

Many obstacles stand in the way of students who come from impoverished circumstances. It is difficult for them to succeed and achieve their full potential because

of these obstacles, such as health and nutrition insecurities, income deprivation, and the lack of a quality of education. Students living in high-poverty areas have very little developed vocabulary when entering school. Many of these students tested tend to score years behind their peers.

Even though research says that all educators should be role models with positive impacts, it is very difficult for many teachers to relate to students of poverty. Teachers living a middle class lifestyle have difficulty understanding and relating to students living in poverty, but the school system's expectations are to coordinate and facilitate access to systems of care to optimize the academic, health, social, and emotional well-being of all students.

Without question, empowering teachers with the content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and ability to relate to a diverse range of students is necessary to produce students who read on grade level. This case study explored the sociological factors needed to change the mindset of educators in order to provide them with the ability to improve academic success with all students through positive teacher/student relationships.

Problem Statement

As an elementary teacher for 16 years in a small, low-economic area; an assistant principal in a school of 700 students; and a principal in a small school with 100% free and reduced lunch students, I have had the opportunity to observe some of the best teachers and the weakest teachers. It is evident that being a teacher requires more than just standing among students providing information. It is also apparent that at-risk students from low-income backgrounds need a lot of collaboration and communication with the educators. Having served as a lead teacher, assistant principal, and principal, I

have had the opportunity to observe different types of classroom management. Some of the “so-called” best teachers will spend every minute of the school day teaching and still not reach 60% of their students. They are teaching but not necessarily reaching anyone. Some teachers hardly ever take the time to even look at their students when teaching. They have one goal in mind, and that is to get through the pacing guide and teach all standards in the state curriculum. It never dawns on the teachers that the goal should be to make sure the students have mastered the standards. These teachers are prone to blame the unsuccessful mastery of standards on student lack of motivation to learn. They believe it is not the teacher’s responsibility to motivate the child. Even though teachers face many obstacles in motivating children to learn, these teachers continue to work in their established approach without any changes and believe they are great educators.

Unmotivated students can be a disturbance to classroom management, if the teacher ignores the situation and student. When students are not motivated to learn, they find other things to do. I worked on a part-time job with students who rebelled against the school system procedures and were what most educators would consider at risk for failure. I usually encountered these students as a result of discipline referrals from school systems and sometimes the court system. Most referrals would involve a student showing disrespect to the teacher or not showing up to school at all. I did not encounter any significant respect-based discipline issues in my high school principalship, but I responded to many such issues in my other capacities. It was clear that these issues stemmed from a disconnect between the teacher and the student. Routinely, it was a misunderstanding centered on cultural beliefs. I began to wonder if the teacher disrespected the student’s culture because they simply did not recognize that differences

existed.

After gaining trust with these students, they began to share that they felt mistreated by the school system, which included their teachers. The disconnect became more evident once reaching the middle school. Discipline referrals increased, and grades declined. This not only affected the students who let you know they struggled but also the students who quietly failed to benefit from positive relationships with teachers. I can remember walking down the hall catching the eye of a student who showed the anxiety of entering a certain teacher's classroom. Even though that teacher never had a problem with the student, the lack of relationship caused that student to suffer academically and emotionally.

In my experience as an elementary teacher and administrator of various age groups, I have found that positive and supportive relationships between teachers and students are essential for an effective learning environment. Even though there are students who quietly suffer in the classroom from a lack of a relationship with teachers, many students demand attention through negative behavior. Jones (1987a) acknowledged that nearly every survey from parents and teachers lists discipline as the number one issue in most classrooms. Wickham et al. (2001) also stated that the single most requests for assistance from teachers are related to behavior and classroom management. Polloway and Patton (1993) shared that the most significant problem with first-year teachers is classroom management. According to Hackman and Morath (2018), since the Department of Labor began its measurements in 2001, U.S. public education employees had the fastest resignation rate in 2018, due to budget frustration, small raises, and opportunities elsewhere. Barr and Parrett (1995) reported that public schools were

reporting all-time highs in violence and vandalism, alcohol and drug problems, and problems of discipline and disruption. The rate of disruptive behavior continues to escalate, while extreme violence has stabilized at an historically low level.

The disruptive behavior in the classroom among at-risk students continues to cause students to drop out and teachers to leave their teaching profession. Besides affecting the educational setting, other long-term issues affect society. Boisjoly et al. (1998) determined that individuals who do not complete high school are more likely to receive government assistance and stay on government assistance longer than those with at least a high school diploma. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2015), 37.3% of people who did not graduate from high school received benefits in 2015. Egemba and Crawford (2003) and Grant and Sleeter (2005) included that female high school dropouts are more likely to join the growing welfare-dependent underclass, have children at younger ages, use more illicit drugs, and become single mothers than female high school graduates. Dupont (2010) contended that early drug and alcohol use are primary risk factors for students who drop out of school.

These high school at-risk students are more likely to become involved in crime. Harlow (2003) stated, "Failure to graduate from high school is associated with a tripling of the likelihood of being imprisoned" (p. 10). According to Chanse (2002), from 1977 to 1985, "when prison populations almost tripled, 70 percent of new inmates were Latinos, African American, or other nonwhite minorities" (p. 3). Wickham et al. (2001) inserted that high school dropouts commit 82% of the crimes in the United States. However, many educators and researchers have also noted that different individuals within the same demographics or categories have been known to have different innate abilities, familial

resources, and support systems to become successful citizens. This study hoped to find connections between positive teacher/student relationships as the major factors in those students.

Need for the Study

If our students determine the future, we must make sure our teachers understand the important role they play in the outcome of students' lives. My teaching experience as a fourth- and fifth-grade teacher afforded me the opportunity to be embedded in a setting with a variety of students from different backgrounds, mostly poverty-stricken areas, with very little resources to prepare students for a successful future in a democratic world. Stepping into the administration role has given me the opportunity to observe great and not so great teachers. With the opportunity of observing teachers, I have been able to see the importance of the teacher/student relationship within the school setting. I have seen teachers treat students fairly in a democratic way and others who authoritatively enjoyed keeping them in their place. The difference in these teachers' styles will often make or break a student's academic success. With this in mind, the purpose of this case study was to investigate the mindset of teachers in the school setting and their effect on student success through developing positive relationships. The study investigated five successful teachers who were identified through professional evaluations to continuously exhibit positive relationships with their students. In collecting the data of this research, many distinctions were determined through observations, discussions, and analytical investigations. Accordingly, the data from studying these teacher behaviors and student outcomes could be used to create and provide future training and professional development.

Research Questions

The specific research questions for this study were

1. How is a teacher/student relationship essential to a successful learning environment?
2. What are some mindset changes necessary for teachers to maintain positive relationships with students?
3. To what extent do teacher perceptions of their interactions with students influence the academic and behavioral success of those students?

To answer these research questions, sociological case studies of five teachers (one exceptional teacher, four elementary general education teachers) were conducted through interviews and focus groups.

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this ethnomethodology exploratory descriptive case study was to investigate the effectiveness of the teacher/student relationship on academics and behavior and its influence on a child's future. The theoretical framework guides the research through a collection of interrelated concepts. Critical characteristics that influence academics and behavior were examined through the teacher/student relationship lens. These characteristics are discussed in the literature review. I have been saddened many times by the disrespect of some teachers towards their students coming from a different cultural environment; therefore, I chose to explore and examine the effect of the teacher/student relationship, positive and negative, within the school setting towards student achievement. President after president has introduced reforms to close the education gap, to no avail.

The study of democratic schooling as an agent of social justice was researched to consider negatives and positives that exist. In a democratic school, students are given the opportunity to voice their opinions and make decisions. This process is to aid the child into developing skills prominent to becoming a successful democratic citizen. My experience has been that democratic settings face resistance because they are the opposite of what people know, even though we live in a democratic world. Many people continue to find comfort in the traditional setting, and it is hard to change the mindset of people once they find a comfort zone. This brings up concerns of social injustice. Is education fair and equal for all students? The literature review examines threats to social justice and reviews methods to counter systemic inequality.

School culture is a necessary component of the framework. In consideration of how students learn, I explored the culture differences like eye contact, smiling during tense times, talking back, and asking questions among teachers and students. For teachers to work effectively with students, the teacher must respect and understand the cultural differences of their students. It is important to examine cultural differences and how they impact teacher/student relationships.

The literature review examines the components of teacher/student relationships and the elements of the teaching pedagogy that teachers can influence and affect academic and behavioral success. I have observed that students who do not have a positive and supportive relationship with their teachers often tend to struggle academically and behaviorally in school. Some teachers intimidate students to keep them in their place and work to mold them into what they consider the norm. Other teachers form positive and supportive relationships with students through their ability to listen to

their needs and empower them into becoming successful citizens for society.

These elements of the teaching pedagogy were selected to research because they are critical to student successes academically and behaviorally. Researchers such as Robert Marzano were important in the framework of teacher effectiveness. Considering this, I also investigated the engagement and motivation literature for connections with academic and behavioral success with teacher effectiveness.

Children have their individual ways of learning and communicating in society; therefore, understanding each individual child is critical to classroom management. Classroom management is critical for teachers to enjoy a positive relationship with students. Along with classroom management, discipline procedures are needed for success. Students need to know they are accountable for their actions and that following direction is a critical component to be successful in society. I searched the literature for connections with discipline, classroom management, and student achievement to look for methods and strategies to benefit an effective teacher/student relationship.

Overview of Methodology

This qualitative research consisted of a sociological exploratory case study supported through the lenses of descriptive details and narratology designed to examine the relationships between teachers and students to determine if academic success is impacted. Patton (2002) described narratology as the ability to interpret stories and to explore and expose the difficulties of teacher/student relationships. These procedures permitted me to explore the relationship dynamics of elementary teachers and their students. Yin (1994) determined that a case study should serve as the primary design for qualitative inquiry as it provides for a detailed assessment of a person, group, or setting

under study. Patton (2002) suggested a researcher may study several participants. In this qualitative study, interviews were conducted with five elementary education teachers as they interacted and related with their students.

The research setting for this study was six elementary schools in a high-poverty area of 3,900 pupils with many at-risk students in a small county lying on the North Carolina and South Carolina state line.

This case study began with an overview of teacher evaluations in search of exceeded growth and distinguished ratings in the areas related to student relationships. From this overview, five teachers were identified as the focus of these case studies.

Research was collected through interviews, participant journals, and observations. Maxwell (2005) interpreted interviews as being able to provide additional information that was missed in observation to be used to check for accuracy. Questions were asked of the teachers to inform and provide exploration in a greater depth. The teachers were asked to keep journals and share issues that occurred with the relationship of their students. Observations were conducted in the classroom setting and other areas during interactions with the students. Maxwell determined observations allow researchers a direct and insightful way to learn about behavior and the context in which the behavior occurs.

In this case study, interviews, observations, and participant journal data were analyzed through the constant comparative method to investigate the characteristics of five elementary teachers interacting in positive manners with their students. Five district coaches volunteered to help with the process of selecting these teachers. Conrad et al. (1993) explained the constant comparative method as a combination of systematic data

collection, coding, and analysis with theoretical sampling in order to generate theory that is integrated, close to the data, and expressed in a form clear enough for further testing. Participant journals were analyzed with the generic coding process. Data were arranged in a Microsoft Word table and rearranged as themes were determined and refined.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following list of terms will be used in this research study.

Educational Resilience

A dynamic set of interactions between the student and the educational environment that work together to interrupt a negative trajectory and support academic success (Downey, 2008).

Ethnography

Culture writing using detailed firsthand written descriptions of a culture based on firsthand research describing two or more cultures in the field (Wolcott, 1999).

Narratology

The humanities discipline dedicated to the study of the logic, principles, and practices of narrative representation (Meister et al., 2005).

Qualitative Research

An approach for exploring and understanding the meaning groups and individuals connect to a social or human issue (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Responsive Interviewing Model

An approach to depth interviewing research, which relies heavily on the interpretive constructivist philosophy mixed with critical theory; the goal being to generate a depth of understanding (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Social Constructivism

Knowledge is socially constructed where individuals create meaningful learning through interactions with others.

Zone of Proximal Development

The distance between the actual developmental level of the child by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance (Vygotsky, 1978).

Summary

In Chapter 1, I provided an introduction and overview of my role in conducting this study and the framework of this research study. I also introduced the specific research questions, the research problem addressed in this study, and the need for this study. Additionally, I addressed the theoretical framework for this study as well as an overview of literature to be further explored in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2 consists of an overview of the professional literature that provides a structural foundation for this study. Included in the literature review is a discussion of the history of education and its reforms from several presidents. Democratic schooling is discussed with a focus on social justice. The achievement gap, driven by poverty, is examined to include the difference in teacher perceptions and expectations. The literature review examines the impact of teacher/student relationships on school success.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology for this study. Included in this chapter is an exploration of case study, a rationale for qualitative research, narratology, a description of the study setting, the data collection process, and steps followed for data analysis along with the data production procedures.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides a review of the literature on the topic of the impact that strong teacher/student relationships have on academic success with high-poverty, at-risk students. The perspectives of a variety of strategies and research-based studies are discussed from an historical viewpoint along with current thinking on the topics and subtopics.

Theoretical Framework

This study will add to the expansion body of research on effective school research, specifically the component of relationships. Edmonds (1982) is the father of effective schools research. Edmonds contended that local schools are the unit of analysis and the focus of intervention and should be examined to improve programs. Theoretical frameworks are important in deductive, exploratory, and theory-testing sorts of studies. Researchers must have an open mind about the subject and eliminate preconceived notions. Edmonds recommended more basic research on school effectiveness to reinforce the correlates of school effectiveness to further advance our knowledge of effective schools. Stake (1995) contended that qualitative researchers must promote the belief that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered. Creswell (1998) and Stake believed that researchers should seek understanding of the world using open-ended questions so participants can construct the meaning of a situation. The purpose of this study was to explore factors concerning teacher/student relationships and the contributions to the development of academics and positive behavior in the learning environment.

Blumer (1978) contended that one must immerse oneself in a situation in order to know what is going on in it. Creswell (1998) discussed that “meanings are constructed by

human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (p. 8). During this case, the researcher focused on deeply understanding the impact of teacher/student relationships in the learning environment through thorough examination.

History of Public Education in a Democratic Society

Langer (1997) said, “if the source of information is someone we respect, we are more likely to be influenced and retain the information than if we view the source as untrustworthy” (p. 86). “When we have learned information mindfully, we remain open to ways in which information may differ in various situations” (Langer, 1997, p. 87). Solid relationships with students create discriminating lifelong learners. The information can be retained even when the source of information is forgotten. Even though this assertion was made almost 30 years ago, it is very well imperative to today’s school system.

Because of research and conversations on revamping the educational system, many presidents have signed acts to improve education. These acts provide funding to reform an educational system that continuously does not seem to work for all students. With this being said, President Eisenhower began a process that would reform the educational system every 3 years. He began the National Defense Education Act of 1958. The National Defense Education Act funded grants to states to enrich courses and provided financial aid for individuals to become great teachers of math, science, engineering, and languages. Like all reforms, the National Defense Education Act had an unintended consequence that built distrust in the quality of public education and broader educational funding that decreased the influence of educators. This marked the beginning of the large-scale involvement of the U.S. government in education.

Reform efforts in the school system have brought many changes throughout the years but still fail to provide success for all students. For example, Klein (2015) discussed the replacement of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001 by Congress under President Barack Obama to the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015. Korte (2015) explained how President Obama spoke on the fact that the practice in learning has always fallen short when it comes to the community. For example, the NCLB reform did not focus on the needs of the community but more on test taking during class time. Public schools and school districts have been forced into cookie-cutter reforms that did not always produce the kinds of results that were required. The change in the reform only changes where the fault lies. According to Andrews (2013), these reforms fail because they pay insufficient attention to the context in which they are applied. For instance, President Bush blamed the schools with his reform, and then President Obama switched the blame to the teachers. To the dismay of many assessments, blame, and reauthorizing of educational acts, the school system continues to fall short for many students.

Before 1970, schools were not critically examined to search for problem areas, so there were no conversations about school improvement. As time passed, the importance of teaching in school began to be a conversation among academic researchers. The term “failing school” began to appear with great frequency in the 1970s. Gerald (2009) stated that NCLB defined a failing school as one that fails to make adequate yearly progress for 2 or more years in a row. Mann (1840) indicated the fitness to teach involves the power of perceiving how far a scholar understands the subject matter to be learned and what, in the natural order, is the next step to take; therefore, can we determine the success of a school only by scores of assessments? According to Dewey (1916) teachers need to be

agents who are able to distinguish what attitudes are beneficial and detrimental to the continuance of student growth. In turn, schools need to use that relational knowledge to build worthwhile educational experiences for these students.

Right before the interpretation of a failing educational program, Jackson (1968) studied life in the classroom and recognized social intimacy as being unmatched anywhere else in society. The teacher is in charge of interpersonal exchanges in the classroom. With the teacher being in charge of the classroom, they must work to win. According to Goodlad (1976), “winning becomes increasingly attractive and absorbing” (p. 70). For instance, the era of NCLB caused a paradigm shift in many schools away from teaching and preparing kids for the future to preparing kids for state assessments. The state assessment scores were used to measure the success of schools. The pressure to reach that enchanting line each year became attractive and absorbing. The weight to prepare for the state assessments drew attention towards those who were succeeding and those not succeeding. In the late 1970s, political leaders became aware that not nearly enough students were getting good grades or scoring well on achievement tests. This caused researchers to once again begin a conversation of much needed changes in the educational system.

Most studies began to focus on well-being and what drives students to learn. Bruner (1977) insisted, “the process of education requires schools to contribute to the social and emotional development of the child if they were to fulfill their function of education” (p. 9). Bruner contributed four themes of the process of learning to revamp the educational system. One of these four themes of the process of learning was stimulating the desire to learn, creating interest in the subject being taught, and what Bruner termed

“intellectual excitement” (p. 11). Even though politicians began to look at test scores as a measure for success, researchers like Vygotsky (1978) believed that higher mental functioning is socially formed and culturally transmitted. Researchers believed that teacher/student dialogue with a skillful teacher increased student thinking and processed their purposeful interactions, which brought about better academic skills.

Glasser (1993) believed the pressure to improve achievement so no child would be left behind and every school would make adequate yearly progress caused the school system to continue to fail. Glasser assumed this failure with the suggested improvements of education was tied to the old teach, test, read, and punish, boss-managed system.

“The preoccupation in most schools with subject matter content has led to a situation in which affective development is negatively influenced” (Devries & Zan, 2005, p. 132). In order to foster intellectual development, a certain kind of interpersonal framework must be created (Devries & Zan, 2005). Throughout the many changes and years in education, Fosnot (2005) stated, “contemporary theorists and researchers no longer believe in isolated mastery of concepts but ideas that real learning is about interactions, growth, and development” (p. 8).

Factory Model Schools

Taylor (1923) researched the Theory of Scientific Management as it influenced the modern system of education in the early 20th century. Cubberley (1929) spoke of children as being raw products that needed to be fashioned into products to meet the various demands of life in schools known as factory model schools. America’s early focus on corporate management and business style leadership in schools remains prevalent in education today along with the unsuccessful attempts at restructuring.

Cubberley indicated that these factory model schools were the norm and were not designed to be democratic. Darling-Hammond (1996) defined factory modern schools as a highly developed tracking system that stressed rote learning and unwavering compliance for the children of the poor. Darling-Hammond also explained, “Like manufacturing industries, schools were designed as highly specialized organizations- divided into grade levels and subject-matter departments, separate tracks and programs- to-facilitate the use of routines and procedures” (p. 13). Lieberman et al. (1994) stated that during this era, teachers were perceived as technicians to be trained to accept and adopt the “right ideas” (p. 30). Meighan (2002) described education as basically authoritarian, since one person or a very few people determine “what to learn, when to learn, how to learn, how to assess learning, and the nature of the learning environment” (p. 1).

History shows that America’s early focus in schools was on business style leadership and corporate management. Even though there have been many theories and restructuring reforms to the school system, this focus remains prevalent in education today.

Traditional Schools

While schools were supposedly changed to democratic schools after World War II, many researchers argued that this was not the case. Winchester (2003) argued, “Most schools, most times, merely everywhere are not democratic places” (p. 2). Students are denied the right to choose because of rituals and structures and the state-mandated curriculum and design of their day. Students are told what to do and when to do it.

