

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Positive teacher-student relationships have extensive effects on students. Stancato (2003) asserted positive teacher-student relationships have positive effects on students, including making students feel confident and accepted. Smith and Sandhu (2004) said students who feel confident and accepted are happier, are more focused on learning, and are more apt to exhibit “prosocial” behavior. Dufresne (2005) maintained that a “child who has a close connection with a caring responsible adult can often overcome incredible odds” (p. 94). She asserted teachers should be advocates and “cheerleaders” for their students. As well, Stancato (2003) noted encouraging positive relationships is effective in reducing school violence. It seems students benefit from the effects of positive teacher-student relationships.

At the other end of the spectrum are negative teacher-student relationships, which Smith and Sandhu (2004) characterized by misbehavior by the student and control by the teacher. They noted aggressive and inappropriate behaviors seem to happen mostly during the middle school years, which Saskatchewan Learning (1999) designated as Grade 6 through Grade 9. Schellenberg, Parks-Savage and Rehfuss (2007) believed “[aggressive] student interactions often permeate a school’s culture and create a hostile learning environment that stifles the academic productivity and success of students” (p. 475). They deemed many teachers are at a loss of how to deal with problem students; they feel powerless to manage misbehavior. Stanwood and Doolittle (2004) noted some teachers choose to be overly controlling and punitive in their discipline strategies, which does not work; these measures often cause students to become more rebellious and disrespectful. Stanwood and Doolittle believed that “coercive, get-tough strategies are ineffective since they do not address the cause of violence . . . these strategies

produce prison-like schools that feel unsafe” (p. 169). It appears negative teacher-student relationships do not benefit students in a positive way.

Creating positive teacher-student relationships appear to have positive effects for students. This study will examine middle years teachers’ understandings of positive teacher-student relationships taking into consideration the conceptual framework developed in Chapter Two of this study.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to describe and understand positive middle-years teacher-student relationships and their effects on students in order to ascertain if the study’s data will be consistent with the study’s conceptual framework.

Research Questions

The following research questions provide the direction for this study:

1. In what ways do middle-years teachers create positive teacher-student relationships?
2. What are middle-years teachers’ understandings of the effects of positive teacher-student relationships?
3. What are middle-years teachers’ understandings of why positive teacher-student relationships are important?

Significance

This study is significant, because Epp (1995) suggested students benefit from the effects of positive teacher-student relationships. Yoon, Barton, and Taiariol (2004) deemed that “[creating] a school environment that guarantees physical safety and psychological security of students is an important task to promote academic, social, and emotional competences” (p. 314). In a similar view, Smith and Sandhu (2004) noted that students who have positive teacher-

student relationships are happier and are more committed to their academics than those students who do not have these positive relationships. Riley and McDaniel (2000) believed “if every student had a caring adult in the school . . . most problems would be prevented” (p. 123).

Haberman (1994) believed fostering positive teacher-student relationships lessens the likelihood of violence in schools. He suggested the more successful teachers are at empowering students, the less violence teachers and students will encounter. Dillon (2007) noted “[from] fostering a positive and inviting school climate, to teaching and modeling good behavior, to encouraging students and staff to be the eyes and ears of the building, schools can do a lot to make themselves unsuitable targets for unstable individuals” (p.10). Erickson, Mattaini, and McGuire (2004) believed schools that promote positive teacher-student relationships prevent violence in schools.

The importance of this research lies in providing insight into how students can learn and how teachers can teach in a safe environment. Teachers need to know that they are not powerless to manage the crisis of unsafe schools; teachers may know that there is a significant problem, but are unaware of how to deal with it. For this reason, this research will provide teachers with information that will show them the impact they can make on students, which in turn, can lessen the likelihood of violence in their school. This study will explore examples of how positive teacher-student relationships can effect students, making schools a safe place to teach and learn.

Researcher’s Positionality

During the course of my career, I have worked in a variety of school settings with a variety of students. I have spent over half of my career working with students who were at risk, students who had irregular attendance and problems with inappropriate behaviour. In working

with these kinds of students, I noticed that some teachers were able to change these students by encouraging them to attend school regularly, persuading them to behave appropriately, and motivating them to learn. Upon closer examination, I realized these particular teachers were developing positive teacher-student relationships. I was interested in finding out what these teachers did to create those positive connections with students and how those relationships altered their students' behaviour.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study are as follows:

- Teachers provided the information about positive teacher-student relationships and their effects on students.
- This study included five middle-years teachers from Saskatchewan schools interviewed in May to August 2009.
- This study utilized semi-structured interviews.

The limitations of this study will be presented next.

Limitations

This study had the following limitations:

- The study was limited, because I used a small sample size of only five teachers.
- The study used interview questions designed by me; therefore the questions may have lacked trustworthiness.
- I requested specific teachers to participate in the interviews, teachers who I recognized as having positive relationships with students; therefore there was bias, because of my perception of these positive relationships.