Apple and Beane (1995) contended that even though healthy societies provide for

freedoms that demonstrate mutual respect, our society is in real danger of losing these freedoms. While traditional schools are bureaucratic institutions and assume hierarchy steps of control with the superintendent above the principal and the teacher above the student, in democratic schools this hierarchy would be clear and concise; and vast opportunities would exist to achieve all goals of the school. The difference between traditional teachers and democratic teachers is that traditional teachers have authority over students and democratic educators have power in their expertise. This explains the fundamental difference between the concept of democratic schooling and the school structures that dominate capitalistic markets. Wright (1997) asserted that while it is clear the market plays an important role in shaping American identities, many of our youngest citizens still define democracy as “the freedom to buy and consume whatever they wish, without government restrictions” (p. 182). Beane (2002) suggested, “as free market economies are glorified and public services privatized, the meaning of democracy is evolving almost exclusively as a matter of personal choice and self-interest, and the complementary notion of a public or common good is disappearing” (p. 25). Even in a democratic world, schools were hardly ever mentioned when talking about democracy. Many argued that utilizing a democratic model for education was inadequate for preparation for students who desired to attain higher education. In addition, requirements for this model were deemed too weak for successful matriculation.

Nearly a century ago, Dewey (1916) asked how educators could claim to believe in democracy if they did not practice it in schools. Tyack (1997) stated that Dewey contended, “we need not only education in democracy, but also democracy in education...for the welfare of the young thoughtful citizens must participate in the

politics of public schoolings” (p. 22). Wilms (2007) stated Dewey claimed,

In order to promote a nation that truly values democratic principles, all of its citizens must be empowered to engage in a democratic principle and all of its citizens must be empowered to engage in a democratic discourse in order to be advocates for themselves as well as to be able to advocate for others. (p. 1)

Democratic systems of education should definitely be a part of a nation that brags about democratic freedom. In reality this seems furthest from the truth. Miller (2007) argued, “All those who are affected by social institutions must have a share in producing and managing them” (p. 1). Dewey’s belief in education was to prepare children for active citizenship in partaking democracy (Wilms, 2007). According to Dewey (1916), a democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, a conjoint communicated experience. An undesirable society is one that internally and externally sets up barriers to free intercourse and communication of experience. From the perspective of Dewey, schools should be a place where students can learn to be great citizens and have the ability to change societies. If students are to be prepared for a college and career future, they must be taught in an environment that consists of the freedom in which they will live.

Democratic Schools

Democratic schools should be set up in a way that they prepare students for a democratic world. These schools are environments where children interact the same way they interact in society. These students should be given opportunities to participate in active roles in the school setting that fit the democratic process prepare them for civilization. Schutz (2001) indicated that in a democratic society, public schools were

intended to promote and support the public good. Building greater societies should come from lessons learned in public school. Loflin (2008) stated that democratic schools generally should be characterized as having shared decision-making among the students and staff, with a learner-centered approach in which students choose their daily activities, where there is equality among staff and students, and the community is an extension of the classroom. Schutz indicated schools should be committed to promoting such active democratic involvement among students, “initiating them into practices that will enable them to effectively engage with oppression and improve our society for everyone” (pp. 294-295). Schools should be compelled to give children an opportunity to make positive decisions that will help them with a prosperous future. Patrick (1995) believed that democratic schools should share three common components: core concepts that express essential knowledge, intellectual and participatory skills that permit practical application of civic knowledge, and virtues that enable citizens to act for the good of their community. With these three components, positive relationships between teachers and students will develop. Shields (2004) indicated, “Democratic education requires empowering children to participate in and take responsibility for, their own learning” (p. 124). Checkley (2003) asserted, “Schools that are democratic are naturally caring places. When students have an equal voice in the governance of their school and its classrooms, they develop the ability to genuinely get along with others” (p. 1). At-risk students from high-poverty areas need caring places to learn how to make caring communities. Preparing students to become active participants in democratic societies is the main purpose of democratic schools, yet Miller (2007) stated that schools are managed entirely by adults, do not democratically educate students, and do not build positive

teacher/student relationships within the learning environment.

The United States is respectfully known as a democracy that is fair and just, where every citizen has the right to equality in society, economics, politics, and education. Section 1 of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution advocates “liberty and justice for all.” Lunenburg and Ornstein (2007) stated frankly,

The U.S. educational system to this day is beset with inequalities that exacerbate racial and class-based challenges. Differential levels of success in school distributed along racial and social class lines continues to be the most pernicious and prevalent dilemma of school. (p. 21)

The mandates in the amendment have not extended equal protections to education, and inequities continue to exist. The education protection clause of the 14th Amendment requires states to provide public access to schooling to all children living in that state but not the same type of education is provided throughout the system. Lunenburg and Ornstein (2007) contended that differential levels of success in school among racial and social class lines continue to stand out in education. In order for equality to exist in democratic schools, teaching practices must be excellent and equitable to all students. This will prepare all students to become democratic citizens ready to enhance the world.

Democracy in the Classroom

The changing of the traditional teacher authority from informal controls to democratic-operated schools gives the teacher/student relationship an opportunity to develop students into caring citizens. Wolk (2007) asked, “what can be more essential to the health of a democracy than caring citizens? Teaching caring rarely goes beyond

kindergarten because the idea of teaching children and young adults to care is seen as not being rigorous” (p. 653). Sztabnik (2015) defined rigor as the result of work that challenges student thinking in new and interesting ways. Therefore, if democracy is to survive, teachers must be committed to democratic practices that give all students an opportunity to engage in challenged, rigorous, everyday learning that is interesting; therefore, the educational system must work to provide training for all teachers to develop strategies provided to instill the beliefs in children that they need to grow as democratic citizens. Dubois (1970) originally stated,

We should fight to the last ditch to keep open the right to learn, the right to have examined in our schools not only what we believe, but also what we do not believe. We must insist upon this to give our children the fairness of a start, which will equip them with such an array of facts and such an attitude toward truth that they can have a real chance to judge what the world is and what its greater minds have thought it might be. (pp. 230-231)

Darling-Hammond (1996) reported Dubois knew America’s best hope of survival relied on democracy and the “kind of education that arms people with an intelligence capable of free and independent thought” (p. 5). This kind of education takes into consideration the desires and interests of children and allows them to have a voice. It also refrains from imparting a predetermined, restrictive, and hegemonic school culture that has served and continues to keep students in their place.

Hegemony

Burke (2005) defined hegemony as “the permeation throughout society of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality that has the effect of supporting the

current situation in power relations” (p. 1). According to Erickson (2005), “hegemony refers to the established view of things, a common sense of what is and why things happen that serves the interests of those people already privileged in a society” (p. 48). Hegemony refers not only to political control but more critically to consent. Education researchers have realized that relationships play a much bigger role in igniting a student’s ability to learn than the ability to be in charge of human beings.

Positive Teacher/Student Connections

Immordino-Yang and Gotlieb (2017) believed that teachers must do more than have strong abilities to engage socially with students while controlling the classroom. While studying the effects of emotions and mindsets of learning, Immordino-Yang and Gotlieb contended that effective teachers must also be able to engage with students around their curiosity, their interests, and their habits of mind through understanding and approaching material. Sparks (2020) quoted North Carolina State Teacher of the Year James Ford: “Our first job as teachers is to make sure that we learn our students, that we connect with them on a real level showing respect for their culture and affirming their worthiness to receive the best education possible” (p. 1). Sparks believed that teachers who have the ability to relate positively with students experience joy versus anxiety in class. Waterford.org (2019) discussed building rapport with students and becoming the mentor is an excellent way to develop a personal connection that raises intrinsic motivation to learn. Students tend to develop the love of learning when they feel interested in their work. Positive attitudes towards teachers, classes, and lessons create beneficial futures for students. Waterford.org contended that positive teacher/student connections can help children develop self-regulation skills; evaluate and manage their

behavior; reach their personal and academic goals; and overtime, reduce failing grades and the need for redirection. Sheldon and Epstein (2013) stated that 25-40% of new teachers are likely to leave the education field within 5 years; however, Sheldon and Epstein also contended that positive relationships with students can reduce this number and show a teacher how their career changes drive a better future for many students. Providing resources for teacher training and support will build better teachers, which will bring high-quality education to all students. Teachers must focus on how to help human beings become better citizens with the ability to live in a complex society.

Connell (1994) pointed out that teachers are placed in society to promote socially just opportunities for students as “the workers most strategically placed to affect the relationship” (p. 125), and determined that schools must “bring teachers’ work to the center of discussions of disadvantage” (p. 143). Nishioka (2016) found that teachers sometimes do not understand the importance a relationship with each student has on that student’s identity and sense of belonging. Gonser (2020) shared Nishioka’s quote, “Once teachers connect more deeply with students, listen to their stories, we begin to appreciate, and maybe to challenge some of our own misconceptions or opinions that we made about the student” (p. 1). Once teachers realize how teacher/student relationships can change the classroom environment, their learning career can determine a lasting success for the future of others as well as themselves.

The ability to relate to students may not come natural to all teachers; therefore, Freebody et al. (1995) contended that teachers must be prepared for “interactive trouble” (p. 296) with the ability to transform their teaching strategies in order to educate each child under various circumstances. Freebody et al. also stressed that teachers can counter

social injustices by recognizing and addressing inconsistencies and incompatibilities between the cultures and lived experiences of disadvantaged students and the culture of the school. According to Quinn (2003), educating for social justice requires three transformations to culture: the transformation of self, the transformation of people, and the transformation of culture. In transformation of self, students examine personal and professionals thoughts about specific situations. With the transformation of people, learners' positions affect others through their beliefs. Transformation of culture requires the learner to begin to empower others to affect social change in their communities.

According to Jensen (2016), teachers must make a difference through education in the lives of students in poverty; therefore, it is imperative to ensure that all educators are equipped to instruct all students with a quality education that provides equal opportunities in the future (Jensen, 2016). Boykin et al.(2006) confirmed that positive and healthy relationships between teachers and students can be beneficial at all levels of an educational establishment, within a classroom and across the school environment as a whole. Jensen (2016) also contended if we are to improve the lives of all students, we must learn to relate with all of them in order to provide a quality education. Research states that teachers can be influential in the lives of children.

Cultural Influences on Learners

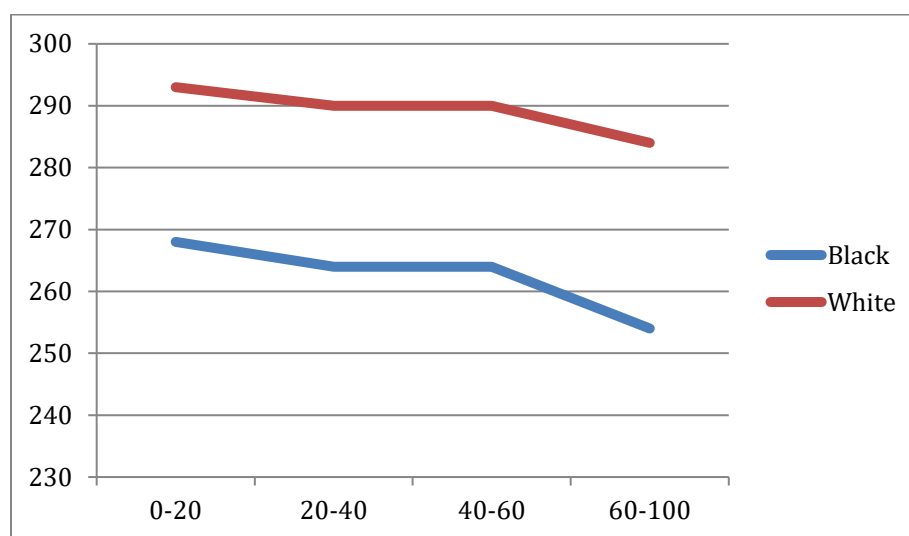
Dworkin et al. (2003) argued that while society looks to schools to develop common values in its citizens, private and public goals are always in conflict; and as long as private industry rules the marketplaces, private interests will control decisions. Schools are often held responsible for social and economic disparities, and this makes teaching really hard. Kalmijin and Kraaykamp's (1996) research contended that many children in

high-poverty areas do not perform as well in school as middle and upper income students, and African American student achievement is considerably behind that of White children. Barton (2003) stated that these achievement gaps that exist across the nation are large and persistent. Nieto (1999) also indicated that these gaps are accompanied by high rates of failure, high dropout rates, overidentification of special education and behavior problems, and placement in the lowest academic programs.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress addresses information in Figure 1 that provides data of Black-White student achievement and the achievement gap among Grade 8 mathematics.

Figure 1

NAEP Scale Score



Note. Black-White student achievement and achievement gap. Grade 8 mathematics.

Why do these achievement gaps continue to exist in so called democratic school settings? According to Gordon (2000), underclass students do not fare as well as those of privilege. Studies show that this achievement gap is the distinct gap stemming from the preparation and experience of teachers who teach in culturally isolated schools and those

who teach in more affluent areas. White-Clark's (2005) research indicated that teachers in diverse settings are more likely to be "unqualified" in their content areas, inadequately prepared, and lacking sufficient professional development to teach effectively. Another contributing factor is the low expectations teachers and principals have for low-income students and students of color. White-Clark's study indicated a correlation between teacher perceptions of minority students and how they educate or fail to educate these children. Delpit (2006) asserted, "in a society that nurtures and attains stereotypes" (p. xxiii), many teachers naturally make assumptions about students assigned to their classrooms. Middle and upper class students are succeeding more from school because the culture of the school is based on the culture of the greater society, to which they are accustomed.

Gay (1992) contended that most teachers come from backgrounds that are different from their culturally and ethnically diverse students. Therefore, these teachers are not naturally sensitive to the needs of these students. Delpit (2006) asserted that this is because these teachers of minority students have different roots in other cultures and "do not often have the opportunity to hear the full range of their student's voices" (p. 17). Shields (2004) emphasized that "to ensure that we create schools that are socially just, educators must overcome silences about such aspects as ethnicity and social class" (p. 110). Shields contended these "pathologies of silence" are "misguided attempts to act justly, to display empathy, and to create democratic and optimistic educational communities" (p. 117). Many teachers continue the struggle to relate with their students and understand their perspectives on life in their culture.

The dynamic situational culture of a student directly influences how that student

learns and performs in a diverse setting. Vygotsky (1978) and Gutierrez and Rogoff (2003) warned a student's culture is shaped by many influences including but not limited to ethnicity, gender, religion, location, generation, age, group memberships, and education. Cardwell and Flanagan (2004) quoted Vygotsky's ideas that culture makes two critical contributions to a child's intellectual development. First, through culture, children acquire much of the content of their thinking; that is, their knowledge. Second, the surrounding culture provides a child with the processes or means of their thinking. Vygotskians call these the tools of intellectual adaptation. According to the social cognition learning model, culture teaches children both how to think and what to think.

Giroux (1996) believed children's culture is a domain where entertainment, advocacy, and pleasure meet to construct conceptions of what it means to be a child occupying a combination of gender, racial, and class positions in society; positions through which one defines oneself in relation to the myriad of others. Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) warned culture affects academic performance and contributes to the academic discrepancies between Asian and Caucasian students and African American and Hispanic students. In order to have a positive teacher/student relationship, the child's culture must be understood. Shields (2004) argued, "If strong relationships with all children are at the heart of educational equity, then it is essential to acknowledge differences in children's lived experiences" (p. 110). Shields contended children can be successfully forced to fit into any "ideal" mold. Culture and Children (2010) reported that children tend to be drawn to the familiar. Children as young as 3, demonstrate an awareness of racial and ethnic identity. There are many things that affect a child's culture. Gutierrez and Rogoff (2003) stated a child's culture is affected by gender, age,

religion, group membership, and family history. Education, community, friends, and the media also influence cultural development. Each exposure to different group characteristics serves to form and modify a child's unique culture.

The factors of culture contribute to a student's success or failure in diverse settings. Issues occur when differences exist between a school system's culture and a student's culture. Delpit (2006) asserted student attitudes, intents, or abilities, as a result of the differences in styles of language use, and interaction of patterns are often misread by teachers. Through understanding, students feel more comfortable in classrooms among teachers. Grant and Sleeter (2005) suggested, "when children feel they belong and find their realities reflected in the curriculum and conversations of schooling, they are more engaged in learning and experience greater school success" (p. 122). Delpit emphasized that the goal must not be to match cultures perfectly but strive to be culturally competent and recognize when certain situations provide problems for individuals or groups of children and address those issues at their roots.

The National Association of Social Workers Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice (2001) reported in the United States that cultural diversity is associated with race and ethnicity, but diversity is taking on a broader meaning to include the social cultural experiences of people of different genders, social classes, religious and spiritual beliefs, sexual orientations, ages, and physical and mental abilities. Respecting diversity is the key to closing the achievement gap to maximize the learning opportunities for all students.

The student and teacher must form a pact that exists within the school setting. Once these two come from different cultures, as happens in socioeconomic status,

misunderstandings are prone to occur. These misunderstandings are caused from the different societal positions of the teacher and student. In order for the teacher to bear the burden of adapting to this situation, teachers must become culturally competent educators. Walker et al. (1985) referred to a culturally competent educator as being able to function effectively with people of diverse cultures. University of California, Berkeley Glossary of Terms (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, 2009) defined cultural competence as a set of academic and interpersonal skills that allow individuals to increase their understanding, sensitivity, appreciation, and responsiveness to cultural competence as “the integration and transformation of knowledge individuals and groups of people into specific standards, politics, practices, and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the quality of services; thereby producing better outcomes” (p. 1). Martin and Vaughn (2007) asserted cultural competence as being comprised of four components. The first component is awareness of one’s own cultural worldview. The second component is the attitude towards cultural differences. The third component is knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews, with the last component being cross-cultural skills. Martin and Vaughn also contended a limited number of individuals seem to possess cultural competence innately. Walker et al. and Osher and Osher (1995) indicated that it is vital that teachers and school leaders understand and respond accordingly to these cultural variances because by being responsive to culture, educators can maximize the effect of their relationships with students and families. King et al. (2007) asserted culturally competent institutions experience less cultural-related miscommunication and ensure stronger and more supportive relationships with students and their families and therefore a higher likelihood of academic and behavioral success exist.

Student and Teacher Empowerment

Culturally competent teachers develop the ability, confidence, and motivation to succeed through empowerment. Empowerment within the school system is very important to teachers and students. Cummins (1986) suggested that students who are disempowered or “disabled” by their school experiences do not develop cognitive-academic and social-emotional foundations. When teachers are motivated to empower students, the school system is successful. Jones (1987b) suggested, “From the giving and receiving of caring, helping, concern, and respect, a bond is built between two individuals that can be trusted. This bond is the basis of most cooperation and spontaneous helping” (p. 65). Great influence in the classroom can be directed from the teacher. This influence and relationship building and maintaining are directly related in the pedagogy of teaching. The influence comes from how the teacher treats and teaches the student. Empowered teachers influence with effective strategies and plan for motivating activities. They also motivate students through academic activities, provide appropriate feedback, and differentiate learning to promote the interests and skills of all students. This gives them the opportunity to manage the classroom effectively and efficiently and to practice effective and positive discipline procedures.

Teacher Effectiveness

Millions of students have the ability to engage in meaningful learning and become successful, but each individual is at a different level when they walk into the school. Preparedness and attitudes towards learning are very important but limited to at-risk students most often. A positive relationship between the teacher and these students is imperative for success. Many students who come from various cultures want to do well

but sometimes do not know how.

It is imperative for these students to have accessibility to effective teachers. Stronge (2002) described effective teachers as those who know their students formally and informally and not only know their learning styles and needs but also their personalities, likes, dislikes, and personal situations that might affect performance in school. Marzano et al. (2001) said teacher effectiveness is broadly used to identify attributes of what constitutes a good teacher. Good and Brophy (2000) and Larrivee (2005) contended that effective teachers are not only accomplished instructors but also work to understand their students' personalities and needs and work to develop and maintain positive supportive teacher/student relationships. Stronge's research was clear in demonstrating that effective teachers have a profound influence on student achievement, and ineffective teachers do not. Marzano's (2003) research determined the effect of teacher effectiveness on student achievement. Researchers estimate that students typically gain approximately 34 percentage points of measuring academic achievement each year. Accordingly, a student who begins a year at the 50th percentile will end the year at the 84th percentile, as measured by the same assessment. While students of effective teachers will receive higher gains, students unfortunate enough to have teachers who do not possess the attitude or aptitude to maximize their learning will achieve at a far lesser rate. Marzano (2003) found that school-level factors account for approximately 20% of the variance in student achievement. Marzano (2003) suggested approximately 67% of the effect, or 13% of the total discrepancy in achievement, is due to the efforts of individual teachers. Marzano (2003) also contended the remaining 20% is dependent on the efforts of the school. Sanders and Rivers (1998) showed the enormous difference teachers can

make in the achievement of their students. An effective teacher can certainly make a difference with an at-risk student's education.

Effective Teachers

The National Partnership for Teaching in At-Risk Schools (2005) defined effective teachers as those who are able to consistently assist their students in making significant academic progress. Teachers must have a command of their subject matter, understand how students learn, and have a broad repertoire of teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of students. Teachers should be certified in the main teaching field. Even though teaching experience does not indicate teaching experiences, research does indicate that teachers who have limited experience are usually less effective than teachers who have a several years of experience teaching. According to Marzano et al. (2001), the effective teacher is capable of performing many functions that can be organized into three major roles: making wise choices about the most effective instructional strategies to employ, designing classroom curriculum to facilitate student learning, and making effective use of classroom management techniques. Marzano et al. (2005) showed that students in effective schools as opposed to ineffective schools have a 44% difference in their expected passing rate on a test that has a typical passing rate of 50%. When comparing the top 1% with the bottom 1% of schools, the difference in the passing rate of a test with a typical passing rate of 50% climbs to 70%. Marzano (2003) warned that ineffective teachers might impede the learning of their students.

Cruikshank and Haefele (2001) described effective teachers with words such as ideal, analytical, dutiful, competent, expert, reflective, satisfying, diversity-responsible, and respectful. Stronge and Hindman (2006) suggested effective teachers cultivate a

positive classroom environment for their students by working with students to ensure that routines, procedures, and expectations are clear. According to Stronge (2002), time students spend engaged in the instruction contributes greatly to classroom success. Students who are not engaged considerably find other things to do with their time, which causes them to get into trouble and lack motivation to participate in learning.

Student Engagement

According to Lezotte (1992), students who are excited about what they are doing in school are usually active participants in their own learning. Newmann (1986) indicated students are engaged when they “devote substantial time and efforts to a task, when they care about the quality of their work, and when they commit themselves because the work seems to have significance beyond its personal instrumental value” (p. 242). Steinberg et al. (1996) defined engagement as “the degree to which students are psychologically ‘connected’ to what is going on in their classes” (p. 15). Engagement is important in the school setting. Graden et al. (1982) indicated that research has found a strong relationship between the amount of time students are actively engaged in learning and their achievement. Black (2004) contended, “Teachers who are the most successful in drawing students into deep and thoughtful learning develop activities that keep students’ psychological and intellectual needs in mind” (p. 42). Garcia-Reid et al. (2005) contended that creating a culture of achievement in their classroom, developing interactive and relevant lessons and activities, and being encouraging and supportive to students are all ways in which teachers can foster student engagement in the classroom. Teachers are responsible for informing but also engaging students.

Steinberg et al. (1996) contended that student disengagement is often a result of

lacking a positive school relationship with a caring adult. Research has stated many times that student engagement plays a big part in student success. Students must be active in order to perform in a successful manner. Adler (1998) indicated that genuine learning is active, not passive; and it involves the use of the mind, not just the memory. It is the process of discovery in which the student is the main agent. According to Wong and Wong (1998), well-managed classrooms are task-oriented and predictable with high levels of student involvement and little wasted time, confusion, or disruption. Teachers who understand and relate to students are able to provide engagement within the classroom and are also able to provide a successful future for all students. Good and Brophy (2000) noted a strong association relates with achievement and engaged learning. Good performance in school is perhaps the best indicator of later success measured by an eventual level of occupation, education, and income.

Teacher/Student Relationship

Student engagement derives from positive teacher/student relationships. Ashworth (1990) asserted, “children are naturally keenly aware of where they stand in the school community and of how they are perceived by other students and teachers” (p. 3). Ashworth also asserted that “human beings are social creatures...biologically intended to live, work, play and succeed together...deeply influenced by others and how they treat us” (p. 6). Perry (2001) stated “the capacity to form and maintain relationships is the most important trait of humankind and without it, none of us would survive, learn, work or procreate” (p. 32). On the other hand, Payne (2005) stated that “in positive teacher/student relationships, emotional deposits are made to the student, emotional withdrawals are avoided, and students are respected” (p. 111). Moos (1979) and

Goodenow (1993) suggested teachers who show personal involvement with students show those students they are respected. Swortzel (1997) believed that feelings of respect motivate and engage students toward increased positive productivity and academic achievement. Without mutual respect, relationships will not exist.

Payne (2001) stated that relationships always begin as one individual to another. First and foremost in all relationships with students is the relationship between each teacher and student; then between each student and each administrator; and finally, among all of the players, including student-to student relationships. Learning occurs between the relationship of the teacher and student. For many students, the failures and successes are highly motivated by the relationships with their teacher. Kohn (2006) stated that most students do not fail due to their cognitive abilities but because they feel unwelcomed, detached, or alienated from significant others in the educational environment. Effective teachers show their students they care about them. Thayer-Bacon and Bacon (1996) contended, “Teachers who care about their students are remembered, effect change, stimulate growth, and are more likely to be successful at teaching their students” (p. 255). Senge (1990) stated,

When people genuinely care, they are actively committed. They are doing what they truly want to do. They are full of energy and enthusiasm. They preserve, even in the face of frustration and setbacks, because what they are doing is what they must do. It is their work. (p. 148)

When students feel the emotional connection of caring with teachers, they are prone to work hard and feel a sense of dedication to becoming better students.

The attachment between adults and children is a very important aspect in the

success of a student. Brendro et al. (1990) indicated that children who are securely attached to significant adults become more curious, self-directed, and empathetic. These relationships foster achievement, autonomy, and altruism. Students need to feel valued but also need to be challenged and know they can succeed or fail. Challenges are delivered through expectations. Tomlinson and Eidson (2003) said teacher expectations can be very powerful and can influence student attitudes and actions and lead to success or failure. Brophy and Good (1970) indicated that many teachers treat students differently based on preliminary perceptions and expectations. Students notice these perceptions, and their self-image and motivation toward learning are hindered. Teachers tend to demand more from students who have high expectations than those they feel are not capable of doing for some reason. Teachers also tend to praise and expect more from higher students while accepting poor performance from the low students. Shouse (1996) contended that teachers who hold high expectations “raise the bar” (p.47) and promote a “culture of achievement” (p. 48). Smey-Richman (1988) agreed that students for whom teachers have low expectations have fewer opportunities to interact and participate in classroom activities. Smey-Richman also contended that students with teachers who expect them to put forth their best effort are more highly motivated and more likely to work harder than students who have teachers who expect less. Borba (1989) believed that “the importance of interpersonal relationships in our lives cannot be overstated. We all need to feel a sense of connectedness to another human being-particularly to those whom we consider to be important and significant” (p. 163). Larson et al. (2002) and Bartlett (2005) described this teacher/student relationship as a formalized interpersonal association between an authority figure and a subordinate who interact on nearly a daily basis.

Positive relationships between the two are very important assets to successful programs in education. It is imperative that students feel comfortable in the learning environment. When students feel comfortable, they can accept and complete academic challenges. Brophy (1988) posited when students feel challenged, they are less likely to be bored and disengaged. Cultivating a culture of achievement in the classroom where instruction is challenged makes students comfortable about asking questions and motivates them to do their best. Stronge's (2002) research provides examples of how a prosperous teacher uses caring to promote positive relationships with students. One study defines caring as understanding the qualities of patience, trust, honesty, and courage. The teacher must be able to show caring through listening skills; gentleness; understanding; warmth; encouragement; seeing students as individuals; and most importantly, having a love for children. Establishing this well-rounded classroom and relationship with students is expected to take time.

Fay and Funk (1995) stated that human beings will perform for the person they love. If a person loves themselves, they will prosper for themselves. If they do not function with high self-esteem or believe in self, they will have to do it for someone else until the time comes when they do love themselves. When students love and respect the teacher, things tend to fall into place. Jones (1987a) contended, "If the students like you, they will go along with almost anything" (p. 191). Effective teachers recognize that they can create and maintain a positive learning environment by developing positive relationships with their students. These relationships develop over time but are a great asset to the learning environment once established. Students want to work hard for teachers who want to teach them.

Cultivated Culture

Cultivating a safe and orderly environment as a place to learn is an important aspect to the school community. It is imperative that children have a safe place to learn. Borba (1989) warned that students generally feel secure in classrooms if they can trust and depend on the teacher. Jackson and Davis (2000) believed the quality of relationships between school staff members and children and among all the adults within the school community makes an enormous difference in the ability of a school to mount an effective instructional program. Positive relationships based on trust and respect, nurtured over time by supportive organizational structures and norms of interaction, enable effective teaching and learning to occur. According to Jones (1987a), the learning environment must be safe to make errors in learning and errors in behavior. Tomlinson and Eidson (2003) and Shalaway (1989) said students need to feel they belong to the group and are important to it and that they share common ground with their peers. They need to come to school with common human needs. They need to feel safe and secure. According to Jackson and Davis, building on early relationships enjoyed with their parents, a student's sense of belonging and acceptance at school enhances their ability and opportunity to learn and perform well in school. Sornson (2001) asserted that enjoying positive supportive relationships with teachers is essential to classroom success.

Positive productive relationships are established through communication. Glasser (1993) stated, "The better we know someone and the more we like about what we know, the harder we will work for that person"(p. 30). Children enter school excited to learn; but after a few years, this excitement too often falls victim to dispiritedness. Harter (1981), Gottfried et al. (2001), Lepper et al. (2005), and Otis et al. (2005) demonstrated

that motivation decreases as students progress from elementary through secondary grades. Kohn (1993) suggested this drop in motivation might be caused by changes in or elimination of various extrinsic reward systems, which undermine intrinsic motivation. Jones (1987b) asserted this lack of joy and motivation towards learning can be attributed to the classroom learning environment. Jackson and Davis (2000) suggested that student motivation and engagement are relative to the quality of the relationships they have in school. In the 2002 Set for Success report, Blankstein (2004) asserted that positive relationships are essential to a child's ability to grow up healthy and achieve later social, emotional, and academic success. Stronge (2002) suggested praising students, reinforcing positive behaviors, and establishing trust help to build caring and respectful teacher/student relationships. Lewis (2000) determined McLaughlin's 12-year study also concluded that fostering relationships between children and adults provides opportunities for them to "see each other in new ways" (p. 643).

Ryan and Patrick (2001) similarly found that students who believe their teachers care about them perform better on tests. When teachers are able to communicate with students, they are able to understand the students and their needs. After understanding students, teachers are able to motivate them. It is imperative that teachers are able to motivate students in order to be effective teachers. Covey (1989) said we must "seek to understand, then to be understood" (p. 237). Marzano (2003) and Shalaway (1989) contended that students who are motivated to learn will typically enjoy increased academic success. When the child's learning needs are met, motivation for further achievement is enhanced. Stronge and Hindman (2006) added that high levels of motivation and enthusiasm for learning in teachers lead to high levels of motivation and

achievement in children. Danielson (2002) and Stronge (2002) asserted that learning is an active process in which students must be engaged as genuine participants. When teachers make the classroom experience engaging and students are meaningfully engaged in challenging learning opportunities and are experiencing success, learning increases and there is little time or inclination for misbehavior. Brendro et al. (1990) warned that students deprived of educational success typically express their frustration through inappropriate behavior or withdrawal. Shalaway (1989) and Sornson (2001) added that when students feel they are emotionally supported, they are better able to concentrate on and generate interest for the learning objective. Motivating students gives them the ability to achieve more, behave better, and have positive attitudes about themselves and others. They are creative, curious, and confident. It becomes the teacher's responsibility to provide this support for students. Through this support, teachers build better relationships with students, and these relationships have a greater capacity to grow and strengthen.

Osterman (2000) contended the best indicator for effort and productive engagement in school is the quality of relationships students have with their teachers. Midgley et al. (1989) and Skinner and Belmont (1993) researched students who enjoy a positive and supportive relationship with their teacher and found those students attend better to instruction, put forth greater effort, work through difficult situations, are better able to cope with stress, and are more accepting of teacher redirects and criticism than students who do not enjoy supportive and positive teacher/student relationships. Pianta (1999) asserted students who have close relationships with caring teachers and share with them personal feelings and information are more engaged and achieve higher academic levels than students who do not enjoy such relationships. According to Stipek (2006),

“when students have a secure relationship with their teachers, they are more comfortable taking risks that enhance learning, tackling challenging tasks, persisting when they run into difficulty, or asking questions when they are confused” (p. 46).

Successful relationships between teachers and students are sometimes difficult to accomplish. Teachers and students coming from various backgrounds tend to exacerbate these challenges among relationships. For example, Payne (2001) conceived the key to achievement for students from poverty is in creating relationships with them. Payne (2001) stated that relationships as well as entertainment are the most significant motivators for these underprivileged students. Payne (2001) contended nine of 10 students from poverty who make it to middle class credit the success of their journey to the power of relationships with specific teachers, counselors, or coaches who took an interest in them as individuals. Honoring students as human beings worthy of respect and care establishes relationships that enhance learning. Jackson and Davis (2000) also found that when successful adults are asked what factor of their education most impacted their success, they often credit a special relationship with a teacher. Carr and Klassen (1997) asserted relationships are especially key to academic success for minority students, and the influence of the lived experiences of predominantly White teachers working with an increasingly racially and ethnically diverse student body needs to be understood. Furthermore, Banks and Lynch (1986) contended that teachers must understand how “race and culture interact to cause educational problems for many ethnic minority students” (p. 16). The factors that explain the low educational or underperformance of some groups in school are the formal as well as the hidden curriculum, involvement of parents, teacher effectiveness, beliefs of minority groups, and school culture.

Teaching and learning during the elementary, middle, and high school levels can involve the affect as much as the intellect. The most crucial teaching tool is the meaningful connection with students and a shared culture. For disadvantaged students of color, seeing an educated professional who looks like them can help make academic aspirations seem possible. Baker (1999) described the unique role of the teacher as the individual who determines when and how a student begins to explore the pressures of society that encourage racist attitudes. These attitudes are important in helping students prepare for a beneficial position in society. Banks and Lynch (1986) contended that teachers must understand how “race and culture interact to cause educational problems for many minority students” (p. 16). This understanding will give teachers the ability to help students prepare for various ordeals in society, regardless of their differences, through relationship building. Consequently, James (1994) focused on the identity or identities of students and observed that teachers have the power to make some children “feel invisible and insignificant and that their differences are irrelevant” (p. 27) through the choice of educational materials and teaching style. Students are not looked upon as individuals but are expected to be able to incorporate information given by teachers through minimal strategies. When individual student needs are not met, students become lost in a classroom or school setting.

Carr and Klassen (1997) adopted a “critical” approach in examining the role and status of White teachers. McIntosh (1998) credited Elizabeth Minnich’s thought of Whites being taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal. McIntosh identified this thought as it being beneficial for others to act like them. This critical perspective maintained that teachers are not “neutral” and their actions

may reinforce inequalities and human differences based on their life experience. Kailin (1994) emphasized the many ways White privilege can “promote subtle and systemic racism, resulting negatively in the cognitive orientations, attitudes, beliefs and opinions” (p. 175). McIntosh described White privilege as an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks that can be cashed in daily. McIntosh determined White teachers as not being trained in school to be seen by self as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. However, Beady and Hansell (1981) stated, “Black teachers expected more of their lived experiences in the classroom” (p. 191). For instance, based on their life experiences, regardless of how little experience with racial or cultural diversity teachers have had, they enter the classroom with a considerably rich body of knowledge about social stratification, social mobility, and human differences. The analogies the White teachers in Beady and Hansell’s study drew between racism and what they knew about sexism, class mobility, and the White ethnic experience tended to minimize or neutralize racism and multicultural education’s implications or action. However, from the teachers’ perspectives, they were accounting for racial discrimination and not ignoring it. Sleeter and Grant (2003) asserted discovering and problematizing the privilege of “Whiteness” (p. 8) should form part of the training and education of teachers. The research of Carr and Klassen (1997) demonstrated that the teacher of color who teaches students of color has a significant role to play in antiracist education. Will (2017) found that low-income Black students who have just one Black teacher in Grades 3-5 are more likely to graduate and consider college, and their likelihood of dropping out is reduced by 29%. Will discussed six areas in which teachers of color can contribute

positively to equity in education by enhancing cultural compatibility, demystifying the hidden curriculum, developing positive attitudes toward persons from a variety of backgrounds, expressing lived experience, connecting with the students, and connecting with communities. New and Sleeter (1993) also indicated that preservice teachers, by placing more importance on behavior than academic work, adversely affect minority children who may not act in conformity with the teacher's culture.

Moving Forward

The Education Commission of the States launched its Quality Teachers for At-Risk Schools initiative in early 2003 (National Partnership for Teaching in At-Risk Schools, 2005). The goal of the effort, which was initiated by Virginia Governor Mark Warner, was to deepen state leaders' understanding of policy issues that are crucial to improving the supply, distribution, and quality of teachers in hard-to-staff urban and rural schools. For almost 75 years, the situation in the public schools seems to present the same problems. While we agree that all students should be treated equitably, equity is rarely equality. When determining the proper education for each child, one size does not fit all. Goodlad (1976) contended children of the same age differ widely in their readiness to learn; they move forward at different rates of speed; and they acquire quite different patterns of learning and thinking. Federal laws have been put into place to make sure all students attend school, but no law guarantees equal education. Students of poverty continue to struggle in education. According to Sacks (2016), one in five students lives in poverty. DeNavas-Walt et al. (2011) contended this number rose from 16% to 22% in 2010. Because of poverty, students enter school on a level 4 years behind other students. Reardon (2011) stated that the income achievement gap continues to grow. Paul (2012)

reported that while the achievement gap between Black and White students shrunk since the 1960s, the achievement gap between low- and high-income families has grown by 40%. According to Jensen (2016), teachers must make a difference through education in the lives of underprivileged students in order to close the income achievement gap.

Jensen (2016) asserted that educators can and must make a difference in the lives of students of poverty through education for the benefit of society in general. Jensen also contended that blame can no longer be put on students of poverty for their underachievement, but the focus must be on how to enrich the teaching from educators to foster the hidden talents of all students. Jensen also contended the old way of teaching is not going to produce new results. Jensen researched a new mindset for enriched teaching and cultivating the talents of students in poverty. Through professional development, educators can enrich classroom relationships, student achievement, student engagement, and school climate for student success. Middle class teachers tend to have problems teaching low-income students from different racial or ethnic backgrounds. The problem is the lack of ability to relate to students of poverty. Changing the mindset of outdated teaching and building a foundation will give students of poverty a chance at an equal education. While this may be a challenge, teaching the old way will present much greater consequences for future generations.

Blad (2016) contended that schools where students feel safe, engaged, and connected to their teachers are also schools that have narrower achievement gaps between low-income children and their wealthier peers. Alexander and Murphy (1998) suggested when students are disinterested in something, it often results in lower achievement over students who are interested in a subject. Students with high interest often see their

achievement levels improve over time. According to Pintrich and Schunk (1996), interest is “elicited by activities that present students with information or ideas that are discrepant from their present knowledge or beliefs and that appear surprising or incongruous” (p. 277). Marzano (2003) asserted that for teachers to be effective, they must be aware of the difference between children and must take a personal interest in each student. Stronge (2002) also asserted that since students learn at different rates, effective teachers recognize differences among their students and plan academic enrichment and remediation opportunities to accommodate those differences in their instruction. Tomlinson (2000) shared ample evidence that students are more successful in school and find it more satisfying if they are taught in ways that are responsive to their readiness levels.

Conclusion

The review of the literature shows a powerful correlation on the building of a strong teacher/student relationship and the academic success of students. The history of public education in a democratic society supports the importance of how a teacher treats a student in the learning environment. Schools have changed throughout the years with the initiation of new reforms, but the struggle still exists with the growth of educational learning. Researchers believe that democracy in the classroom will build positive teacher/student relationships with a better learning environment. Effective teachers in a democratic setting can make a difference in the lives of all students, regardless of the environment from which they come.

There is ample evidence from sources in Chapter 2 that indicates that building a strong relationship with students contributes greatly to a successful learning environment.

Positive and healthy relationships among teachers and students can be beneficial, especially in at-risk areas. Windecher (2019) stated that our problems come down to education, and we must change the way we teach students. Sharma and Zbacnik (2019) explained that education is important for the personal, social, and economic development of the nation. Sharma and Zbacnik also stated that education is vital to living a happy and prosperous life. Barr and Parrett (1995), in 3 decades of research, demonstrated that schools can improve academic outcomes and other measures of success for children who live in poverty. Jensen (2016) confirmed that if we are to improve the lives of all students, we must learn to relate with all students in order to provide them with a quality education.

It is my belief that more research is needed to establish strategies for teachers to create a strong and successful relationship with their students. My study addresses how teacher/student relationships positively affect academic success within the learning environment. Leita and Waugh (2007) contended, “positive teacher-student relationships are characterized by mutual acceptance, understanding, warmth, closeness, trust, respect, care and cooperation” (p. 3). The teacher/student relationship provides a foundation for effective classroom management, and classroom management is the key to high student achievement. Using strategies supported by research, teachers can influence the dynamics of their classrooms and build strong teacher-student relationships that will enhance student learning.

This chapter provided a review of the literature. Chapter 3 presents the research methodology used for the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The focus of this research was to determine how teachers incorporate the relationships they develop with students within the school setting. This research also attempted to identify how relationships between teachers and students affect student academic performance and behavior in a 3,845 student, high-poverty district serving kindergarten to 12th grade.