- Students' perceptions were not examined in this study, which was a limitation because the study examined teacher-student relationships.

The assumptions made in this study will be outlined in the next section.

Assumptions

I made the following assumptions:

- Participants were interested in the topic they were being interviewed about.
- The interview questions were understood by the participants.
- When answering the interview questions, participants were honest.
- Participants in this study had positive relationships with students.

The organization of the study will be outlined next.

Organization of the Study

Chapter One has provided the background, significance and purpose of the study. It presents the research questions that are answered, their delimitations, limitations, and assumptions. Chapter Two reviews the literature relevant to the topic. Chapter Three describes the research methodology, the instrument used and the population studied. Chapter Four presents the data collected. In Chapter Five, the data are compared and contrasted with the literature reviewed. As well, the concluding chapter discusses the implications of the findings.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Positive teacher-student relationships have been shown to have positive effects on students. A review of the literature regarding positive teacher-student relationships and their effects on students will precede the data collection on this topic. This literature review will begin with a definition of relationships, an examination of the types of relationships, and a discussion of the teacher-student relationship that is categorized as an influential relationship. The definition and the characteristics of positive teacher-student relationships will be examined. These characteristics are high expectations, networking, dialogue, practice, self-disclosure, and rituals and traditions. The effects of positive teacher-student relationships will be discussed, including improved self-concept, increased motivation to learn, increased desire for others' well-being, increased feeling of security and attachment, and increased desire to improve society. The literature review will conclude with an explanation of the conceptual framework that was the foundation for this study, including research done by Griffin (1998) and Epp (1995).

What are Relationships?

The focus of this study is positive student-teacher relationships. Therefore, the concept of relationship needs to be defined. Craig (1996) defined relationships as “involving obligations such as fairness and loyalty . . . the knowledge of these obligations is a necessary part of . . . thought, knowledge, and understanding that involve the social world” (p. 382), meaning that relationships are necessary to be part of society; relationships require people to think, trust, and understand each other. Santrock (2003) discussed connectedness as being an important element in relationships, connectedness being defined as “mutuality, sensitivity to and respect for others' views; and permeability, openness to others' views” (p. 305). Travers, Elliott, and Kratochwill

(1993) defined relationships as “continuity among interactions” (p.122). Relationships are created through a series of interactions. Further, they indicated elements of any relationship included (a) perception, how others feel about and understand the behavior of others, (b) cognition, the judgments others make based on their own thinking, and (c) affection, the judgments others make based on their emotions.

For the purpose of this literature review, the definition of relationships by Travers et al. (1993) was utilized. The types of relationships will now be discussed.

Types of Relationships

In 2005, Deiro used a qualitative case study approach to ascertain what six secondary teacher did to create positive relationships with their students. The teachers she observed had reputations for being exemplary teachers that were able to develop positive connections with the students they taught. From her study, Deiro suggested there were four types of social relationships: (a) expressive-emotional, (b) confirmatory, (c) instrumental, and (d) influential. She deemed expressive-emotional relationships are developed to satisfy oneself; examples of expressive-emotional relationships are friendships and marriage. She believed confirmatory relationships are developed to validate our values and beliefs; examples of confirmatory relationships are belonging to the same church or political party. Diero indicated instrumental relationships are developed to achieve an objective; examples of instrumental relationships are work-related relationships or committee members. She suggested influential relationships are developed to make a change in one or both individuals in the relationship; examples of influential relationships are teacher-student relationships or doctor-patient relationships.

In addition, Travers et al. (1993) suggested there are several types of relationships, including student-student, teacher-student, and teacher-parent in an educational setting. For the

purposes of this literature review, influential relationships will be the focus, because the teacher-student relationship is influential, and teacher-student relationships are the focus of this study.

Teacher-Student Relationships as Influential Relationships

Deiro (2005) noted teacher-student relationships are an example of influential relationships. She defined influential relationships as a connection that is “formed to create a change in one or both parties in the relationship” (p. 10). By examining the characteristics of influential relationships, teachers could learn how to develop positive relationships with their students.

Characteristics of influential relationships. According to Deiro (2005), the characteristics of influential relationships included: (a) intended change, growth, or learning; (b) intended change, growth, or learning is planned; (c) when the intended change is completed, the relationship is discontinued; and (d) the distribution of power among the participants is asymmetrical.

Deiro (2005) noted the first characteristic in influential relationships is an intended change, growth, or learning. In a teacher-student relationship, the main concern of the teacher is a change in the student’s situation, behavior, or attitude. According to Deiro, the second characteristic in influential relationships is the intended change, growth, or learning is planned, not by chance. A teacher making a plan to change a student’s situation, behavior, or attitude is an example of this characteristic. Deiro found the third characteristic in influential relationships is when the change has been achieved or completed, the relationship was discontinued. A teacher would discontinue their relationship with a student once the student advanced to the next grade. Deiro believed the fourth characteristic in influential relationships is that the distribution of power between the participants is asymmetrical. Asymmetrical means uneven or unbalanced.

In teacher-student relationships, the teacher has more power than the student. With this power comes responsibility. The teacher is expected to give, know, and understand more than the student. An example of this is that students learn from their teacher. Teachers who exercise this power must do so in a careful and respectful manner.

In summary, Deiro (2005) believed the characteristics of an appropriate influential relationship are: (a) planned support of change, growth, or learning; (b) the development of autonomy in regards to the change, growth, or learning; and (c) the respectful use of power in the relationship. A positive teacher-student relationship is an example of an appropriate influential relationship. This literature review will now examine the definition of positive teacher-student relationships.

Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

Mendler (2001) defined a positive teacher-student relationship as a “personal connection” that develops “academic and social competence” (p. 21). Developing this connection includes creating a climate of trust with students, so students will want to learn what teachers have to share with them. Mendler also advocated encouraging academic success and developing social connections with students as part of a positive teacher-student relationship. Exploring positive teacher-student relationships are the focus of this study, therefore the characteristics of positive teacher-student relationships must be examined.

Characteristics of Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

Griffin (1998) conducted a year-long qualitative research study using survey, field notes, and informal interviews. The purpose of her study was to explore how teachers built community in their classrooms by creating positive teacher-student relationships. Griffin believed that the characteristics of positive teacher-student relationships were: (a) high expectations, (b)

networking, (c) dialogue, (d) practice, (e) appropriate self-disclosure, and (f) using rituals and traditions within the classroom. She further suggested these positive teacher-student relationships had positive effects on the school and the students. The following sections outline what is involved with such characteristics.

High Expectations

Griffin (1998) noted one of the characteristics of positive teacher-student relationships is high expectations. Deiro (2005) defined high expectations as “establish[ing] and maintain[ing] high academic standards” (p. 36) and “and believ[ing] that students can meet these high standards” (p. 36). She believed that high expectations increase academic achievement. Deiro noted students like teachers who believe their students were capable human beings. She added, teachers with high student expectations have more positive relationships with their students; these teachers focus on students’ academic strengths rather than their weaknesses, in order to encourage students to work to their fullest potential.

Wong and Wong (2001) defined high expectations as “the teacher believes in the learner and that the learner can learn” (p. 10). They also stated that high expectations are “an optimistic belief that whoever you teach or whatever you do will result in success or achievement” (p. 10). Wong and Wong believed that whatever the teacher expects from their student is what that student will give the teacher and that having high expectations for students’ success aids in their academic performance. They noted teachers need to recognize students’ achievements, positively reinforce their accomplishments, and celebrate students’ academic and personal success by recognizing them publicly. Recognizing students’ success shows students that someone cares about their accomplishments. Wong and Wong noted teachers with high expectations for their students assist their students to learn to their fullest potential. As well, they

believed teachers who used high expectations with their students have greater academic achievement from their students than teachers who set low expectations.

Shafii and Shafii (2001) believed positive connections in a school involve caring teacher-student relationships and high expectations for student learning, where students are treated fairly by their teachers and have close relationships with their peers and teachers. These positive connections also make students feel connected to and have a *stake* in their school. In a study where they comparatively examined the rates of school violence and school factors related to those rates, Akiba and Han (2007) found that student learning is effected by teachers' academic expectations.

High expectations are widely believed to effect student learning, as research done by Deiro (2005), Wong and Wong (2001), Shafii and Shafii (2001), and Akiba and Han (2007) demonstrated. Griffin (1998) noted having high expectations is one of the characteristics of a positive teacher-student relationship. Another characteristic of positive teacher-student relationships is networking, which will be discussed in the next section.

Networking

Griffin (1998) deemed networking is a characteristic of positive teacher-student relationships. Deiro (2005) defined networking as "mak[ing] personal connections with the people who are important to our students" (p. 38). Networking included connecting with parents, family members, friends, and neighbors of students. A positive school climate can not be established by the school alone. It has to be addressed by several groups working together. Positive school climates are created through communication, cooperation, and collaboration (Shafii & Shafii, 2001).

Roher and Weir (2004) deemed society's role is to make certain that children are safe and supported both in school and in the community. They noted collaboration with teachers, colleagues, parents, and members of the community will ensure improved student learning. They added teachers are not only educational leaders in the school, but also community leaders, who have to be dedicated to supporting students. This united effort to make our students feel supported creates a positive school climate (Lions Club International, 2005b). Lions Club deemed having parents and family members involved and visible in schools helps to create and maintain a safe and positive school climate. They added building community alliances, such as those with service groups, other schools in the community, community leaders, religious and other spiritual leaders, law enforcement officers, health care providers, juvenile justice representatives, social service agencies, media representatives, and university experts, helps to create a safe and positive learning environment for students. Wong and Wong (2001) stated that "the more the school, the family, and the community are joined as partners in the cause of educating young people, the greater each child's chance for success" (p. 46).