Preliminary Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness and influence of teacher/student relationships on academics and behavior. Accordingly, the researched questions were

1. How is a positive teacher/student relationship essential to a successful learning environment?
2. What are some mindset changes necessary for teachers to make in order to maintain positive relationships with students?
3. To what extent do teacher perceptions of their interactions with students influence the academic and behavioral success of those students?

Rationale for Qualitative Research

The ethnomethodology exploratory descriptive case study maintained through the lenses of narratology was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of teacher/student relationships on academics and behavior and their influence on a student's future. These qualitative procedures addressed methodological concerns that occurred in this study of human occurrences and outcomes.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) contended that documentation can be used to support

methods associated with qualitative research investigations useful in examining complex systems and human experiences in the context of natural environments. Qualitative data analysis allows researchers to discern, examine, compare and contrast, and interpret meaningful patterns. Anfara et al. (2002) contended that qualitative methodology makes data analyses more explicit and promotes “openness on the grounds of refutability and freedom from bias” (p. 28). As long as valid and reliable procedures have been used, findings can be generalized to larger populations and comparisons can be made between similar settings. On the other hand, McEnery and Wilson (1996) described quantitative study as being able to provide precise information considering the frequency and rarity of certain occurrences. Quantitative analysis warrants the difference between what happens as a result of a variable acting on something and what occurs out of chance.

The disadvantage of the qualitative approach is that findings cannot be extended to a bigger population with the same degree of certainty like quantitative analyses, but Yin (1989) argued that the relative size of the sample is not important. Yin (1989) also asserted that the results of a study are applicable depending on the methodology employed and the rigor of the resulting case study. If the case study is understanding, describing, and explaining, the results are generally applicable.

According to Patton (2002), qualitative research is a “facilitated study of issues in depth and detail” (p. 14). This study is an in-depth analysis of a limited number of five elementary teachers and how they perceive the relationships with their students affect academic performance and behavior. For Patton (2002), “A thick, rich description will provide the foundation for qualitative analysis and reporting in this study” (p. 15). The “thick” description will also provide the information needed to make informed judgments

regarding the degree and extent of fit (Eisner & Peshkin, 1990). According to Ponterotto (2006), a thick description will capture the feelings and thoughts of participants as well as the often-complex web of relationships among them. Schwandt (2001) suggested thickly interpreting social actions by recording the circumstances, meanings, intentions, strategies, motivations, and so on that characterize a particular episode. The goal of this case study was to investigate the nuances of five successful teachers to learn how they facilitate and nurture positive relationships with their students. A qualitative design best served the needs to provide a rich, in-depth, intensive description of the speculation on the numerous dimensions of teacher/student relationships for this case study.

According to Patton (2002), “Inductive analysis involves discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one’s data. Findings emerge out of the data, through the analyst’s interactions, in contrast with deductive analysis where the data is analyzed according to an existing framework” (p. 453). The inductive reasoning that moves the researcher from specific observations to broader generalizations and theories is better known as the “bottom up” approach. Trochim (2006) determined that in qualitative inductive reasoning, the researcher begins with specific observations and measures and works to detect patterns and regularities through coding.

Qualitative research tends to be more personal than quantitative research. Principles supporting qualitative research: Qualitative research defined (n.d.) contended that in qualitative research, much more can be learned about a case study when the researcher participates in or is immersed in the setting to discover categories, dimensions, and interrelationships. Qualitative design best served the goals of this research because of the fully immersed participation in the environment throughout the study.

Theoretical Traditions

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the qualitative researcher operates in the unique position of a “human-as-instrument” (p. 221), whose function is to recognize the social constructs discovered through data collection processes that are unobtrusive, noncontrolling, and nonmanipulative. The human being is the best tool to grasp the subtleties, complexities, and fluidity of a human experience, because they possess skills, knowledge, experiences, background, and certain bias to be a primary collector and analyzer of data. Lincoln and Guba, Patton (1990), and Taylor and Bogdan (1984) suggested this collection of data is normally accomplished through observations, interviews, analysis of documents, and archival forms of data. The human tool can investigate observations with deeper insight than any quantitative instrument designed.

Case Study

The theoretical traditions used in this research were a case study, ethnomethodology, narratology, and portraiture. According to Patton (2002), a case study approach to qualitative analysis comprises a specific way of gathering, organizing, and analyzing data. Patton (2002) stated that the case study approach gathers comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about each case of interest. Stake (1995) indicated a case study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case. Stake also asserted that it is “the study of the complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). Routio (2007) defined a case study or monograph as an exploration of an event, process, person, organization, unit, or object. According to Benbasat et al. (1987), “A case study examines a phenomenon in its natural setting, employing multiple methods of data collection to gather information from one or a few

entities (people, groups, or organizations)” (p. 370). Yin (1994) suggested a case study approach is often the primary design of a qualitative investigation that holds an explanatory evidence related to “how,” “why,” and “what” aspects of the questions served as the impetus to the study. The case study design is appropriate for this research because it explored the understanding of the diverse characteristics and beliefs of the five teachers and their relationship with students in a natural setting.

Stake (1995) and Yin (1994) determined case studies are perfect for understanding the details of a single unit of analysis within a bounded system. In this case study, the teachers were analyzed, and the classrooms and school constructed a surrounded system. Zonabend (1992) suggested that case studies should be done in a way that incorporates the views of the “actors” in the case under study. This study sought the teachers’ views and perceptions.

Yin (1994) suggested case studies be explanatory, exploratory, and descriptive. Explanatory case studies attempt to explain courses of events and how those events occurred. An exploratory case study looks for patterns in the data and is conducted prior to other social research. Descriptive research design attempts to describe characteristics of a phenomenon. Because of the scarcity of existing literature about teacher perceptions regarding how their relationships with students affect academics and behaviors, an exploratory descriptive case study to chronicle the complexities of five elementary school teachers as they interact with students was chosen in an effort to understand the perceptions of the teachers and how they see their relationships with students affecting student academics and behaviors.

Ethnomethodology

Patton (2002) defined ethnomethodology as a study of the ordinary methods of how people do things. Giddens (2006) described “ethnomethodology as the study of how people make sense of what others say and do in the course of day-to-day social interaction” (p. 1). The objective of ethnomethodology is to observe events that naturally occur through the exploration of the inner dynamics in order to comprehend the routines of a culture under study. Patton (2002) contended ethnomethodologists conduct deep interviews and participant observations. Ethnomethodologists perceive everyday interactions and the practices involved in them as having a regularity or stability. Ethnomethodology is known to be a good method for seeing how individuals make sense of the social world for themselves. Accordingly, ethnomethodology provided a stipulation of the dynamics of relationships among the teachers and students in this study.

Narratology

According to Patton (2002), narratology strives to “understand lived experience and perceptions of experience” (p. 115), focusing specifically on the interpretation of “stories, life history narratives, historical memoirs, and create nonfiction to reveal cultural and social patterns through the lens of individual experiences” (p. 478). Eisner and Peshkin (1990) determined narrative as being a form of inquiry that contains the environment and the relations within that environment, and those relationships become the focus of attention. Narratology examines the ways narratives structure our perception of cultural artifacts and the surrounding world. Benham (1997) determined the benefit of narratology is narratives are rich in detail derived from human relationships, and a rich, in-depth, intensive description is required to begin to speculate on the multiple

dimensions of teacher/student relationships. Considering this richness, narratology proves an opportunity to really get into thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973). Rosenbaum and Silber (2001) proclaimed a thick description of human events and behavior retains the meanings that behavior has for the people involved and entails a detailed account of a case study. Narratology provided an opportunity to get into the thick descriptions of the five teachers and their relationships with students.

Portraiture

Portraiture is a way to record people. English (2000) defined portraiture as a creative qualitative approach to engaging in research of groups in action and in telling the stories of individuals in life, and the intent is to capture the essence of the subject. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) stated, “Portraitists seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experience of the people that they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions, their authority, knowledge, and wisdom” (p. xv). This technique was useful in creating portraits of the five elementary teachers telling their stories through their journal entries.

Design of the Study

Setting

The site for this research is a kindergarten through 12th grade school district serving a small rural school district in North Carolina, approximately 60 miles from a large metropolitan area. The district, serving 3,845 students as of 2019-2020, consists of six elementary schools, one middle school, one early college, and one high school. There are 248.47 teachers with a 15.41:1 ratio. The district currently qualifies for the Community Eligibility Program, providing breakfast and lunch meals free to all students

funded through the National School Lunch Act. Current achievement data show that each elementary school in the county met or exceeded growth in the 2018-2019 school year. Based on the North Carolina School Report Card (2018), only 32% of economically disadvantaged students are reading on a proficient level, which is 25% less than North Carolina.

The population of the county is 26,948. The population is 49% Blacks, 47% Whites, and 4% Hispanics. The median household income for the county average is \$34,650 compared to \$43,840 for North Carolina. It also reported that 80.4% of people are high school graduates with only 9% having a bachelor's degree or higher education. The county's 11% unemployment rate makes it one of the highest unemployed counties in North Carolina.

The classroom populations in most elementary schools in the county are predominantly Black with low economic students from the small communities. There are students with individual education plans for learning struggles and personal literacy plans for reading difficulties.

Access was given to me by the school district for purposeful sampling because I serve as a building principal had the permission and the encouragement of the district superintendent. In order to generate informative case studies, the sociological exploratory descriptive case study was an overview of teacher evaluations in search of five teachers with positive teacher/student interactions. Teachers were pursued who have been recognized for positive teacher/student relationships according to the North Carolina teacher's professional performance evaluation instrument performed by principals. The district coaches and principals provided information to identify these five teachers.

Lofland and Lofland (1995) suggested qualitative researchers ask participants to grant “access to their lives, their minds, and their emotions.” Therefore, these teachers will be provided a letter asking permission and specifying confidentiality. A consent letter will be given to outline the purpose of the study, procedures, risks, benefits, and information to be collected (Appendix A). Information will also be provided regarding the process of interviews. These participants will be referred to as Participant 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. All data will be locked under password accessibility for only the researcher.

Data Collection

Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Stake (1995) suggested a case is suitable for study when it is typical and permits naturalistic generalizations. The teachers picked for the study was unique and typical but also had characteristics in common, because they were all female, elementary grade teachers. Information was gathered from the district literacy coaches and principals to determine the five teachers participating in the research using discipline data and teacher’s professional performance evaluation data. Purposive criterion-based sampling procedures were used to select these unique and typical participants for this study. These teachers were all females of a regular elementary class, because over 90% of elementary teachers in the school system are women. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2003), researchers use purposeful sampling when they believe a specific sample will yield needed data. Patton (2002) contended purposeful cases “are selected because they are ‘information rich; and illuminative, and offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 40). Rubin and Rubin (1995) asserted a case to be studied must be purposefully sampled based on its ability to provide completeness. The purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases.

Purposeful sampling was used when selecting the five teachers to be studied. Because of the small sampling of five teachers instead of a large population of teachers, purposive sampling was utilized.

Role of the Researcher

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Patton (1990), the researcher is the key instrument of data collection, and the characteristics or attributes of the researcher are relevant in establishing the trustworthiness of the inquiry. I have expertise in the field of elementary education with 26 years of experience and a profound desire to understand the effect of teacher/student interactions dominant to this study. Additionally, I served as technology coordinator and have had the opportunity to train these elementary teachers throughout their career in the district. I am also a principal with the ability to observe any teacher and student in the district using Google meet and Zoom invitations. Teachers invited me into their Google meets and Zoom sessions to observe their classes. The nature of my participation enhanced my ability to collect and interpret data for this study and share these findings as a tool of continuous improvement.

Data Production

Patton (2002) contended that when using a combination of observations, interviewing, and document analysis, the fieldworker is able to use different data sources to validate and cross-check findings” (p. 244). Therefore, data were collected through observations, interviews, and journal entries of participants. Research was collected over a 6-week period by observing and interviewing these five teachers regarding their interactions and perceptions of their relationship with the students. Additionally, the journal entries were kept regarding observations of their relationships with their students.

The data collection process was conducted as follows:

1. Initial Teacher Interview
2. Classroom Observations (two per classroom over 6 weeks)
3. Post-observation teacher interview (following each observation)

Figure 2

Data Collection Process



Interviews

According to Maxwell (2005), “interviews can provide additional information that was missed in observations, and can be used to check the accuracy of the observation” (p. 94). Patton (2002) stated, “We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions” (pp. 340-341). Lofland and Lofland (1995) contended an in-depth interview does not follow a rigid form in order to provide for free and open responses and is designed to elicit rich, detailed information that can be analyzed. Patton (2002) suggested the purpose of asking open-ended interview questions is to gather and comprehend the perspectives of other people without influencing the responses through preselected questions. Patton (2002)

described the informal conversational interview or unstructured interview as the most open-ended interview approach. While the goal is to go with the flow, the interviewer still asks questions in order to keep the dialog from wandering into irrelevant territory.

When not using unstructured open-ended questions, the standardized interview approach was used with careful preparation of each question before the interview (Appendix B). Each participant was asked the same questions but in a separate interview at different times. According to Patton (1990), the key to a good interview is good questioning and listening while the interviewer refrains from offering opinions, perceptions or feelings. Following a semi-structured open-ended in-depth interview process permitted the subject and me, as researcher, opportunities to expand and clarify during the interview session. Follow-up questions were also used to permit “thicker description” and a more complete portrait of each participant.

Patton (2002) recommended an interview guide be prepared with a list of questions to be explored and suggested probes for follow-up when responses invite further examination. In this way, the guide assured the same information was gathered from all participants.

Each interview was conducted by the researcher at a convenient site of the subject’s choice and digitally recorded using a digital voice recorder and a Swivel for video recording. Phrases were listened to multiple times and then transcribed into a Google document. Each interview was transcribed and provided to the participant to be reviewed and revised. After the accuracy, the transcripts were coded by micro-analyzing all data points using Code Blocks in Google Docs by placing words, phrases, and events into groups of meaningful units (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The codes were used to develop

themes (Appendix C). Curry (2019) suggested using probes during the interview in order to elicit more information or a better clarification from the respondent (Appendix D).

Research Questions and Initial Interview Questions

1. How is a teacher/student relationship essential to a successful learning environment?
 - a. What do you consider a successful teacher/student relationship?
 - b. What affective qualities do you think a teacher needs in order to be able to relate positively with all students?
 - c. To what extent does classroom management affect student behavior and academic performance within the learning environment?
 - d. To what extent does the school culture affect a successful learning environment?
2. What are some mindset changes necessary for teachers to maintain positive relationships with students?
 - a. What do you consider a positive relationship with students?
 - b. What are some mindset characteristics you consider helping you as an effective teacher?
3. To what extent do teacher perceptions of their interactions with students influence the academic and behavioral success of those students?
 - a. What are your perceptions of your interactions with your students?
 - b. Describe a negative interaction that you remember having with a student.
 - c. Did your perceptions develop a change that influenced academic and behavioral success for this student?

Document Review

Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined documents as written or recorded materials not prepared for evaluative purposes. Lincoln and Guba listed a number of advantages with using public documents. Public documents are created for accountability purposes. These documents can be collected from internal and external sources. External records can help a researcher understand participants and compare persons or groups. Internal records like mission statements, grade cards, standardized tests reports, EVAAS reports, and policy manuals help researchers understand personal and group characteristics that assist in identifying strengths and weaknesses. Diaries, portfolios, artwork, and schedules are considered personal and public documents. These documents help researchers understand how people view the world.

Each participant was asked to keep journals around specific prompts to generate written documentation of their perceptions of how they relate with students and how those relationships affect student learning and behavior. The journals were coded with the same codebook for the interview transcription.

Journal Prompts

1. Reflect on the most challenging situation in class this week pertaining to instruction and behavior.
2. Reflect on the procedures for obtaining a democratic process in your classroom.
 - a. How did you invite all students to provide input into decision-making in your classroom?
 - b. How were students able to voice their opinions in your classroom during

learning activities?

3. Provide steps taken to establish positive and supportive relationships with your students within the class setting.
 - a. List verbal and nonverbal feedback used within the class setting that indicated the learning environment was positive.
4. What were some strategies used this week to maintain positive instruction?
 - a. What made these strategies appropriate in promoting a positive learning environment?

The journals were used to draw a picture of the individual teacher. This gave the researcher an understanding of the interpersonal characteristics of the teacher being researched by coding specific words that exhibit positive teacher/students relationships.

Observations

Following the interviews, classroom observations were conducted using Marzano's (2009) Observational Protocol (Appendix E) and the Teacher Expectations for Student Achievement (TESA) Protocol (Appendix F) to gather further evidence to corroborate information obtained during the interview. Hoepfl (1997) contended the observation of participants in a natural setting is the classic form of data collection in qualitative field research. Observations provide opportunities to learn things about the participant that may not be shared. The observer can observe the participant through a natural setting. Maxwell (2005) asserted observations allow researchers a direct way to learn about behaviors and why they occur. According to Patton (2002), "observational data describe the setting that was observed, the activities that took place, the people who participated, and the meanings of what was observed from the perspective of the

observer” (p. 262).

Field research notes are a running description of settings, people, activities, and sounds (Hoepfl 1997, p. 1). Patton (2002) suggested field notes contain a description of everything taking place in the setting. According to Spradley (1979), four types of field research notes were taken. First, short notes were made at the time of the field session. Next, expanded notes were taken after each observation. Third, a fieldwork journal was used to record problems and ideas. Last, the researcher took a provisional running record of analysis and interpretations. This provided specific instances of recording by capturing direct quotations and factual descriptions of interactions between the teacher and students. As I captured thick descriptions, these notes were typed on the same day of the observation. These observation notes were coded line by line using the codebook established during the interview and journal coding.

Data Analysis

Patton (2002) considered “each qualitative study as being unique because of its dependency on the skills, training, insights, and capabilities of the inquirer. The analytical intellect and style of the analyst determines the qualitative analysis.” This study included analyzing the data from the five participants, generating five unique case study reports with qualitative data analysis procedural steps and processes. Rubin and Rubin (2005) described these steps as the responsive interviewing analysis techniques, which consist of recognizing, clarifying and synthesizing, elaboration, coding, and sorting. Recognition consisted of finding the concepts, themes, events, and topical markers in the interview. Clarifying and synthesizing through systematic examination of the different interviews formed an understanding of the overall narrative. White-Clark (2005) contended the

narrative permits the transformation of knowing into telling; therefore, participant journals would be examined. Riessman (1993) suggested storytelling as a collaborative process for the teller to share and the listener to gather and emphasize. The process of elaboration generated new concepts and ideas after clarification and synthesis. Sorting the data with the constant comparative method was used to build a relationship towards a theory. According to Glaser and Strauss (1968), four stages of the constant comparative method give the qualitative researcher the ability to determine themes to describe the data. Glaser and Strauss described the four stages as comparing incidents applicable to each category, integrating categories and their properties, delimiting the theory, and writing the theory. The constant comparative method provided information to be analyzed throughout the case study by utilizing and categorizing the data. Participant interviews and observations were analyzed by employing a coding procedure by systemically labeling concepts, themes, events, and topical markers. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that each data point be micro-analyzed by grouping words, phrases, and events into categories of meaningful units. The data collected were organized into a Microsoft Word table to be stored, merged, sorted, analyzed, and coded. At this time, no new data were discovered that could provide a unique dimension or property.

Interview questions in an emergent design format were established to gain information from the participant. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by listening to a phrase and then typing it into a Google document while making notes of every fragment, stutter, syllable, filler and restart. Code Blocker was used on the Google document to code the transcripts. Participants were provided transcripts for review and revision. Edited transcripts were kept separate from the original interview responses and

used for coding. This provided an understanding of their perceptions of how the relationship with their students affects academic and behavioral success in the classroom.

Coding

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested interpretive, descriptive, and pattern codes be used in a codebook. The codebook consisted of operational defined themes based on the research questions and conceptual framework. The interview data were coded by marking excerpts that represent similar information with shorthand codes. Categories like relationship, culture, engagement, classroom management, high-quality instruction, and feedback were identified within the data analysis. After coding line for line and setting categories, feedback was determined as needed. The data coded from the observations, journals, and interviews used criteria as follows to form themes. Figure 3 presents a summary of how data were coded.

Figure 3

Observation, Journal, and Interview Coding System

Component	Description	Code	Acted upon
Relationship	Describing the opportunities that promote positive teacher/student intervening	R	
Culture	Describing the opportunities that promote positive environmental areas	C	
Engagement	Describing the opportunities that promote students participating in learning activities	E	
Classroom management	Describing the opportunities that promote classroom control and order	CM	
High quality instruction	Describing the opportunities that promote student learning	HQI	

Limitations

Terms of Validity and Reliability

According to Joppe (2000), “Validity determines whether the research truly

measures that which it was intended for or how truthful the results are” (p. 1). Maxwell (2005) argued validity is relative and must “be assessed in relationship to the purposes and circumstances of the research” (p. 105). Winter (2000) agreed the concept of validity is not fixed but is “rather a contingent construct, inescapably grounded in the processes and intentions of particular research methodologies and projects” (p. 1). Qualitative validity determines that the researcher is checking for accuracy of the findings through certain procedures. On the other hand, qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher’s approach is dependable.