Deiro (2005) argued that when teachers are involved in extra-curricular activities, their connections with students are strengthened. She noted involvement in extra-curricular activities gives teachers the opportunity to get to know their students on a more personal level; being a part of the students' lives outside of the classroom creates a sense of community.

Deiro (2005), Shafii and Shafii (2001), Roher and Weir (2004), Lions Club International (2005b), and Wong and Wong (2001) noted networking strengthens positive teacher-student relationships. Griffin deemed that networking, as well as high expectations, is a characteristic of positive teacher-student relationships. The next characteristic of positive teacher-student relationships to be examined will be dialogue.

Dialogue

Dialogue was another characteristic of positive teacher-student relationships. Griffin (1998) defined dialogue as “open ended . . . genuine dialogue, neither party knows that at the outset what the outcome of the decision will be” (p. 39). Griffin added, “Dialogue also allows people to get to know each other and develop and maintain caring relationships” (p. 39). When teachers and students spend time together in caring dialogue, a positive connection will result (Deiro, 2005). Deiro believed one-on-one time with students has been shown to be the most effective way of creating a dialogue with a student. Being approachable, having an open rapport, and getting involved with students outside of class time are approaches Deiro advocated for creating dialogue with students.

Lantieri (2001) believed “[relationships] mean everything, in terms of motivation. Students want to mean more to [teachers] than just their grade. They want [teachers] to know them” (p. 35). Lantieri noted students feel valued as people when teachers listen to them; students feel like they are an important element of the school community. Stephens (1995) suggested when students feel a part of the school community, the school has a climate of ownership and school pride. He noted students like teachers who genuinely show caring for them and want them to succeed. Stern and Repa (2001) encouraged teachers to pay attention to their students, to encourage their students’ strengths, to support their learning, and to model appropriate behavior. They deemed teachers should notice when a student seems sad or angry, when things change in their students’ lives. They believed teachers should support students’ aspirations and recognize students’ achievements.

Communicating with students is important in order to create positive teacher-student relationships, as research done by Griffin (1998), Deiro (2005), and Stern and Repa (2001)

indicated. Griffin noted that dialogue was a characteristic of positive teacher-student relationships, as well as networking and high expectations. The next characteristic to be examined will be practice.

Practice

Griffin (1998) noted practice is a characteristic in positive teacher-student relationships. Griffin defined practice as an “opportunity to have experiences in caring” (p. 40). She advocated that teachers need to provide students with opportunities to gain skills in caring, such as lessons in social skills and modeling from their teachers; teaching skills in caring can be done through social skills training or character education. Smith and Sandhu (2004) advocated teaching positive social skills to students to influence their behavior. Erickson, Mattaini, and McGuire (2004) deemed reinforcing appropriate social behavior is important in teaching students how to behave appropriately. They believed teachers could also achieve results by simply advocating and modeling caring and respect. Dillon (2007) said that good behavior should be encouraged and that skills like listening, communicating, managing anger, and resolving conflicts should be taught.

Wong and Wong (2001) believed that teachers need to be role models for their students. They suggested, for some students, their teacher might be the only stable adult in their lives. Stern and Repa (2001) advocated teachers to model considerate and pro-social behavior with the intention being that students would learn and adapt this behavior for themselves. Using student surveys, Quaglia (2000) found that students should have a caring adult that they have a connection with in their lives. He deemed students needed a responsible adult they could turn to in times of discontent. Spitali (2005) suggested teachers have an enormous influence on their students, an influence that should be positive and encouraging. Gordon (2001) believed when a

teacher models a positive attitude, their students would usually mirror that attitude; students learn what they are taught.

Brownlie and King (2000) suggested establishing an atmosphere of caring in the classroom encourages students to be caring individuals. They noted a caring climate, in which students feel they belong, is at the heart of a safe school; when a classroom emphasizes belonging, students feel comfortable in striving to reach their personal best. Brownlie and King believed these classrooms model acceptance, cooperation, and appreciation for others. Gordon (2001) found satisfying esteem needs reinforces empowering students, boosting self-confidence, and establishing a sense of purpose. He noted esteem needs correlate to belonging needs; students who feel cared for more easily build confidence and self-esteem. Brown (2005) deemed students become a part of a mutually respectful relationship with their teacher when they feel as though their teacher cares about them and demonstrates empathy and concern for their well-being. He noted the influence of one caring teacher could make a difference in the life of a student. Positive relationships between teachers and students create a positive, safe school climate and a sense of community (Lions Club International, 2005b).

Practicing social skills has been shown to be a part of positive teacher-student relationships, as demonstrated by the literature discussed in this section. Enabling students to become caring individuals is a characteristic in positive teacher-student relationships, as are dialogue, networking, and high expectations. Another characteristic of positive teacher-student relationships is self-disclosure, which will be examined in the next section.

Self-Disclosure

Griffin (1998) noted appropriate self-disclosure is an important characteristic in positive teacher-student relationships. Deiro (2005) defined self-disclosure as “the act of sharing or

disclosing the teacher's own feelings, attitudes, and experiences with students in ways that are helpful to the students and enhance their learning process" (p. 32). She deemed self-disclosure creates a connection between teachers and their students; self-disclosure shows students that their teachers are real people. Deiro deemed this characteristic of positive teacher-student relationships facilitates trust between the student and the teacher.

Deiro (2005) indicated self-disclosure is honest and revealing, and should be used in an appropriate way. She noted self-disclosures should be stories that students relate and identify with. She deemed self-disclosure should not be used inappropriately – for instance, to fulfill the teacher's emotional needs in order to impress or control students. Deiro believed self-disclosure can aid students to see teachers as human beings who have the same feelings as they do; students tend to like teachers that they relate to, and self-disclosure aids in that positive connection between teachers and students.

Cyanus (2002) found when teachers use appropriate self-disclosure with their students, the students perceive the use of self-disclosure as good. His study included questionnaires from 274 students. The questionnaires determined relationships among teacher-disclosure, student communication, and effects on students. Cyanus suggested that positive self-disclosure increases student participation in class and improves student learning.

The research about appropriate self-disclosure undertaken by Diero (2005) and Cyanus (2002) demonstrates that self-disclosure is an important characteristic in positive teacher-student relationships. According to Griffin (1998), using rituals and traditions in the classroom is also a characteristic of positive teacher-student relationships, and will be examined next.

Using Rituals and Traditions

Griffin (1998) believed that rituals and traditions are a critical characteristic of positive student-teacher relationships. Deiro (2005) defined rituals as “activities that are performed the same way each time they are introduced” (p. 43). Deiro noted rituals and traditions include rules, expectations, routines, and procedures, and are important for creating a sense of community. Using a student-rating instrument with sixty students, Pass (2007) deemed classroom management is essential to student learning; students cannot learn to the best of their ability in a chaotic climate. As well, he noted effective classroom management could help students achieve optimal learning achievement. Vincent (1999) believed rules bring order to the classroom; they are expectations for appropriate behavior. He deemed rules help to create a courteous climate that is safe, orderly, and positive. Wong and Wong (2001) noted fair rules are expectations that are just and reasonable. They suggested the teacher should communicate these expectations to students in a consistent manner that students can rely on. They suggested students who misbehave should be given logical consequences, a penalty that is both rational and reasonable for the offence. For example, a student who vandalizes the school building with graffiti would be given the consequence of erasing the graffiti. Shafii and Shafii (2001) believed discipline should be appropriate, fair, and consistent. They deemed students prefer teachers who use appropriate, fair, and consistent discipline. They suggested discipline that is clear and enforced enables teachers to make meaningful connections with students and helps them to remain enthusiastic in their role as teacher.

In addition to rules and consequences, Wong and Wong (2001) indicated that procedures, also known as routines, are an integral part of classroom management and student discipline. They defined procedures as how things are done in the classroom. They believed if students

knew what they were supposed to do, most of them would generally do it. An example of a procedure is how to hand in an assignment or what to do when a student has a question. They suggested that teachers need to show students the procedures for how they want things done in the classroom. Wong and Wong believed the most successful classes have a teacher with a clear idea of what is expected from the students and students have a clear idea of what the teacher expects from them. They deemed teachers should be responsible for modeling, teaching, and practicing rules and routines with their students. Vincent (1999) agreed routines help a school run smoothly and build character in children and youth.

Classroom management and discipline include rules, consequences, procedures, and routines, and as the research discussed suggests, these are important areas to discuss with respect to rituals and traditions in the classroom. Because rituals and traditions are a part of positive teacher-student relationships, it is important to discuss the impact rituals and traditions have on the school. The quality of student-teacher relationships influences school climate by reducing student hostility and misbehavior. These relationships also lower the likelihood of violence in schools. Gladden (2005) suggested students who have a positive relationship with an adult in the school are less likely to become involved in negative behavior. Schultz (2006) believed managing a classroom becomes easier as a teacher builds positive relationships with students. Gladden and Schultz indicated building positive teacher-student relationships prevents misbehavior in school. As well, Gladden noted the quality of teacher-student relationships influences school violence by recognizing otherwise alienated students, by placating misbehavior, and by supporting student discipline. He believed alienated students are more likely to become involved in school violence, and teachers who strengthen their relationships with these alienated students lower the chances that these students will become involved in a

violent situation. He noted students who have a positive relationship with an adult at their school are better behaved than those students who do not share a positive attachment. Gladden deemed positive relationships between teachers and students create a positive school climate. By using rituals and traditions in the classroom, teachers are better able to develop positive relationships with students.

This section has summarized Griffin's (1998) characteristics of positive teacher-student relationships, which are (a) high expectations, (b) networking, (c) dialogue, (d) practice, (e) appropriate self-disclosure, and (f) using rituals and traditions within the classroom. The effects of positive teacher-student relationships will now be examined.