Joppe (2000) defined reliability as “the extent to which results are consistent over time” (p. 1). Joppe proposed, “the research instrument is considered to be reliable if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology” (p. 1). Lincoln and Guba (1995) and Patton (2002) determined that in qualitative research, the researcher is the human instrument. By establishing trustworthiness, this creates reliability in qualitative research.

Triangulations

Maxwell (2005) determined triangulation be used to reduce the risk of unintentional associations and systematic biases. Patton (2002) suggested combining observations, interviews, and document analysis. This authorizes the researchers to use various data sources to validate findings. In this study, interview transcripts, participant journals, and participant observation notes were multiple sources used to strengthen the validity of the findings to reduce any known and unknown biases.

Trustworthiness

Seale (1999) affirmed the “trustworthiness in a research report lies at the heart of

issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability”(p. 266). Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined trustworthiness in terms of four criteria: credibility, transferability, conformability, and dependability.

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described credibility as the degree to which the findings of a part of research can be believed or accepted. Erlandson et al. (1993) stated through the degree of confidence in the truth, that the findings of a particular inquiry be carried out through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, member checks, and peer debriefing. Lincoln and Guba asserted persistent observations will allow the most relevant characteristics and elements of the case study setting to be discovered through multiple interviews and journal entries associated with the participating teachers. Prolonged engagement ensures sufficient time being spent by the investigator to enable the researcher to assess the possibility of receiving misinformation and lessens the possibility of distortions in interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Manning, 1997; Rodwell & Byers, 1997). Lincoln and Guba interpreted peer debriefing as “a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session to explore aspects of the inquiry that might remain implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (p. 308). During this study, as a peer debriefer, a doctoral candidate from another university with the experience of elementary teaching and leadership, reviewed the transcripts of the interviews, the participant journal entries, observation notes, and coding and themes assigned to the data. Lincoln and Guba described member checking or narrative checking as being the most critical procedure for credibility. The interviewees were asked to review written transcripts for accuracy.

Conformability

Erlandson et al. (1993) described “conformability as the degree to which its findings are the product of the focus of its inquiry and not of the biases of the researcher” (p. 34). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested using ethnographic audits to evaluate interpretations and conclusions. If facts and conclusions can be traced to their sources and the findings follow a logical path, the study can be considered confirmable. An audit was conducted for this investigation to address conformability and dependability.

Dependability

According to Erlandson et al. (1993), a study is dependable if, when “replicated with the same or similar respondents (subjects) in the same (or similar) context, its findings would be repeated” (p. 23). Lincoln and Guba (1985) also suggested using ethnographic procedures to assess dependability through an audit of a study. The peer debriefer performed a dependability audit to confirm the assertions and quotations in the case study were directed back to original, raw data.

Transferability

Erlandson et al. (1993) defined transferability as “the extent to which the findings can be applied in other contexts or with other respondents” (p. 31). Erlandson et al. determined that transferability, through thickly described, appropriate, and precise detail, ensures the readers’ ability to determine the degree to which the findings can be applied to their own situation. This design provided a thick description of observed teacher/student interactions (Geertz, 1973). It will help the reader who must compare details of the case study with previous real-life situations.

Conclusion

The qualitative research method in this study is a focus on understanding the teacher/student relationship. My goal in conducting this study was to find specific examples of positive teacher/student relationships and their impact on academics and discipline within the classroom. Identifying these specific examples of positive teacher/student interactions through interviews, journals, and observations provided valuable information to the educational learning community.

Being persistent in the case study generated rich data for analysis and interpretation to give the reader the ability to determine if the research is credible, dependable, and confirmable.

Chapter 4: Results

In my experience as an elementary teacher and administrator of various levels, I have had the responsibility of evaluating secondary and elementary teachers concerning pedagogy and teacher/student interactions. I have overseen many teachers with positive and supportive relationships with their students and other teachers not able or willing to take the necessary steps to form and preserve these same relationships. In my experience, the students who encountered positive relationships with their teachers performed at higher academic levels and had fewer behavioral problems than these same students did with teachers who did not develop positive relationships. While interpreting professional literature, abundant information was found to prove that teacher/student relationships affect academics and behaviors in a positive way. A gap still exists in literature investigating teacher engagements and how they feel their relationships with students effect their students' academic and behavioral success.

The purpose of this sociological exploratory case study through the lenses of portraiture and narratology was to investigate and create an understanding of the impact of a positive teacher/student relationship on student achievement between five elementary grade teachers and their students in a high-poverty, at-risk school setting. Five elementary teachers were purposefully selected from a staff of six elementary schools in a small rural school district. These five teachers are considered exceptional in their relationships with their students according to their principals, instructional coaches, and the district teachers' evaluation instrument. The county serves 3,900 pupils comprised predominately of African-American low-income students located in a small county lying on the North Carolina and South Carolina state line. The teachers are typical in that they are females,

as are a majority of teachers in the county.

Stake (1995) purported that researchers should use direct interpretation and aggregation of instances to gain meaning about cases. These strategies are necessary during case study analysis with meanings coming from repeated reappearances. Data for each case were collected in 2021. Open-ended, in-depth interviews were conducted with each participant, and transcripts were provided back to each participant to permit corrections and further explanation or clarification if needed. Two classroom observations were conducted with note-taking of each participant with a focus on teacher/student interactions. Each participant also completed and submitted journals around specific prompts explaining perceptions of how their relationships with their students influence academic growth and behavior. Each journal was coded through a narrative analysis process using Google and interview transcripts. Observation field notes of each participant were analyzed using a generic coding procedure. In addition, a peer debriefer reviewed data to reduce potential biases and strengthen validity. The debriefer, a third-grade teacher, performed an audit by reviewing the interview transcripts, the observation field notes, and participant journal entries.

The resulting data informed by the five case studies were cross-analyzed by examining the information from each participant case and associating all other cases to determine common themes.

Data by Research Question

The data obtained in this chapter are organized thematically according to each of the research questions posed in Chapter 1 of this study. The specific research questions that inform this study are

1. How is a teacher/student relationship essential to a successful learning environment?
2. What are some mindset changes necessary for teachers to maintain positive relationships with students?
3. To what extent do teacher perceptions of their interactions with students influence the academic and behavioral success of those students?

Physical organization and categorical revisions provided an opportunity for data to be logically prepared for discovered themes. Vignettes from interviews and narrative stories shared in journal responses provided an analysis for the study. Vignettes from observations provided a portrait of the five study participants. Participant data were discussed in each section. Each teacher was referred to as Participant 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. Participant responses to interview questions were noted and recorded to each research question. Participant journal entries were also assessed to show relation to the research questions. The research questions were also supported by the observation data. Observations primarily supported participant responses regarding Research Questions 1 and 3 and to a lesser degree contributed to Question 2. Participant journals contributed data mostly to Research Questions 1 and 2. The interview process provided more data for each research question; therefore, interview and journal entry data are addressed together in question order and observation data are presented separately and analyzed chronologically by participants.

Participant Interviews and Journal Entries

Each participant was interviewed in this study to give them an opportunity to describe the process for building a relationship with their students and share anecdotal

evidence that supported what they reposted. The interviews provided an in-depth and detailed clarification of the research questions. Interviews followed each observation to give the participant an opportunity to clear up any misunderstandings and provide further documentation for observation field notes. The interview provided clarity and interpretation of the data by listening for key terms, words, and evolving themes compared to the research questions.

Research Question 1: How Is a Teacher/Student Relationship Essential to a Successful Learning Environment?

Interview and Journal Questions/Comments.

1. What do you consider a successful teacher/student relationship?
2. What affective qualities do you think a teacher needs in order to be able to relate positively with all students?
3. To what extent does classroom management affect student behavior and academic performance with the learning environment?
4. To what extent does the school culture affect a successful learning environment?

A substantial theme identified was “relationship.” Larson et al. (2002) and Bartlett (2005) defined the relationship between the teachers and students as a formalized interpersonal association between an authority figure and a subordinate who interact on a day-to-day basis. The interpretive codes that led to the determination of this theme were “personal knowledge,” “empowerment,” and “caring.” Nodding (2005) determined that caring and trusting relationships between teachers and students provide effective teaching. Effective teachers interact in a way that empowers student learning. Shields

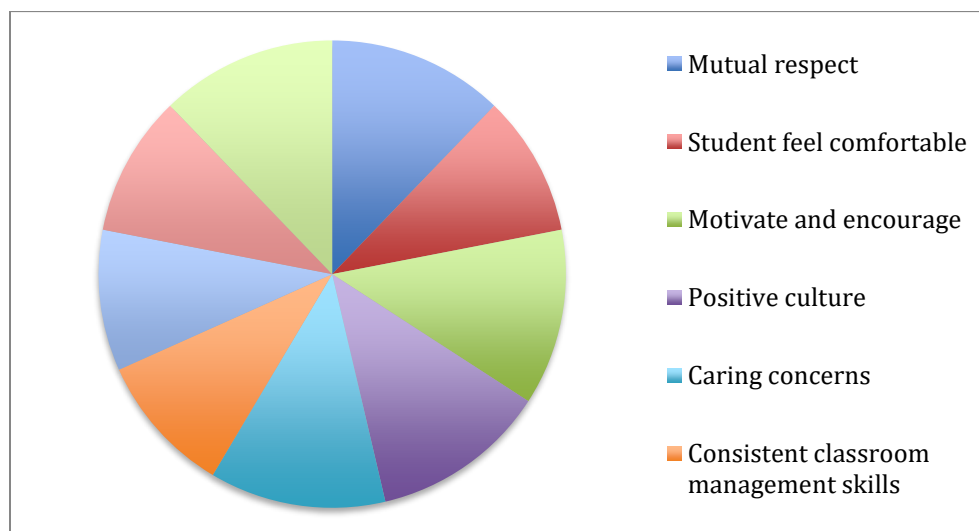
(2004) recommended that children be empowered to participate in their own learning and take responsibility for their own learning. Students who know teachers care about them tend to work harder in the classroom. According to Stronge (2002), a caring relationship from a teacher develops through listening, gentleness, understanding, knowledge of students as individuals, warmth and encouragement, and an overall love for all children.

Another significant theme was “culture.” Deal and Peterson (1990) defined culture as the “deep patterns of values, beliefs, and traditions that have formed over the course of history”(p. 7). The school building in which the teacher and student interact provides a set of norms and ways of working, thinking, talking, and behaving built around beliefs and values. The interpretive codes that led to the determination of culture as a theme were “diversity,” “relationship building,” and “communication.” A culture of achievement is characterized by instruction that is challenging, where students feel comfortable asking questions and students are expected to do their best (Brophy, 1987; Garcia-Reid et al., 2005; Shouse, 1996; Smey-Richman, 1988; Weiss & Pasley, 2004). The common comments in Research Question 1 were labeled typical (at least four participants) or general (five participants) among the five participants, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1*Research Question 1 Interview and Journal Common Comments*

Research question	Comments	N	Frequency
1. How is a teacher/student relationship essential to a successful learning environment?	Mutual respect	5	General
	Student feels comfortable	4	Typical
	Motivate and encourage	5	General
	Positive culture	5	General
	Caring concerns	5	General
	Consistent classroom management skills	4	Typical
	Strong bonds between teacher and student	4	Typical
	Personal connections	4	Typical
	Building relationships	5	General

Figure 4 demonstrates the commonality of comments between the five participants.

Figure 4*Research Question 1 Interview and Journal Comments*

Participant 1. When asked how she felt about the considerations of a successful teacher/student relationship, Participant 1 stated, “A successful teacher/student relationship is created when the teacher establishes a safe, positive, and inviting environment. There should be mutual respect...between teacher and students. The

students should feel comfortable asking and answering questions.... And the teacher should be approachable.” Participant 1 also shared qualities that are needed for positive relationships between the teacher and students. Journaling about the process she follows to empower her students to share their voices in her classroom, Participant 1 wrote, “I have discussions with the class to determine what is important to them. I give out jobs so that students feel like they have a part in controlling the classroom.”

Participant 2. When asked directly what she feels is essential to a successful learning environment, Participant 2 stated,

A bond is extremely important between the teacher and student. A student must be able to feel loved and nurtured. Caring for students must be present in order to feel these things. A successful relationship is when you are able to coach your students and observe the individual growth. Positive environments...are imperative to building relationships in the classrooms. Teachers must understand where students are coming from and students must know and...respect their teachers.

This teacher also wrote in her journal that caring relationships in her classroom are important among students:

My students help each other out in the classroom and are taught to take care for themselves in certain situations. They praise each other by clapping. They give each other time to think and answer. They even tell me when it’s appropriate to give someone positive behavior bucks.

Participant 3. To develop and maintain caring relationship with her students, Participant 3 shared a clear process of being able to relate with her students:

To relate positively with students, a teacher definitely needs a positive mindset starting out about a student. Every student has different needs, and as a teacher you have to be able to see what type of positive feedback/relationship that students may need.... For example, where one child may need love and affection from their teacher, another student may just need a smile and positive verbal reinforcement. Another student may need IMMEDIATE positive reinforcement as soon as they step their little foot in the classroom, whereas another student may not need it until they are doing an assignment.

In her participant journal, Participant 3 wrote about her perception of the importance of structure:

Giving students a sense of structure, of knowing what will happen next within their day relieves some anxiety, and allows the student to easily [sometimes] go onto the next part of the lesson or subject. Today, I had to use straight-forward wording to remind and direct students, whereas the one student needed the “fluffed” reminder so that she wouldn’t shut down.

Participant 4. When asked about what she considers a successful teacher/student relationship, Participant 4 replied,

Students tend to react from parents’ responses when both positive and negative situations occur. I also believe that teacher/student relationships are successful when they take the time to get to know their students and acknowledge them in positive ways. Students tend to react more positively when they know you truly care about them.

Participant 5. Regarding her perception of the importance of a positive supportive

relationship with her students, Participant 5 stated,

The relationship between a teacher and students is one of the most influential factors in a learning environment. This is the key element affecting students' progress, engagement of school and academic motivation. A teacher/student relationship forms the basis of the social context also. We all want to feel cared for and valued by the significant people in our lives and students are no different. Establishing a relationship with students builds trust and leads to increased cooperation. Students don't care how much you know, but how you make them feel. Relationship promotes a desire to learn. It is by far...the most...important tool a teacher can have to reach their students. [sighs]

Participant 5 journaled about a time she had to change strategies for better classroom management:

It was with a student who was always unmuted, lots of noise in the background and not visible, and was always trying to text other children. This caused a lot of interruptions during instructional time with behavior and keeping others attention doing instruction. I knew I had to revamp expectations to eliminate these issues. I began by getting to know this student and changing the way I saw things with him.

Research Question 2: What Are Some Mindset Changes Necessary for Teachers to Maintain Positive Relationships With Students?

Interview/Journals Research Questions.

1. What do you consider a positive relationship with students?
2. What are some mindset characteristics you consider helping you as an

effective teacher?

As with Research Question 1, the significant themes were “relationship” and “culture.” The interpretive codes that supported the relationship theme were “caring,” “personal knowledge,” and “empowerment.” The interpretive codes that supported the theme of culture were “cultural knowledge,” “culture of achievement,” “high expectations to learn,” and “high expectations to behave.”

With Research Question 2, the significant themes were also “high-quality instruction” and “classroom management.” The interpretive codes that supported high-quality instruction were “effective feedback,” “differentiated instruction,” and “teacher effectiveness.” Marzano et al. (2001) and Weiss and Pasley (2004) described high-quality instruction as rigorous, aligned with content standards, and uses instructional strategies to meet the academic needs of all student classrooms. Effective teachers are able to make wise choices and have a mindset that can be changed when needed for growth. Teachers who differentiate instruction follow a systematic approach to planning instruction for academically diverse learners and modify the instructional content, process, product, and environment so students who learn best in different ways are instructed in a manner that maximizes learning (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Garcia-Reid et al., 2005; Lezotte, 1992; Stronge, 2002). Effective feedback must always be supportive, diagnostic, and constructive and must provide an explanation of what is correct and what is not correct and how to make improvements (Brookhart, 2008; Danielson, 2002; Hattie, 1992; Lezotte & Pepperl, 1999; Stronge, 2002). The interpretive codes that supported the theme of classroom management were “meaningfulness,” “consistency,” “patience,” and “choice.” Jones (1987b) and Danielson (2002) posited that classroom management,

behavior management, and classroom discipline are interrelated and often used interchangeably. Duke (1979) defined classroom management as “the provisions and procedures necessary to establish and maintain an environment in which instruction and learning can occur” (p. xii). These teachers know the importance of a changed mindset in order for teacher/student relationships to work for the betterment of all children.

The common comments in Research Question 2 were labeled typical (at least four participants) or general (five participants) among the five participants, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

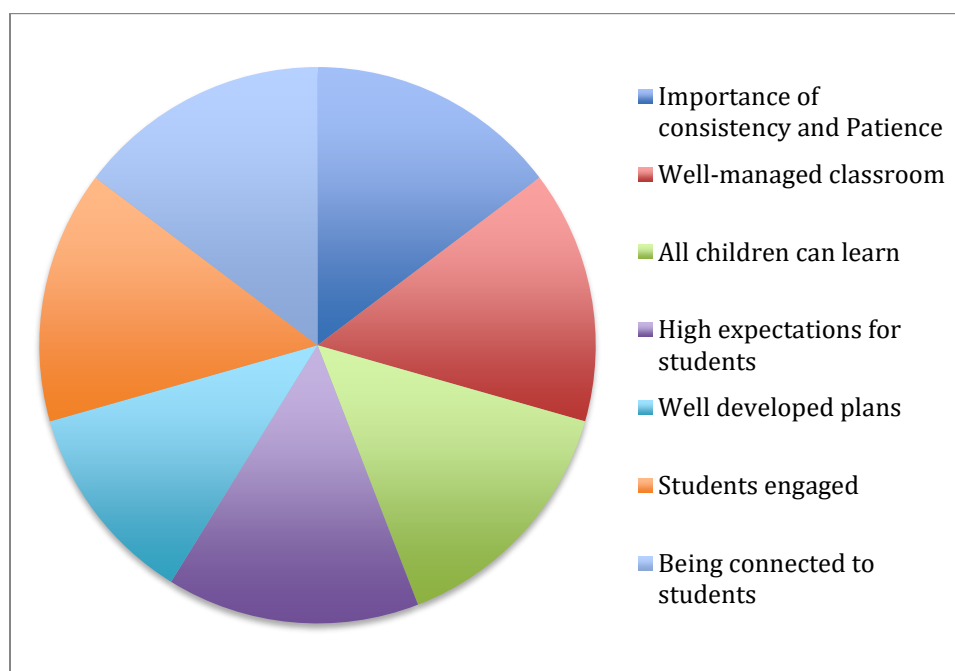
Research Question 2 Interview and Journal Common Comments

Research question	Comments	N	Frequency
2. What are some mindset changes necessary for teachers to maintain positive relationships with students?	Importance of consistency and patience	5	General
	Well-managed classroom	5	General
	All children can learn	5	General
	High expectations for students	5	General
	Well-developed plans	4	Typical
	Students engaged	5	General
	Being connected to students	5	General

Figure 5 demonstrates the commonality of comments between the five participants.

Figure 5

Research Question 2 Interview and Journal Comments



Participant 1. When asked what mindset changes she perceived as important in teacher/student relationships, Participant 1 shared the importance of improving classroom management: “Classroom management helps to set the stage for student behavior and academic performance. A poorly managed classroom hampers effective teaching and learning. If students are disruptive and disrespectful, and no guidance or rules have been established, chaos will ensue.” Regarding her relationship with her students and the impact of classroom management, this teacher spoke about the importance of consistency and patience when building a relationship with her students.

Participant 1 also stressed in her weekly journal writing that using high-quality instruction, instructional technology, and engaging the home as instructional partners contributes to student success. Writing about 1 week of effective teaching, she shared,

We used graphic organizers while doing cause-and effect on the whiteboard in

Google classroom. Parents were able to help guide students at home with the lesson. Using technology promotes engagement and positive learning. Students like to use technology tools and they often forget that they are learning. It takes a lot of patience from the teacher and the parents, but it is worth it in the end. Math work during indirect time gives students an opportunity to practice what I have taught. It also allows for a partnership with parents/guardians between what I teach and what the students need to practice on individually.