The Effects of Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

Epp (1995) indicated that positive teacher-student relationships effect students in a positive way. The effects of positive teacher-student relationships will be framed by Epp's study of teacher and student perceptions of caring teachers. Epp found that there are five effects positive teacher-student relationships have on students: (a) improved self-concept, (b) increased motivation to learn, (c) increased desire for others' well-being, (d) increased feeling of security and attachment, and (e) increased desire to improve society. Epp's study used teacher and student questionnaires to investigate how teachers and students perceive caring behaviors of teachers towards students. The teacher questionnaires were completed by a random sample of 223 teachers and the student questionnaires were completed by a random sample of 431 students. Each effect of positive teacher-student relationships will now be discussed, beginning with improved self-concept.

Improved Self-Concept

Epp (1995) indicated positive teacher-student relationships have positive effects on student self-concept. He suggested improved self-concept enhances the educational and personal experience for the student. As well, he believed improved self-concept initiates students working to their fullest potential. Deiro (2005) agreed with Epp, in that she deemed positive teacher-student relationships enhances student learning and encourages students to strive for their highest potential. Epp noted striving for academic success requires motivation to learn, which will be examined in the next section.

Increased Motivation to Learn

Epp (1995) noted positive teacher-student relationships have positive effects on students' increased motivation to learn. He believed teachers who demonstrate they care about their students have students who more easily cooperate with classroom expectations. He deemed a respectful and trusting classroom climate enhances students' learning.

Akerman (2004) examined teacher-student relationships in the classroom. Using qualitative research methods, including field observation, student interviews, and analysis of student work, she found positive teacher-student relationships make a difference in students' motivation to learn. Ackerman also discovered that positive teacher-student relationships have a significant correlation to students' academic success.

Using student questionnaires and student participation in a focus group, McNally's (2005) study found positive teacher-student relationships improve student achievement. McNally concluded when students perceive that their teacher cares about them, the students will care about the class and their learning of the class material.

Price (2008) studied teacher-student relationships and their relationships to improved school climate. Her study used teacher surveys and found that positive teacher-student relationships create an improved school climate, which maximizes student learning. Price concluded that it is important that students feel connected to the school and have positive connections with their teachers. These connections help students toward optimal student achievement.

Case (2007) used annual school profiles and student surveys to examine the relationship between school climate and social, behavioral, and intellectual student outcomes. The findings suggested that a positive school climate enhances student learning.

Duval (1999) found that positive teacher-student relationships enhance student motivation and learning. Duval's (1999) study was conducted during a year-long internship at a school. She employed classroom observations, questionnaires, formal and informal teacher interviews, and student surveys to collect her data. Duval's (1999) study highlighted strategies to create positive teacher-student relationships: (a) communicating care, (b) having high expectations, (c) providing support, (d) using appropriate self-disclosure, (e) being enthusiastic, and (f) self-reflecting.

Gladden (2005) found that a safe school climate is created by teaching non-violence, creating respectful teacher-student relationships, effective instruction, and responsiveness to students' culture and community. Gladden's (2005) study utilized student surveys to collect this data. He also concluded that building a positive school climate, that includes high behavioral and academic expectations, improves student learning.

Through the observation of six high school students in a study designed to determine if student relationships were important and what influenced the quality of those relationships,

Osterman (2003) found that the quality of student-teacher relationships has a direct and significant effect on student learning. Brownlie and King (2000) suggested when students are able to work and learn in a positive classroom climate, they are better able to achieve their personal best. Patrick, Ryan, and Kaplan (2007) believed when students feel their teacher supports them, they are more likely to focus on academics, expend effort on their studies, and ask their teacher for help. In addition, they are more likely to accomplish greater academic achievement. Barbetta, Norona, and Bicard (2005) deemed that it is the teacher's responsibility to help students learn. They believed learning is severely hindered in a negative classroom climate and a positive classroom climate is conducive to improved student learning. Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio, and Turner (2004) deemed that an important component for optimal student learning is having supportive relationships that make students feel secure.

As the discussion of literature indicates, an effect of positive teacher-student relationships is an increased motivation to learn. Another effect of positive teacher-student relationships is increased desire for others' well-being, which will now be examined.

Increased Desire for Others' Well-Being

Epp (1995) believed positive teacher-student relationships have positive effects on students' desire for others' well-being. He deemed students, who are involved in positive relationships with their teachers, are more apt to develop positive relationships with others as well. In addition, students who have teachers who model caring and support are more likely to exhibit caring and supportive behaviors towards others.

Brownlie and King (2000) believed establishing an atmosphere of caring in the classroom encourages students to be caring individuals. They deemed a caring climate, in which students felt they belong, is at the heart of a safe school. They further indicated a classroom climate that

emphasizes belonging is a classroom that students feel comfortable in striving to reach their personal best, classrooms that model acceptance, cooperation, and appreciation for others. Gordon (2001) noted satisfying esteem needs reinforce empowering students, boosting self-confidence, and establishing a sense of purpose. They believed esteem needs correlate to belonging needs in that students who feel cared for more easily build confidence and self-esteem. Brown (2005) indicated students become a part of a mutually respectful relationship with their teacher when they feel as though their teacher cares about them and demonstrates empathy and concern for their well-being. Lions Club International (2005) believed the influence of one caring teacher could make a difference in the life of a student. They deemed positive relationships between teachers and students create a positive, safe school climate and a sense of community.

As the literature discussed indicates, an increased desire for others' well-being is an important effect of positive teacher-student relationships. Epp (1995) believed that an increased feeling of security and attachment was another important effect of positive teacher-student relationships; this effect will be discussed next.

Increased Feeling of Security and Attachment

Epp (1995) argued positive teacher-student relationships enable students to have increased feelings of security and attachment. Epp deemed positive-teacher relationships help students meet their needs for security and attachment, especially when those needs are not being met at home. Epp advocated that teachers must communicate to students that they are cared about and that they are important. He noted even students with positive family relationships benefit from positive teacher-student relationships.

McNally (2005) found that positive teacher-student relationships produce a positive classroom atmosphere. By using student questionnaires and focus groups, McNally concluded that relationships grow more positive by spending time together and sharing personal experiences with each other.

Boire (2003) used a qualitative case study, employing a semi-structured interview, classroom observation, and document analysis. She observed a teacher whom had an excellent reputation for working with at-risk students. She concluded that building a safe and caring classroom establishes a positive climate in the classroom and in the school. Boire found that the teacher she observed established positive teacher-student relationships by showing her students that she cared for them.

Case (2007) used annual school profiles and student surveys to examine the relationship between school climate and social, behavioral, and intellectual student outcomes. The findings suggested that that a positive school climate enhances school safety.

Perone's (1998) study examined student and teacher perceptions of school climate and safety. The study used quantitative data by surveying middle-years teachers and students and collected qualitative data through focus groups. The data concluded that there is a strong relationship between a positive school climate and student and teacher perceptions of school safety.

Gladden (2005) believed the quality of student-teacher relationships influences security in the classroom by reducing student hostility and misbehavior. He deemed these relationships also lower the likelihood of violence. He suggested students who have a positive relationship with an adult in the school are less likely to become involved in negative behavior.

Schultz (2006) noted managing a classroom becomes easier as a teacher builds positive relationships with students. He deemed building positive relationships prevents misbehavior in school, therefore making schools safer. Gladden (2005) suggested a reduction in student misbehavior and a decrease in school violence is a positive effect of positive teacher-student relationships. He deemed that positive relationships between teachers and students create a feeling a security and attachment for students.

Epp (1995) found an increased feeling of security and attachment is an effect of positive teacher-student relationships, as is improved self-concept, increased motivation to learn, and increased desire for others' well-being. Epp noted an increased desire to improve society was another effect of positive teacher-student relationships, and will be discussed next.

Increased Desire to Improve Society

Epp (1995) noted positive teacher-student relationships increase students' desire to improve society. He suggested the more students know how to care for others, the more desire they have to improve they world in which they live.

Erickson et al. (2004) advocated students' involvement in positive activities will result in living in a stronger community. Smith & Sandhu (2004) said a positive approach to preventing school violence is focusing on positive social behaviors. Establishing positive teacher-student relationships is important in order to develop relationships between all involved in the community, including students, their families, peers, schools and community members (Smith & Sandhu, 2004).

In summary, Epp (2005) found positive teacher-student relationships have positive effects on students. These positive effects include: (a) an improved self-concept, (b) an increased motivation to learn, (c) an increased desire for others' well-being, (d) an increased

feeling of security and attachment, and (e) an increased desire to improve society. Griffin's (1998) concept of the characteristics of positive teacher-student relationships and Epp's research on the effects of positive teacher-student relationships guided the conceptual framework of this literature review. This conceptual framework will now be examined.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that outlines this literature review is based on Griffin's (1998) concept of a positive teacher-student relationship and Epp's (1995) study on the effects of positive teacher-student relationships on students.

Griffin (1998) stated that characteristics of positive teacher-student relationships include (a) high teacher expectations, (b) networking with family and friends, (c) dialogue, (d) practice, (e) appropriate self-disclosure, and (f) rituals and traditions. Griffin believed a sense of community is created through these positive teacher-student relationships.

The purpose of Griffin's (1998) study was "to investigate how teachers facilitate the building of a community in their classrooms by using their own manifestations of caring in the teacher-student relationships" (p. iv). Griffin employed qualitative research, including surveys, field notes, and informal interviews to conduct her study. The study concluded that caring teacher-student relationships are comprised of high expectations, appropriate self-disclosure, and personal acceptance. These caring relationships create a sense of community inside the classroom, a sense of community that students are not receiving outside of the classroom. The purpose of creating this sense of community is to develop caring students that are academically successful.