Participant 2. When asked about mindset changes necessary to maintain a positive relationship with students, Participant 2 stressed the importance of classroom management and instruction fit for all students in the class:

Teachers need to be well prepared for up to date strategies in order to teach quality education that is rigorous in a controlled setting. Teachers need to start each day off with a fresh beginning. Students should be held accountable for their actions but teachers should be able to manage their classroom with patience and consistency.

In her journal, Participant 2 shared an example of how she positively impacts the learning environment to provide high-quality instruction:

Behavior management and differentiation are some strategies I used this week to maintain positive instruction. It is important for me to keep a positive learning environment by being persistent in teaching students rules, expectations, and daily routines. Including differentiated instruction, allows my students to be different and creative utilizing their strengths and interest in making choices in what they learn and how they learn. For example, they were given “Tic Tac Toe” boards to

choice activities to complete for science class.

Participant 2's journal entries spoke of building and maintaining positive and supportive relationships with students, and a direct connection was drawn between classroom management and high-quality instruction.

Participant 3. Speaking about maintaining a culture of high-quality instruction and a managed classroom where students feel safe and are empowered to perform at high levels, Participant 3 alleged,

A positive relationship with a student is one where my personal mind thinks positively about that student. I feel that if that reciprocated within the student, then that is a positive relationship. Not every single day is a positive day; just like any relationship there are hard days, and good ones. But...the respect is always there. [smile]

Participant 4. Speaking on the mindset characteristics that have helped her, Participant 4 stated,

I believe there is five mindset characteristics that have helped me become an effective teacher. The first is to be flexible and open to change. Teaching a lesson or managing students isn't always perfect. As a teacher...I have learned that maybe...I need to change my way of thinking instead of my students. The second is to be more positive.... Students will react more positively when the people around them do.... The third is to start small, make small changes one day at a time. I have learned that I cannot change students' and parents' perceptions and behavior in one day. Building a positive classroom and positive relationships take time. The fourth would be to love all of my students no matter what. My students

cannot help their situations outside the classroom.... As a teacher, I try to make the best of their day, so they will look forward to coming back to school. The last is to be more reflective. Each day I try to reflect on my day and think of ways to improve every aspect...my teaching, my planning, my behavior management, my attitudes, etc..... These five mindsets have helped me every year in becoming an effective teacher. Although, sometimes I have to adjust my mindsets...depending on the type of year that I have.

Participant 5. When asked about mindset changes, Participant 5 was a little reluctant when answering the question. After a pause, Participant 5 stated,

I look for the best in my students and the best in myself. I teach with enthusiasm and passion. Students will respond positively when a teacher is enthusiastic and passionate about the content she is teaching. Excitement is contagious. When a teacher introduces new content enthusiastically, students will buy in.

Participant 5 wrote in her journal about obtaining a democratic process in her classroom and the mindset change for her and students these days:

The democratic process is reflected in two major ways: written classroom policies and teaching methodology. Written classroom policies—During the first few days of school, I share and distribute a written statement of policies and procedures for our class. Next, I teach and explain why we have and need the particular rule and procedure in the classroom, etc. I invite the students to add and share their comments. Then we all agree to the rules and policies and we commit to it by repeating a pledge every day to obey the rules. We accept it as a class agreement. The students take ownership because they had input. By providing my students

feedback, it not only informs instruction, it conveys that I value their insight, and that their voices are at the center of the work that we do. When I listen to and honor my students, I can show them that their voices are at the center of the work that we do. When I listen to and honor my students, I can show them that their voices can be powerful instruments of learning for themselves and others.

Almost consistently, the participants shared and demonstrated a pattern of mindset changes necessary for teachers to maintain positive relationships with students. Jensen (2016) researched four essential mindsets that are very similar to the findings in this study. Jensen determined relational, achievement, rich classroom climate, and engagement to be highly relevant in a positive teacher/student relationship. It is interpreted through the study that these participants follow the same pathway and show that relationship, culture, engagement, high-quality instruction, and classroom management are mindset changes needed among teachers to maintain positive relationships with students.

Research Question 3: To What Extent Do Teacher Perceptions of Their Interactions With Students Influence the Academic and Behavioral Success of Those Students?

Interview/Journal Questions.

1. What are your perceptions of your interactions with your students?
2. Describe a negative interaction that you remember having with a student.
3. Did your perceptions develop a change that influenced academic and behavioral success for this student?

As with Research Question 1, the significant theme was “relationship.” “Caring” and “empowerment” were the supporting interpretive codes. The culture theme was also

evident and was again supported by the interpretive codes of “relationship building” and “communication.” This question asked the participants to consider how their perceptions of their interactions with their students influenced academic and behavioral success. All participants have taught more than 1 year and had former students on whom to reflect. Some participants have worked long enough to have students who are now grown and in the community. “Classroom management” also showed up as a theme, which was again supported through the interpretive code of “consistency.”

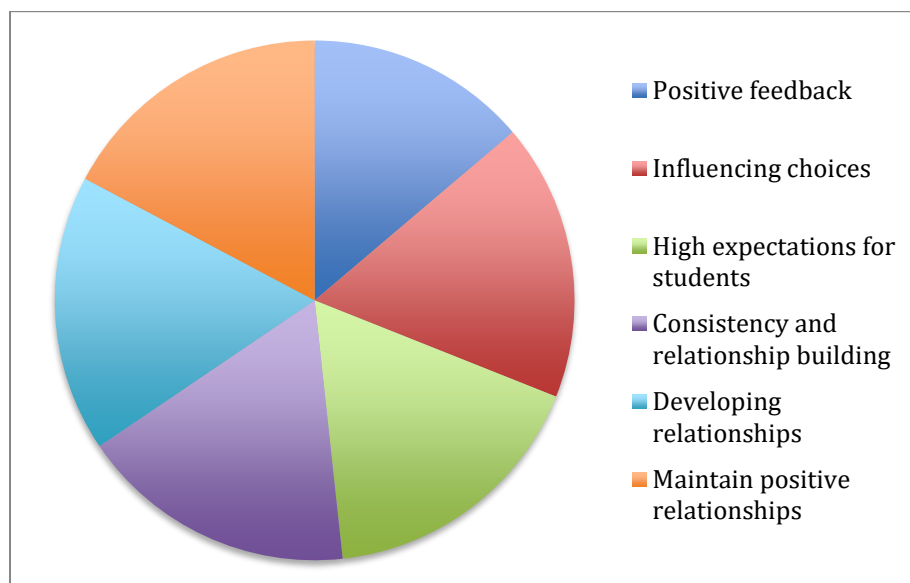
The common comments in Research Question 3 were labeled typical (at least four participants) or general (five participants) among the five participants, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Research Question 3 Interview and Journal Common Comments

Research question	Comments	N	Frequency
3. To what extent do teacher perceptions of their interactions with students influence the academic and behavioral success of those students?	Positive feedback	4	Typical
	Influencing choices	5	General
	High expectations for students	5	General
	Consistency and relationship building	5	General
	Developing relationships	5	General
	Maintain positive relationships	5	General

Figure 6 demonstrates the commonality of comments between the five participants.

Figure 6*Question 3 Interview and Journal Comments*

Participant 1. Reflecting on the perceptions of the interactions with students, Participant 1 shared,

The more encouraging I am, the more likely my students will be engaged, the harder they will work and be motivated to learn. I've learned the more I praise them, give them positive feedback and encouragement, the harder they work.

Participant 2. When asked how she feels the relationships she has with students affects their academic and behavioral performance when they leave her classroom, Participant 2 shared the following story regarding the carryover from her high expectations for behavior and the caring culture of her classroom:

My first year of teaching...I had a student that was dealing with issues from losing a younger brother to cancer. It was really a struggle knowing what behavior to expect from him on a day-to-day basis. I tried to get to know him and his family but there was a wall built up that I could not tear down. I tried everything I

could think of and finally realized that with patience and consistency, I could build a relationship through positive communication with the student and family. I decided to take one day at a time. I noticed him this year.... It's like he is a new student. I would like to think that the consistency and relationship building when he was with me made a difference and caused him to grow.

Participant 3. Reflecting on the development and maintenance of her students' personal values supported through caring and empowerment from the time in her classroom, Participant 3 stated,

Softhearted. I have been working on not being as softhearted. I have learned that sometimes this can get me into trouble with my heart, or students recognizing it and taking advantage. I try to bring my best self every day for my students and leave what is bothering me behind, if it's personal. I have noticed that my students get excited about learning if their teacher is excited. This is hard sometimes! I also try to be a cheerleader for my students. In the back of my mind, good home or bad, sometimes I am their only motivation.

Participant 3 also wrote in her journal about how these perceptions of developing a change influenced academic and behavioral success for her student:

My perception of this student did change from the beginning of the year. Once I started to develop a relationship and get to know more of the background, I would not get as frustrated and was able to help them a little better with their moods. In addition, knowing the situation provided me ways to question and get insight into what was going on and I knew exactly where to start instead of throwing random questions at her that would irritate her more and cause her to shut down. This in

turn helped them to stay in the classroom more often and learn more material.

They would do better on assignments and started to participate more in class! This student's academic success did go up.

Participant 4. For Participant 4, a perception of interactions with her students is not always positive. To this regard, she questioned, "Does this change my perception of my students?" She further explained,

It shouldn't. But sometimes I must catch myself and change my mindset that even though my students may make mistakes or behave inappropriately, they are children, and they need to learn that their mistakes can be easily forgiven, and we move on.... I have learned that a child's racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic background does not determine who they are or how they should be treated. All children can learn based on the expectations they have been given.

Participant 4 then shared a negative interaction and the outcome in her journal writing:

I had a student that broke down because of an emotional issue. It took me a few times to realize he was venting and wanted to argue no matter what I said, either positive or negative. I also realized that if I placed him in a quiet place in the room and gave him a choice of what he could do, he would usually choose the right path. I learned that after giving him his two choices, I had to walk away and not let my temper get the best of him or me.

Participant 5. When asked about teacher perceptions of their interactions with students and its influence on academic and behavior, Participant 5 stated,

It has everything to do with student's behavior and academics. Teacher expectations equal student achievement. When perceptions are low, expectations

are low, when perceptions are high, expectations are high. My perceptions are high for all students and my expectations are high for all my students. I truly believe that all students can learn, all are special. I approach every child as if they are my own and treat each child as I would want my own child to be treated. I believe that if a child hasn't learned, I haven't taught. I need to teach the way the child learns. Find their strongest and weakest modality.

During a weekly journal reading, Participant 5 shared her perception through changing strategies to maintain positive instruction with a student:

To maintain positive instruction this week, I used a strategy to build intrinsic motivation with a student who never wants to work a problem, but keeps himself invisible. I told him that it's okay not to know, but it's not okay not to try.... He made himself visible, unmuted himself and said he didn't know. I praised him for this, and told him that it was okay because my job as his teacher was to teach him. [Smile] I did a problem and explained the steps and strategy. Then with little assistance, he guided me through the steps to complete the next problem. He did an excellent job and I made a big to do over it with the class. I could see the smile on his face and hear the joy in his voice. The next day, he unmuted himself and said he wanted to do a problem. He did it with 100% accuracy. It was definitely a positive learning environment.

Interpreting data from the participants, a teacher's perception is shown to be very influential towards the academic and behavioral success of students.

Participant Observations

Data from participant observations primarily addressed Research Questions 1 and

3 and to a lesser degree addressed Research Question 2.

Research Questions

1. How is a teacher/student relationship essential to a successful learning environment?
2. What are some mindset changes necessary for teachers to maintain positive relationships with students?
3. To what extent do teacher perceptions of their interactions with students influence the academic and behavioral success of those students?

According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), “using published literature to suggest concepts and themes by which to code is perfectly legitimate as it will help you relate your findings to what others have already written” (p. 209); therefore, for categorical aggregation, the TESA rubric and Marzano’s (2009) Observation Protocol (Appendices D and E) were used. TESA is an interaction model and rubric derived from research of Good and Brophy (1976) to interpret teacher and student relationships. Marzano’s (2009) protocol focuses on teacher effectiveness and teacher relationships with students. During the triangulating process, these categories provided the ability to have clarity and consistency that were well grounded in research. All five of the previously identified themes were found in the analysis of the observation data. The theme of “classroom management” was very evident and supported by the interpretive codes of “meaningfulness,” “competence,” “impact,” and “choice.” The “relationship” theme included the interpretive codes of “personal knowledge,” “empowerment,” and “caring.” The “culture” was interpreted by the “diversity,” “relationship building,” and “communication” in the classroom; and the theme of “engagement” was interpreted by

the “sense of belonging,” “active learning strategies,” and “activities” in which both the teacher and student engaged. High-quality instruction was evident and was supported by the interpretive codes of “effective feedback,” “differentiated instruction,” and “teacher effectiveness.”

Participant 1. Participant 1 began a language arts lesson by directing student attention to the objectives and standards and telling them they would be talking about the Earth’s form and practicing the letter R. The teacher reviewed information on Earth. The teacher asked students to recall previous information that was given the day before class. She restated student responses that clarified correct answers and asked follow-up questions when needed. The teacher spoke in a calm, subtle voice that soothed the classroom full of students. All students looked with attention as the teacher went through the lesson of the Earth. She transitioned smoothly into the discussion of volcanoes. The only behavior redirect was quick and quiet. A student came on Google class with a robe and no shirt. Without stopping the lesson, the teacher recommended the student go put on a shirt by saying, “Go put a shirt on Buddy.” The student quickly jumped up to get a shirt and was back in front of the camera with no other interruptions of the lesson. In discussing this with her later, the teacher stated that it is important to provide an opportunity for all students to be successful, and redirecting quickly gives them an opportunity to return back to class with dignity and little academic time missed. In discussing this exchange, Participant 1 explained that she has worked to have a positive relationship with this student; but the environment he lives in persuades him, and she is trying to give him an opportunity to learn about other cultures and what is expected outside of the home. This shows a caring willingness to understand a child’s culture and

to build a culture within the school in which they can learn. The teacher provided directions for the students to watch a video on volcanoes. The teacher stopped the video and asked questions. Asking students to explain their thinking process is an example of high-quality instruction, as such questioning causes a deeper level of processing. During this observation, there was an effective instructional balance of teacher talk and student talk. Students were actively engaged in the learning process, which indicated an effectively planned lesson that conveyed high expectations for learning and a supported culture of achievement. The teacher very clearly delivered a caring, respectful, high-quality lesson. She called students by their first and last name, which showed respect and gave them a sense of ownership of their education.

Participant 2. It was evident that this teacher spends much time planning for high-quality instruction for student success. As she began teaching her Reading Wonders by going over letter recognition and letter sounds, she displayed letters on the computer screen using the Google Classroom. After grasping the attention of all students, she stopped the lesson to ask them about their weekend. She calmly listened to each student's story and excitedly reacted at the end. The teacher smoothly transitioned into the high-frequency words activity and students followed. She called students by name; and after they responded, she praised them for the effort. When the student's answer was not correct, she asked follow-up questions to provide thinking and success. After finishing the high-frequency words, the class took time to cheer. When inappropriate actions were noticed, Participant 2 used a very calm but clear tone to redirect students without stopping class. She began to discuss with students the importance of being nice and caring to others. She asked students of ways to change the world. When calling on

students, she used their first and last names. When a student did not speak loud enough, she calmly asked them to say it again. The student spoke up with confidence the second time. In discussing this with Participant 2, she stated that she uses wait time to give students an opportunity to feel comfortable enough to participate in class. She stated that the longer they are in class, the more comfortable her introverts begin to feel.

Participant 2 demonstrated how she engages in high-quality instruction planning by providing active student involvement during the math activity in the second observation. Specifically, she asked students to write numbers on a whiteboard with their markers that she personally took to their houses. One student stated that his marker was not working anymore, and she caringly let him know that she would bring him another marker. She then led the class in a chorally counting of bear shapes to 20. She asked students to write the number 20; and then by extending their thinking, she directed them to add three more bears and write the number on the whiteboard. As students shared their whiteboards, she praised them one at a time. This demonstrated care for their learning and reinforced the culture of achievement in the class.

Participant 3. Participant 3 began a math lesson by directing students to open up their note-taking. She stated several times that students would receive 40 dojos for note-taking during class. She reminded students to save dojos to be able to pie face the principal at the end of the year. The teacher welcomed each student into class with individual gestures. For example, “Hey girl, do you have your notebook? Okay, go get your notebook.” The teacher introduced students to the posted learning objective and told them that they would be converting time by adding and multiplying. Marzano et al. (2001) described summarizing and note-taking as a high-quality instructional strategy.

The teacher demonstrated how to convert minutes into time and then asked students to write down notes and the example in their notebook. She then displayed the steps on the whiteboard in order for students to copy them down. The teacher asked students to repeat steps as she processed the answers. She restated student responses which served to clarify, and she asked follow-up questions when more detail was desired. One noted example was when a student came into class late and the teacher quickly spoke and remained on task. Students were provided a problem to work on as the teacher guided them through the steps. The teacher replied, “Real quick, 1 hour plus 23 minutes equal how many total minutes? Good morning buddy, just write down this part right here.” Without stopping she guided students through several equations with questions and repeated responses. The teacher continuously reminded students that note-taking would get them 40 dojos. This provided the students with the exact requirement for success. As students worked, Participant 3 went from student to student informally assessing understanding, asking leading questions to prompt student thinking, and encouraging them when needed. In discussing this with her later, she described this strategy as a way of motivating students and also assessing them for understanding. Participant 3 also stressed the importance of rewarding her student’s appropriate behavior. She uses dojos for students to earn incentives like movie day and pie facing the principal and custodian. This is a clear demonstration of a culture of achievement, high expectations for behavior, and rewards and recognition for appropriate behavior.

In an observation of a reading lesson, Participant 3 planned for cooperative learning, which is a high gains instructional strategy (Marzano et al., 2001). The objective of this lesson was to have students cooperatively work in groups to interpret

information and develop main ideas and details of a story. Each student was placed in a breakout group to cooperatively work on a activity. A timer was set to raise the level of concern with groups for motivation to finish work. In our discussion, the teacher explained she often uses time to encourage her students to work with a purpose and to stay focused. This demonstrates to students a high expectation for both academics and behavior. During the activity, groups were given differentiated instruction while still having high expectations of learning for all. When asked about discipline problems, the teacher shared that the students have no time for negative discipline because of the constant transition of activities.

Participant 4. Observing a math class teaching the geometry standards for third graders, Participant 4 began by calling out students to display a right angle with their hands. The teacher dignified the correct displays by chanting, “Good job, good job.” This gesture motivated the students to prepare for class. The teacher then reviewed definition terms while relaying them to real life situations that students could remember. “Okay, let’s see an acute angle, now what about an obtuse angle? What does that mean in Hawaii.” “Hang loose, exactly, hang loose.” All except one student were excited and attentive. In midsentence the teacher said, “Plastic in your mouth is not a good thing.” “Remember what we learned in health.” “Do I need to call your mother?” The teacher continued to review angles, and the student instantly corrected his behavior. This redirect was subtle and respectful and showed high expectation for behavior while providing for academic success. After reminding students of an afternoon test on angles, the teacher began to discuss polygons. While showing pictures of polygons on the whiteboard, the teacher asked recall questions to lead the students toward application. After the

discussion of polygons, the students were directed to form their own symbols in their notebook. As students began the activity, Participant 4 supervised and supported by asking and answering questions while informally assessing for understanding. In discussing how she performs such informal formative assessments as students work, Participant 4 shared that she felt this demonstrated importance of her students' academic success.

In an observed science lesson, Participant 4 prepared activities for her students to build an understanding of landforms. She began by reviewing volcanoes, valleys, and canyons. She provided words for the week and asked students to write definitions in science notebooks. The teacher used repetition to make sure students received all information needed. The teacher watched and listened to students throughout the class to grasp access of their understanding as they completed the task. While no individual student behavior redirects were observed, Participant 4 shared that recognizing appropriate behavior and reminding students of preferred conduct build encouragement for positive behavior and academic success.

Participant 5. In a classroom observation, Participant 5 was facilitating a Reading Wonders class where her students were discussing and reading about life on a farm. The teacher showed pictures of animal farms and herbal farms. Students went through a lesson of comparing and contrasting the farms with the teacher. This effective lesson plan of similarities and differences showed that the teacher uses high gain instructional strategies for effective lesson plans. As an anticipatory set, students were asked to draw a picture of an animal on a farm and a fruit tree on a farm. The teacher then asked the students to draw a circle around the animal and a circle around the tree.

Students were given time to complete the task. The teacher then shared her Venn diagram and directed students to look at their page, and they noticed that they had created their own diagram for comparing and contrasting. The children excitedly looked at their whiteboards. She asked them to fill in the circle with things that would be on both farms. During the interview, the teacher shared that she tries to give students an opportunity to learn through doing. She stated that she likes to give them the ability to choose activities and ways to complete them. She has built a learning environment where students feel safe and comfortable enough to try their best. This demonstrated caring, empowerment, and a culture of achievement. As students completed their work, the teacher individually praised them for a job well done. The teacher quickly transitioned to a video about farms. This brought back the focus of the students quickly. The teacher stopped the video and asked the students to identify animals and food grown on a farm. They were then asked to place these things on the Venn diagram. The teacher placed the Venn diagram on the board and asked students to check and edit their Venn diagrams for accuracy. Giving students an opportunity to correct them is also high-quality instruction (Marzano et al., 2001). The teacher placed a picture in the wrong place, and the students began to let her know. "Ooops, that is wrong. Let me correct it." This demonstrated high academic expectations and caring, as it showed her students it is okay to make mistakes while learning, but it is important to correct those errors. The teacher worked so fast to eliminate bad behavior before it happened, so misbehavior did not occur. During a math lesson in Observation 2, Participant 5 engaged her students by first asking questions about the students' day. The students were given an opportunity to describe their day before class. The teacher then asked students to write down their age. The teacher then

shared her age. The students were shocked and amazed at the teacher's age. The teacher wrote down her age and explained to the students that they would need 10s in the place value in order to write her age. The teacher asked students to use their whiteboards to write down her age. She then asked them to draw a place value chart around her age. She then checked each board and praised the students for a good job. She individually helped two students who were confused about the activity. Again demonstrating high-quality instruction and an effectively planned lesson, Participant 5 displayed the place value chart on the interactive whiteboard and asked students to check and correct their answers. She took the time to check each student's work. In discussing how she performs informal formative assessments during class, Participant 5 shared that she felt it was important to know what her students are doing at all times. She stated that she needs to know each student individually, so she can meet them where they are academically and take them where they need to be on grade level. Through this 40-minute lesson, students were actively participating and focused on the teacher. The teacher and students ended class with a chant: "I am smart, yes I am. I can do anything, because I am smart. Yes, I am." Participant 5 demonstrated high expectations for both behavior and academics and further showed her students that she cared about their success.

Using my interview transcript and observation data, I analyzed each line looking for relevant data using the TESA Interaction Model (Appendix G). There are 15 teacher interactions separated in three categories with five actions in each. The three categories are response opportunities, feedback, and personal regard.

Table 4*TESA Interaction Model*

Response opportunities	Feedback	Personal Regard
<u>Equitable distribution:</u> Teachers provide an opportunity for all students to participate	<u>Affirm/correct:</u> Teachers give immediate feedback to students performances	<u>Proximity:</u> Significance of using eye contact to students as they worked
<u>Individual help:</u> Teachers provide help to individual student when needed	<u>Praise:</u> Teachers give positive feedback throughout activities	<u>Courtesy:</u> Teachers use gestures and expressions of courtesy with students
<u>Latency:</u> Teachers use wait time with students to provide time to think and answer questions	<u>Reasons for praise:</u> Teachers give positive feedback purposefully during student learning	<u>Personal interest and compliments:</u> Teachers give compliments, ask questions related to students interest and cultures
<u>Delving:</u> Teachers support students' thoughts to help build student responses	<u>Listening:</u> Teachers use eyes and ears to listen attentively to students	<u>Touching:</u> Teacher touches students in a friendly and appropriate manner
<u>Higher level questioning:</u> Teacher asks challenging questions that require critical thinking and problem-solving skills	<u>Accepting feelings:</u> Teachers accepts student misunderstandings and proactively develops teaching techniques that support all thoughts and beliefs	<u>Desisting:</u> Teacher encourages positive behavior and deters misbehavior through a calm, controlled and courteous manner

Note. This table provides an operational description of the participants' interaction that was dominant for each category.

Appendix G provides a sample of interview statements and classroom observation notes that corresponded with each TESA category and action to form five themes.

Research information from line-to-line interview and observation coding was

completed with Marzano and TESA protocols. Notes from participant observations were used to distinguish similarities from the designed questions to provide a cross-analysis of results through frequency of occurrences that provided an analysis for the research questions. Each evidence shared was either typical, meaning at least four participants showed this evidence; or general, when all five participants showed evidences. Table 5 provides teacher shared evidences of the five participants.

Table 5

Marzano's Observational Protocol Notes

Research questions	Design questions	Teacher shared evidences
1. How is a teacher/student relationship essential to a successful learning environment?	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking questions • Probing incorrect answers • Using behaviors that indicate affection • Noticing when students are not engaged • Maintaining a lively pace • Using academic games
2. What are some mindset changes necessary for teachers to maintain positive relationships with students?	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledging adherence to rules • Understanding students' interests and backgrounds • Establishing classroom routines • Provide clear learning goals
3. To what extent do teacher perceptions of their interactions with students influence the academic and behavioral success of those students?	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing response rates during questioning • Using strategies to ensure students respond • Organizing groups • Providing opportunities for students to talk about themselves • Demonstrating objectivity and control

Glaser and Strauss (1968) stressed the need to having enough relevance and not

forcing data into preconceived categories. Patterns in the coded data were used to sort information into categories to form themes. Once all the observation notes and transcripts were categorized, overlapping components of categories determined recurring themes. These themes described what the five participants felt most essential with building teacher and student relationships. Categories were then synthesized by integrating the overlapping elements of each into contextual themes with supporting details. Classroom observations helped support the coding by showing the recurring regularity overlapping and connecting into certain categories. Appendix H provides a summary of results from observations of the five participants. Patton (2002) determined a massive amount of raw data allows the researcher to identify significant patterns and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal. Observation data and interview patterns constructed a framework of categories for interpretation purposes.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of five individual case studies regarding regular education classroom teachers and their perceptions of how the relationships they have with students influence the success of learning and behavior in the classroom. The portraits developed from the interviews and journals and the narratives from the observations provided lived beliefs and feelings of these five teachers. Participant observations and interviews were analyzed through a generic coding process, and participant journals were examined using the narrative analysis process. Five predominant themes emerged after performing a cross-case analysis. Data from each participant were examined and compared to determine these predominate five themes: (a) classroom management, (b) relationship, (c) culture, (d) high-quality instruction, and (e)

engagement.

In coding the journals, observations, and participant interviews, the interpretive codes that supported the “classroom management” theme were “meaningfulness,” “consistency,” “patience,” and “choice.” These teachers spoke of and showed evidence of consistency for basic structure so students feel safe and are able to focus. They also shared details of how they differentiate instruction to allow for student choice. Appropriate instructional levels were evident in classroom walkthroughs. The teachers also shared details of how the code of conduct must be established early in the year to be sure that everyone including the teacher makes an effort to follow through. The consistency of praise was clearly visible with all teachers. Even though students knew of consequences, there was little mention or observation of punishment. It was clear that these teachers saw the purpose of addressing inappropriate behaviors and the purpose of imposing consequences to redirect those behaviors but saw little value to imposing a punishment.

The theme of “relationship” was clear in the participant journals, observations, and interviews; and the interpretive codes that supported this theme were “personal knowledge,” “empowerment,” and “caring.” These teachers clearly articulated caring through personal and interpersonal connections with their students. These teachers know their students as individuals. Planning of opportunities for students to participate in the decision-making process in the classroom that provided a sense of ownership was also clear among all participants. A partnership between teachers and students in the business of schooling was evident in the participant journals, observations, and interviews of all participants.

“Engagement” was also clear in the observations, participant journals, and interviews; and the interpreted codes that supported this theme were “sense of belonging,” “active learning strategies,” and “activities.” Each of the five teachers had a comprehensive knowledge of understanding how to motivate their students to engage in instructional activities. Designing activities and providing learning strategies that gave students a sense of belonging seemed to be a norm for all five teachers during the observations. It was also evident in interviews that these teachers felt the importance of providing a learning environment where students felt a sense of belonging to eliminate inappropriate behaviors.

The fourth theme “culture” emerged from the participant journals, interviews, and observation codes. The interpretive codes that supported this theme were “diversity,” “relationship building,” and “communication.” Each of the five participants had a great sense of understanding of diversity among the students and community. They were able to use this knowledge to relate learning with each student’s individual background and interest areas. These students felt like they were a part of the learning experience and knew there were high expectations from their teachers. It was clearly visualized in observations and heard in teacher responses that their students were expected to perform academically high and to behave appropriately within school and classroom boundaries. Planning instruction and delivering learning opportunities students can relate to permitted each participant to establish a classroom culture of achievement.

The fifth theme collected from observations, interviews, and participant journals was “high-quality instruction.” The supporting interpretive codes were “effective feedback,” “differentiated instruction,” and “teacher effectiveness.” The use of these

specific instructional strategies was observed in the classroom and interviews by the researcher. These participants shared the resemblances of how they differentiated instruction to allow student choice and appropriate instructional levels. Feedback and praise with specific words so students could understand what was correct and what needed correcting were heard throughout observations.

Tables 6-8 demonstrate the relationship of each of the discovered themes and the interpretive codes that support each theme according to each research question for each participant.

Table 6

Common Themes Across Cases: Research Question 1: How Is a Teacher/Student Relationship Essential to a Successful Learning Environment?

Theme	Interpretive code	Participant				
Relationship	Caring	1	2	3	4	5
	Personal knowledge	1	2	3	4	5
	Empowerment	1		3	4	5
Culture	Diversity	1	2		4	5
	Relationship building		2	3		5
	Communication	1		3	4	5
Classroom management	Meaningfulness	1	2	3	4	5
	Consistency	1	2	3	4	5
	Patience		2	3	4	5
High-quality instruction	Effective feedback	1	2	3	4	5
	Differentiated instruction	1	2	3	4	5
	Teacher effectiveness	1		3		
Engagement	Sense of belonging	1	2	3	4	5
	Active learning environment	1	2	3	4	5
	Activities	1	2			5

Table 7

Common Themes Across Cases: Research Question 2: What Are Some Mindset Changes Necessary for Teachers to Maintain Positive Relationships With Students?

Theme	Interpretive code	Participant				
Relationship	Caring	1	2	3	4	5
	Personal knowledge	1	2	3	4	5
Culture	Diversity	1	2		4	5
	Relationship building		2	3		5
	Communication	1		3	4	5
Classroom management	Meaningfulness	1	2		4	5
	Consistency	1	2	3		5
	Patience	1		3	4	5
High-quality instruction	Effective feedback	1	2	3	4	
	Differentiated instruction	1	2	3	4	5
	Teacher effectiveness		2	3	4	5

Table 8

Common Themes Across Cases: Research Question 3: To What Extent Do Teacher Perceptions Of Their Interactions With Students Influence the Academic and Behavioral Success of Those Students?

Theme	Interpretive code	Participant				
Relationship	Caring	1	2	3	4	5
	Personal knowledge	1	2	3	4	
Classroom management	Meaningfulness	1	2	3	4	
	Consistency	1	2	3	4	5
	Patience		2	3	4	5
High-quality instruction	Effective feedback	1	2	3	4	5
	Differentiated instruction	1	2	3	4	5
	Teacher effectiveness	1	2	3	4	5

The aspiration to conduct this sociological exploratory descriptive case study developed from a concern of all students not having the opportunity to feel the enjoyment of a positive and supportive relationship with their teachers during the first 6 years of their education. The lower level of positive teacher/student relationships professed the tendency of low academic performance and appropriate behavior. An inclusive review of the empirical literature showed immense research around the importance of supportive and positive teacher/student relationships. The thoughts of how teachers see and conduct these relationships with students affecting student success did not appear in the research. Accordingly, it was the intent of the study to investigate the perceptions of teachers who are effective through the positive relationships they create with their students. The teachers investigated in the study clearly believed the positive and supportive relationships they have with their students play important roles in the academic and behavioral successes in and beyond the culture of the classroom.

Chapter 5 presents discoveries, implications, conclusions, and recommendations for educators and researchers interested in the positive and supportive input of teacher/student relationships.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This sociological exploratory case study was conducted as a result of my interest in the perceptions of the complications of the interpersonal relationships between at-risk students and small rural elementary school teachers. The study was undertaken to inquire an understanding of how positive relationships between teachers and students affect the academic achievement and behavior choices. Portraits and narratives of five teachers were developed as a result of research collected through observations, journal entries, and interviews. The investigation was to provide teacher perspectives of how their relationships with students affect their students' academic and behavioral success. This research was conducted in 2021.

An excessive amount of research regarding the need for positive and supportive teacher/student relationships and the negative effect of the absence of this positive teacher support on academic and behavior exists in literature. Studies of teacher perceptions of how they can influence student learning and behavior through positive relationships are lacking in literature. As a teacher with a history of positive relationships with students and an administrator who has witnessed teachers taking opportunities to maintain positive relationships with students, I have watched these students return to visit with overwhelming stories of success and love for what was done for them while in school. Teachers who take the time to build positive relationships with their students have higher academic performances across the board and fewer discipline problems.

Conducting this research study convinced me that teachers should develop positive relationships with all of their students so students will have an opportunity to become successful citizens in a democratic world. Students will one day be running the

world and will need to be prepared to do so. The function of the school should be to prepare our children to fulfill active and impacting roles in society. If not prepared to participate democratically in society, the haves will continue to have and the have-nots will continue to not have. As discussed in Chapter 2, in order to close this gap, schools must produce well-rounded students ready to perform in democratic roles in society. Glickman (1998) cited evidence that democratic schooling promotes “astonishing success in the intellectual achievement of all students” (p. 4) and leads to living successful lives. Glickman also stated that students taught democratically outperform their skilled and drilled peers in mastering basic skills and in learning, understanding, and applying content knowledge. Schools can create environments where teachers and students work together to learn and grow.

In school, the teacher’s role should be to influence and guide learning through positive relationships with students rather than to direct the learning. Students should have a voice and responsibility in their learning. The opportunity to have a voice gives students the sense of belonging which helps to build healthy relationships and connections with peers, teachers, administrators, and the greater community.

According to Covalleskie (2004), democracy takes a great deal of intelligent diligence and a healthy dose of altruism. Darling-Hammond (1996) suggested that these skills are not naturally developed but learned. Schools must be free to develop and prepare teachers with the ability to develop positive relationships with all students. Conducting this research has convinced me that teachers can and must develop positive relationships with their students so these students will have opportunities to prosper in society. While teachers have the power to keep students in their place, they also have the

power to form positive relationships and the ability to empower students to accomplish many things in life. Every teacher must be trained to uphold these expectations with all students. The school system must learn to support such teachers. Positive relationships between teachers and students must become the norm in all schools. Rather than having to look for “good” teachers, we must not accept anything less than the best for our students. The visions of school must be of all students being treated with dignity and respect with the opportunity for the best education.

As elementary school is the first place many students encounter adults outside of the home, these schools would be prime candidates for positive teacher/student relationship reforms. The study shows that teachers who recognize the importance of forming a positive relationship with their students understand that this behavior positively influences the academic and behavioral successes of their students. As a deep and intense investigation is necessary to consider the multi-faceted dimensions of teacher/student relationships, a qualitative research design best met this need. As a qualitative researcher, I was the instrument that gathered the data and was able to observe the setting naturally in my position as a building principal. Five grade-level teachers were identified as holding the federal distinction of being highly qualified teachers. Federal law defined a highly qualified teacher as one who met three criteria: (a) holds at least a bachelor’s degree from a 4-year institution; (b) holds full state certification; and (c) demonstrates competence in each core academic subject in which a teacher teaches (Livingston & Wirt, 2004). These teachers were unique in that they were found to have positive relationships with students according to the district’s professional performance evaluation instrument measured by EVAAS data and common in that they were all female elementary general education

teachers.

Results

Elmore (1996) analyzed how organizations can replicate the accomplishments of successful teachers in order for school reform to occur by adopting their successful practices. Elmore wrote about the change that applies to teacher and student roles in constructing knowledge as well as the role of the classroom structure in effective change in the learning process. Evidence in this study was found to support the importance of the teacher/student relationship as it applies to student success.

The data presented in Chapter 4 were organized thematically according to each of the research questions posed in Chapter 1 of this study. The specific questions that informed this study were

1. How is a teacher/student relationship essential to a successful learning environment?
2. What are some mindset changes necessary for teachers to maintain positive relationships with students?
3. To what extent do teacher perceptions of their interactions with students influence the academic and behavioral success of those students?

Research Question 1: How Is a Teacher/Student Relationship Essential to a Successful Learning Environment?

The results of the study showed that teachers were in agreement and shared common characteristics of a positive teacher/student relationship. All participants noted characteristics such as relationship, culture, classroom management, high-quality instruction, and engagement as necessary for deeming a successful learning environment.

It has been shown that these empowered teachers influence with effective strategies, plan for motivating lessons, motivate students through caring actions, provide appropriate feedback, differentiate learning that promotes interests, manage classroom effectively and efficiently, and practice effective and positive discipline procedures. The study has determined that positive relationships between teachers and students provide an environment in which students are successful. Throughout the study, these teachers disclosed accessibility of being effective teachers students need. Marzano et al. (2001) described this teacher effectiveness as being broadly used to identify attributes of what constitutes a good teacher. Observations, interviews, and journal entries showed these participants sharing the characteristics of building a successful learning environment by making wise choices about the most effective instructional strategies to employ, designing classroom curriculum to facilitate student learning, and making effective use of classroom management techniques. Like Stronge and Hindman (2006) suggested, the participants also cultivated a positive classroom environment for their students by working to ensure that routines, procedures, and expectations were clear. The findings in this study are supported by the research in Chapter 2 noting that if teachers build positive relationships with students, student success will follow.

Research Question 2. What Are Some Mindset Changes Necessary for Teachers to Maintain Positive Relationships With Students?

Through interviews, it is relevant to say that all participants believed that students not engaged considerably will find something else to do with their time. Lezotte (1992) believed that students who are excited about what they are learning are usually active in their own learning. Observations, interviews, and journal entries of the five participants

showed a demand of engagement among all in the classroom setting. These teachers all determined that teachers must change their way of thinking when it comes to engaging students in learning. Demanding student engagement alone does not provide the motivation that is needed to maintain positive relationships. Student engagement derives through the keen awareness that children naturally form through perceptions. Payne (2001) stated that relationships derive from one individual to another's interactions. All participants shared stories of having to change the way they judged students by the way they looked or acted in the class. They described patience as an important aspect of really getting to know what students really needed from them to succeed in the classroom setting. They also determined that teachers must be able to interact with students without taking what they do and say personally. Being consistent with communication was shown to be a critical support in developing teacher/student relationships; but the teachers all believed that in order for this to happen, the mindset of teachers must change when adjustments are needed for the success of all students. The result of the analysis indicated that teachers must have a mindset change of believing that they are responsible for motivating students to learn. In the observations, the teachers showed that through caring and personal knowledge, positive relationships were provided in order to build student success.

Research Question 3. To What Extent Do Teacher Perceptions of Their Interactions With Students Influence the Academic and Behavioral Success of Those Students?

To determine the themes teachers shared about perceptions of interactions with students, observations, interviews, and journal entries were studied. All teachers perceived themselves as having great relationships, strong classroom management, and

high-quality instruction that influenced the academic and behavioral success among all their students. Participants shared examples of high-quality instruction with effective feedback, differentiated instruction, and teacher effectiveness that provided successful learning in the classroom setting. The classroom management among these teachers created a sense of belonging, an active learning environment, and activities that contributed to learning.

Brophy and Good (1970) determined that teachers treat students differently based on preliminary perceptions and expectations. In the study, this was not found to be true for these participants. They spoke of all their students having the potential to succeed. Throughout the interviews, the five participants stressed a sense of demand for their students to be their best. They believed that students notice these perceptions, and it motivates them to be engaged in learning. These teachers spent much time praising and encouraging all students, because they perceived that all students could learn. The perception of their interactions with students determined the cultivating culture of achievement in the classroom.

The findings of the content analysis indicated that in general, the perception of the interaction with students runs parallel with student motivation. The assumption that can be drawn from these results is that when teachers have high expectations for students, students tend to perform better. Teachers must also be drawn to positive perceptions of what they are capable of doing as teachers, because it influences the academic and behavioral success of students.

Implications

Sarason (1999) questioned if the characteristics of good teachers could be

observed while the teacher interacts with students so the educational community could learn from them. The focus of this study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers regarding the relationships between teachers and students and how they perceive the relationships affect student success. Teachers have the power to positively or negatively affect the lives of every student they encounter. Students enter school with a love of learning and a desire to succeed. Teachers have the ability to build a student's belief in education or tear it down. Teachers must know from day one that they have a responsibility that cannot be taken for granted. Teachers must believe in all students and must value their student's education and future. Developing a positive relationship with students where they feel valued and empowered to participate in the learning process must spread throughout every teacher in the school system. Students who feel valued, empowered, and cared for are more likely to participate and own their education, which will develop successful citizens who will participate positively in a democratic society.

Recommendations

The findings in this case study provided several strategies for practical ways to successfully build a relationship with students that could have an impact on their learning environment. Whether from fear of the sanctions of the Every Child Succeeds Act, pressure from the district or building to produce results in EVAAS, lack of professional development, lack of empathy, or the desire to feel superior to their students, these teachers, by not forming positive relationships with their students, are failing to serve student needs in a school setting. Teachers must be provided with the proper professional development and must be demanded to perform at a higher level. Our children's lives depend on the growth of these teachers.

My recommendations, as a result of this study, are to begin incorporating and demanding elements of teacher/student interactions into instructional strategies. The mission of every district, school, and classroom must be for teachers, administrators, and support personnel to work to develop positive relationships with each student. Every student must be given the opportunity to achieve and operate at academically high levels within a system where they feel valued and loved at a point where they can maximize success and be prepared to perform positively in a democratic society.

The following recommendations are offered as a starting place for districts, schools, and teacher reform:

1. Professional development must include trainings that consider the teacher/student relationship. Participants should study teachers who have positive relationships with their students and how those relationships affect academics and behavior. They should also be given the opportunity to study teachers who do not have positive relationships with students and the effect it has on student success.
2. Teacher selection instruments must identify teacher candidates who have skills and abilities to develop positive relationships with students. This process must be designed to recognize candidates who are capable of becoming fluent in these characteristics if not naturally accustomed to developing a positive relationship with students.
3. Teachers should develop SMART goals pertaining to relationships with their students. Teachers should be provided access to the opportunities to observe and collaborate with other teachers during the development of positive

teacher/student relationship strategies.

4. Professional performance evaluation instruments should be designed to measure teacher abilities to maintain positive relationships with students. Teachers should be provided open-ended questions to address during the evaluation to describe the ability to produce positive relationships with students and present the effect it has had on student success.
5. Each school should have a system in place where every child has an advocate and is known in great detail by one other adult in the school.

These recommendations, if considered, clearly will be beneficial to districts, schools, teachers, and students.

Limitations

Yin (1994) negated the criticism of writing the goal of case study research is to “expand on a broader body of knowledge by investigating within a real life context” (p. 10). He expanded that this allows for analytic generalizations as opposed to a statistical generalization. Limitations to this particular study are due to only five cases being studied, and the participants were all elementary school teachers who were females. The study did not focus on the demographic differences between the teachers and students. Not included in the study are the perceptions of middle school and high school teachers. Including their perspectives in relationship building with students of a different age level could provide a broader range of effective strategies to use in the classroom.

Another limitation is that the study participants, at times, were using previous experiences of regular classroom settings before the COVID-19 pandemic and could have forgotten some details of procedures. Even with the possibility, I believe the information

recalled was valuable and relevant. There was much evidence to support the conclusion of this study.

The study may have further limitations in that the teachers and students have been placed in a new academic setting of remote learning throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Although, I was given the ability to observe and interview teachers via Zoom, it is difficult to know what effect, if any, the setting had on the participants. During the interview process and observations, the participants seemed confident and at ease, providing access to their classes for observations and interviews.

Even with limitations, the findings of this case study could provide the field of education with valuable insights into the development of strong teachers with abilities to relate with students in a positive manner, building student success.

Future Research Needs

Because of the limitation of only the experience and perceptions of five teachers in a small rural area district, future research is needed that will consider an increased sample size with various demographics. Future researchers can consider the following:

1. Research conducted by a researcher who does not work in the district and has a professional relationship with the participants.
2. Research conducted in diverse areas.
3. Research conducted in a larger district with more participants.
4. Research conducted in the middle and high school.
5. Research conducted with male teachers.
6. Research conducted with extracurricular and Exceptional Children teachers.
7. Research conducted over a long period of time to follow students as they

change teachers.

8. Research conducted for several years with the same teachers and different students.
9. Research conducted on the transition of elementary to middle school students.

This listing of future directions for research is not a conclusive list but a beginning for researchers interested in examining how teachers perceive they affect student success.

Conclusions and Summary

The sociological exploratory case study developed through the lenses of narratology and portraiture investigated the perceptions of five general education elementary school teachers regarding their perceptions and experiences with positive relationships with their students and the effect they have on student success. During the beginning of 2021 in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, observations were conducted over Zoom with each participant, interviews were established, and participant journals were reviewed. The data from the journals, observations, and interviews were coded, analyzed, and structured into five themes. This information was presented in Chapter 4.

Through the case study, the implication of a positive teacher/student relationship revolves around how it affects the teaching, learning, and behavior in the academic setting. Each theme that was created as a result of this case study includes specific components of the teacher/student relationship that affect the academic and behavioral success of the student. The resulting findings of this case study support the contention that everyday interactions in the academic setting are imperative to student success.

This study has given me the opportunity to gain the in-depth knowledge that

while some teachers feel the pressure to perform for EVAAS data and teach state standards, many effective teachers who recognize and accept the need to build positive relationships with students are capable of achieving these goals and developing successful students prepared for a democratic society.

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Appendix A
Consent Documentation

**Informed Documentation
Gardner-Webb University**

A case study on the Effect of Teacher/Student Relationships on Student Success

You are being asked to participate in a research study on how teachers interact with their students and whether or not these interactions affect academic achievement and behavior. You were selected as a possible participant because you have a distinction of being a classroom teacher with a unique student population. The strategies that you use in your classroom has the potential to yield information that can be used in the study. Please read the form and relay any questions that you may have before deciding whether you would be interested in being a part of the study.

██████████, a Doctoral candidate at Gardner-Webb University, is conducting this study.

Background Information

The purpose of this research is to describe familiarities of behaviors used when interacting with students in a classroom.

Procedures

If you choose to be a participant in this research, you will be asked to do the following things:

- Agree to 2 observations, by the researcher, in your classroom setting.
- Participate in 2 post observation sessions that will be approximately 20-30 minutes.
- Participate in 1 interview session that will be approximately 45 to 60 minutes.
- Maintain a Journal with a focus of key open-ended questions for six weeks.

Interviews will be videotaped and recorded. Recordings of class observations will be asked to be shared with the researcher.

Voluntary Participation

The risks of participating in this research are minimal. This will be an ordinary day at work. You will be asked to keep a journal for six weeks. Should you experience any risks, please contact the researcher immediately.

Payment

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study.

How to Withdraw From the Study

Your participation is completely voluntary. Your principal or the district does not require your participation. You can choose not to participate in this research. Also, you can change your mind at anytime during this study.

Confidentiality

The records of this research will be kept private. In any sort of report that might be published, the researcher will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you as a participant. Research records will be kept in a secured file at the researcher's home. Files on the computer will be kept under a secured password. All data will be erased and deleted after the dissertation defense and publication.

If you have questions about the study, contact:

EdD Candidate
 School of Education, Gardner-Webb University
pratt@gardner-webb.edu

Faculty Advisor:
 Faculty Research Advisor:
 School of Education, Gardner-Webb University

If the research design of the study necessitates that its full scope is not explained prior to participation, it will be explained to you after completion of the study. If you have concerns about your rights or how you are being treated, or if you have questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact the IRB Institutional Administrator listed below.

IRB Institutional Administrator
 Gardner-Webb University
 Email: skbrown@gardner-webb.edu

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.


Voluntary Consent by Participant

I have read and understand the information above, and I agree to participate in the study. "*The Qualitative Study on the Effect of Teacher/Student Relationships on Student Success.*" I understand that my participation is voluntary and I can withdraw at any time with no negative consequences. I have received answers to questions I asked, or I can contact the researcher at any time for further questions. I am at least 18 years of age.

I _____ agree _____ do not agree to be videotaped and recorded for this study.

Print Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Name of Researcher Obtaining Consent _  _

Signature of Researcher Obtaining Consent _____

☐

Appendix B

Research Questions and Initial Interview Questions

Research Questions and Initial Interview Questions.

1. How is a teacher/student relationship essential to a successful learning environment?
 - a. What do you consider a successful teacher/student relationship?
 - b. What affective qualities do you think a teacher needs in order to be able to relate positively with all students?
 - c. To what extent does classroom management affect student behavior and academic performance within the learning environment?
 - d. To what extent does the school culture affect a successful learning environment?
2. What are some mindset changes necessary for teachers to maintain positive relationships with students?
 - a. What do you consider a positive relationship with students?
 - b. What are some mindset characteristics you consider helping you as an affective teacher?
3. To what extent do teacher's perceptions of their interactions with students influence the academic and behavioral success of those students?
 - a. What are your perceptions of your interactions with your students?
 - b. Describe a negative interaction that you remember having with a student?
 - c. Did your perceptions develop a change that influenced academic and behavioral success for this student?

Appendix C
Interview Scale

Review Scales of Codes for Themes

Personal Significance	Vocabulary	Beliefs	Teaching Practices	Self Reflections	Love Of

Appendix D

Probes for Interview Coding

I
Probes for interview Coding

Clarifying	You said "X" please describe
Echo	Repeat the last statement and ask to continue
Silent	Tilt head, nod slowly
Direct	"Tell me more"
Neutral	"Encouraging; "I see" or "uh-huh"
Phased assertion	Imply you already know something or encourage respondent to speak up
Detail	Who, where, what, when, how

Appendix E

Marzano Observation Protocol Short Form

Marzano Observation Protocol Short Form

I. Lesson Segments Involving Routine Events						
Design Question #1: What will I do to establish and communicate learning goals, track student progress, and celebrate success?						
1. Providing clear learning goals and scales to measure those goals (e.g. the teacher provides or reminds students about a specific learning goal)	Notes	<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div>				
		I	A	D	B	NU
2. Tracking student progress (e.g. using formative assessment the teacher helps students chart their individual and group progress on a learning goal)	Notes	<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div>				
		I	A	D	B	NU
3. Celebrating student success (e.g. the teacher helps student acknowledge and celebrate current status on a learning goal as well as knowledge gain)	Notes	<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div>				
		I	A	D	B	NU
Design Question #6: What will I do to establish and maintain classroom rules and procedures?						
4. Establishing classroom routines (e.g. the teacher reminds students of a rule or procedure or establishes a new rule or procedure)	Notes	<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div>				
		I	A	D	B	NU
5. Organizing the physical layout of the classroom for learning (e.g. the teacher organizes materials, traffic patterns, and displays to enhance learning)	Notes	<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div>				
		I	A	D	B	NU
II. Lesson Segments Addressing Content						
Design Question #2: What will I do to help students effectively interact with new knowledge?						
1. Identifying critical information (e.g. the teacher provides cues as to which information is important)	Notes	<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div>				
		I	A	D	B	NU
2. Organizing students to interact with new knowledge (e.g. the teacher organizes students into dyads or triads to discuss small chunks of content)	Notes	<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div>				
		I	A	D	B	NU

3. Previewing new content (e.g. the teacher uses strategies such as: K-W-L, advance organizers, preview questions)	Notes	
		I A D B NU
4. Chunking content into “digestible bites” (e.g. the teacher presents content in small portions that are tailored to students’ level of understanding)	Notes	
		I A D B NU
5. Group processing of new information (e.g. after each chunk of information, the teacher asks students to summarize and clarify what they have experienced)	Notes	
		I A D B NU
6. Elaborating on new information (e.g. the teacher asks questions that require students to make and defend inferences)	Notes	
		I A D B NU
7. Recording and representing knowledge (e.g. the teacher ask students to summarize, take notes, or use non-linguistic representations)	Notes	
		I A D B NU
8. Reflecting on learning (e.g. the teacher asks students to reflect on what they understand or what they are still confused about)	Notes	
		I A D B NU
Design Question #3: What will I do to help students practice and deepen their understanding of new knowledge?		
9. Reviewing content (e.g. the teacher briefly reviews related content addressed previously)	Notes	
		I A D B NU
10. Organizing students to practice and deepen knowledge (e.g. the teacher organizes students into groups designed to review information or practice skills)	Notes	
		I A D B NU
11. Using homework (e.g. the teacher uses homework for independent practice or to elaborate on information)	Notes	
		I A D B NU
12. Examining similarities and differences (e.g. the teacher engages students in comparing , classifying, creating analogies and metaphors)	Notes	
		I A D B NU

13. Examining errors in reasoning (e.g. the teacher asks students to examine informal fallacies, propaganda, bias)	Notes	
		I A D B NU
14. Practicing skills, strategies, and processes (the teacher uses massed and distributed practice)	Notes	
		I A D B NU
15. Revising knowledge (e.g. the teacher asks students to revise entries in notebooks to clarify and add to previous information)	Notes	
		I A D B NU
Design Question #4: What will I do to help students generate and test hypotheses about new knowledge?		
16. Organizing students for cognitively complex tasks (e.g. the teachers organizes students into small groups to facilitate cognitively complex tasks)	Notes	
		I A D B NU
17. Engaging students in cognitively complex tasks involving hypothesis generating and testing (e.g. the teacher engages students in decision making tasks, problem solving tasks, experimental inquiry tasks, investigation tasks)	Notes	
		I A D B NU
18. Providing resources and guidance (e.g. the teacher makes resources available that are specific to cognitively complex tasks and helps students execute such tasks)	Notes	
		I A D B NU
III. Lesson Segments Enacted on the Spot		
Design Question #5: What will I do to engage students?		
1. Noticing and reacting when students are not engaged (e.g. the teacher scans the classroom to monitor students' level of engagement)	Notes	
		I A D B NU
2. Using academic games (e.g. when students are not engaged, the teachers uses adaptations of popular games to reengage them and focus their attention on academic content)	Notes	
		I A D B NU
3. Managing response rates during questioning (e.g. the teacher uses strategies to ensure that multiple students	Notes	

respond to questions such as: response cards, response chaining, voting technologies)			I	A	D	B	NU
4. Using physical movement (e.g. the teacher uses strategies that require students to move physically such as: vote with your feet, physical reenactments of content)	Notes						
			I	A	D	B	NU
5. Maintaining a lively pace (e.g. the teacher slows and quickens the pace of instruction in such a way as to enhance engagement)	Notes						
			I	A	D	B	NU
6. Demonstrating intensity and enthusiasm (e.g. the teacher uses verbal and nonverbal signals that he or she is enthusiastic about the content)	Notes						
			I	A	D	B	NU
7. Using friendly controversy (e.g. the teacher uses techniques that require students to take and defend a position about content)	Notes						
			I	A	D	B	NU
8. Providing opportunities for students to talk about themselves (e.g. the teacher uses techniques that allow students to relate content to their personal lives and interests)	Notes						
			I	A	D	B	NU
9. Presenting unusual or intriguing information (e.g. the teacher provides or encourages the identification of intriguing information about the content)	Notes						
			I	A	D	B	NU
Design Question #7: What will I do to recognize and acknowledge adherence or lack of adherence to rules and procedures?							
10. Demonstrating "withitness" (e.g. the teacher is aware of variations in student behavior that might indicate potential disruptions and attends to them immediately)	Notes						
			I	A	D	B	NU
11. Applying consequences (e.g. the teacher applies consequences to lack of adherence to rules and procedures consistently and fairly)	Notes						
			I	A	D	B	NU
12. Acknowledging adherence to rules and procedures (e.g. the teacher acknowledges adherence to rules and procedures consistently and fairly)	Notes						
			I	A	D	B	NU

Design Question #8: What will I do to establish and maintain effective relationships with students?					
13. Understanding students' interests and backgrounds (e.g. the teacher seeks out knowledge about students and uses that knowledge to engage in informal, friendly discussions with students)	Notes				
		I	A	D	B
14. Using behaviors that indicate affection for students (e.g. the teacher uses humor and friendly banter appropriately with students)	Notes				
		I	A	D	B
15. Displaying objectivity and control (e.g. the teacher behaves in ways that indicate he or she does not take infractions personally)	Notes				
		I	A	D	B
Design Question #9: What will I do to communicate high expectations for all students?					
16. Demonstrating value and respect for low expectancy students (e.g. the teacher demonstrates the same positive affective tone with low expectancy students as with high expectancy students)	Notes				
		I	A	D	B
17. Asking questions of low expectancy students (e.g. the teacher asks questions of low expectancy students with the same frequency and level of difficulty as with high expectancy students)	Notes				
		I	A	D	B
18. Probing incorrect answers with low expectancy students (e.g. the teacher inquires into incorrect answers with low expectancy students with the same depth and rigor as with high expectancy students)	Notes				
		I	A	D	B

Appendix F

Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement Interaction Model

TEACHER EXPECTATIONS AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT (TESA) INTERACTION MODEL

Strand			
UNITS	A <i>Response Opportunities</i>	B <i>Feedback</i>	C <i>Personal Regard</i>
1	Equitable Distribution	Affirm/Correct	Proximity
2	Individual Help	Praise	Courtesy
3	Latency	Reasons for Praise	Personal Interest and Compliments
4	Delving	Listening	Touching
5	Higher-Level Questioning	Accepting Feelings	Desist

Figure 2.2

Source: Los Angeles County Office of Education, <http://www.lacoe.edu/SchoolImprovement/StateFederalPrograms/SFPPublications.aspx>

Retrieved from the companion website for *Engagement by Design: Creating Learning Environments Where Students Thrive* by Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, Russell J. Quaglia, Dominique Smith, and Lisa L. Lande. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, www.corwin.com. Reproduction authorized only for the local school site or nonprofit organization that has purchased this book.

Appendix G

TESA Interaction Model

Appendix G

TESA Interaction Model

Response Opportunities	Feedback	Personal Regard
<p><u>Equitable Distribution:</u> Uses 'sticks' in a can to randomly pull names to participate.</p> <p>Make sure each student has a chance to participate. "I didn't get a chance", "Okay everybody will get a chance."</p> <p>Call on students alphabetically</p>	<p><u>Affirm/Correct:</u> "Explain to the class what you have learned today."</p> <p>Great job, using your 'Jamboard'.</p> <p>"When you are counting raisins, it makes it easier to place them in a line."</p>	<p><u>Proximity:</u> Significance of being physically close to students as the work</p> <p>Focus eyes on Google Meet page</p> <p>Sit eye level with students</p>
<p><u>Individual Help:</u> Teacher helps student open iReady program</p> <p>"Let's count to ten and then add two"</p> <p>"I will come by and help you with writing"</p>	<p><u>Praise:</u> "Nice job"</p> <p>"Good job good job"</p> <p>"Alright Alright Alright"</p>	<p><u>Courtesy:</u> Teacher uses expressions of courtesy with students</p>
<p><u>Latency:</u> "Turn and talk to your partner"</p> <p>"Please, wait your turn"</p> <p>Teacher directs students to wait before answering question.</p> <p>Directs student to finish computer program.</p> <p>Directs student to sit up and face computer.</p>	<p><u>Reasons for Praise:</u> To reinforce expected behavior during Google Meet.</p> <p>To reinforce behavior during direct instruction</p> <p>To motivate students</p> <p>To make students feel important</p>	<p><u>Personal Interest & Compliments:</u> Teacher asks question, makes statements related to a student's personal interest</p>
<p><u>Delving:</u> "You count, It's your problem. Ha Ha Ha"</p> <p>Explain that to me, I'm confused.</p> <p>Let's put on our thinking hat"</p>	<p><u>Listening:</u> I listen to the students to determine what they need.</p> <p>I usually sit eye level with students so they know that I am listening.</p> <p>We use morning meeting so students can tell their story.</p>	<p><u>Touching:</u> Teacher touches student on shoulder for reassurance.</p> <p>Teacher pats student on head in a friendly manner.</p>
<p><u>Higher Level Questioning:</u> "If I take away five, how many will you have left?"</p> <p>Inferring – "Do you think you can figure out how many she will need?"</p>	<p><u>Accepting Feelings:</u> Respecting cultural differences</p> <p>Understanding what student is going through.</p> <p>Listening before forming an opinion</p> <p>Giving student time to transition feelings before beginning class</p> <p>Morning meeting</p>	<p><u>Desisting:</u> Teacher stops misbehavior in a calm manner</p> <p>"Please use your inside voice"</p> <p>"1,2,3,4 and 5 you should be seated"</p>

Appendix H

Summary of Results from Observation

Appendix H

Summary of results from Observations

Domain	Core Idea	Category	N	Frequency
1. How is a teacher/student relationship essential to a successful learning environment?	High Quality Instruction	Excited to teach	4	Typical
		Strengthens atmosphere	5	General
	Classroom Management			
	Engagement	Effective communication	5	General
	Relationship	Teacher impact Meaningful connection		
2. What are some mindset changes necessary for teachers to maintain positive relationships with students?		Knowing your students	4	Typical
	Culture			
	High Quality Instruction	Achievement Mindset Feedback Goals	5	General
	Classroom Management	Rich classroom Climate Mindset Belonging Voice	5	General
	Engagement	Engagement	4	Typical
	Relationship	Relational Mindset Safe to raise hand Activities Connection	4	Typical
3. To what extent do teacher's perceptions of their interactions with students influence the academic and behavioral success of those students?	High Quality Instruction	Expectations	5	General
	Classroom Management	Consistency	5	General
	Relationship	Empowerment	4	Typical
	Culture	Understanding Communication	5	General