Epp's (1995) study of teacher and student perceptions of caring teachers found that there are five effects that positive teacher-student relationships have on students: (a) improved self-

concept, (b) increased motivation to learn, (c) increased desire for others' well-being, (d) increased feeling of security and attachment, and (e) increased desire to improve society. Epp's (1995) study used teacher and student questionnaires to investigate the perceptions of teachers and students concerning the teacher behaviors which indicate, to students, that teachers care about them.

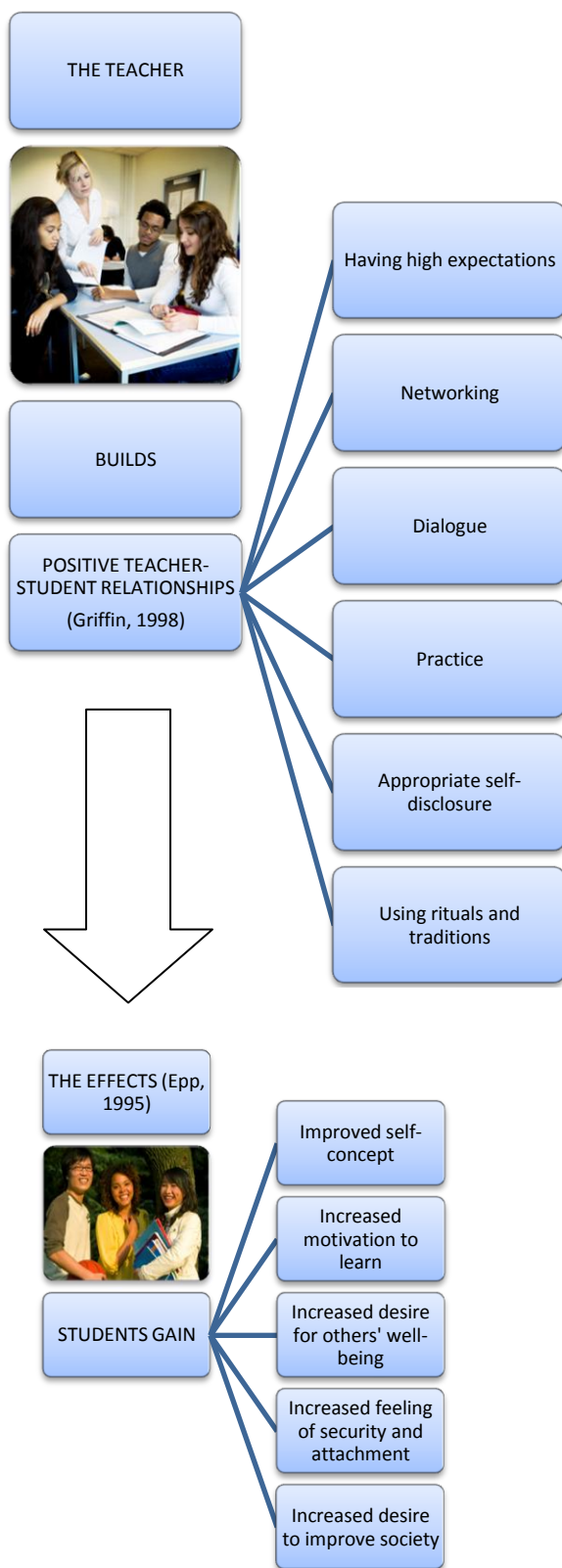


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Summary

This study sought to discover the ways middle-years teachers created positive teacher-student relationships, the effects of those relationships, and why those relationships were important. This literature review concentrated on six characteristics of positive teacher-student relationships, including having high expectations, networking, communicating, practicing social skills, using appropriate self-disclosure, and using rituals and traditions in the classroom. As well, the effects of positive teacher-relationships were also examined. The literature review presented and discussed five effects of positive teacher-student relationships. These effects include students gaining improved self-concept, increased motivation to learn, increased desire for others' well-being, increased feeling of security and attachment, and increased desire to improve society. This literature review also provided a conceptual framework that guided this study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter will focus on the methodology that was used to conduct this study. The research design, participants, method of data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations are outlined in this chapter. The purpose of this study was to describe and understand positive middle-years teacher-student relationships and their effects on students. Middle-years teachers were interviewed about the ways they created positive teacher-student relationships, the effects of those positive teacher-student relationships on students, and why positive teacher-student relationships were important.

Research Design

When choosing a research design, I chose a method appropriate to the study. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) noted that a quantitative research design concentrates on testing theory, establishing facts, and describing statistical relationships, while a qualitative research design concentrates on developing an understanding of the experiences of people; quantitative research has a large, random sample, while qualitative research often uses a small, nonrepresentative, purposeful sample. Qualitative research suited this study, because of the topic being studied. McNeill and Chapman (2005) noted the choice of topic influences the choices a researcher will make with regard to the research method. I was interested in the experiences of middle-years teachers and how they build positive relationships with their students. Because of my interest in these teachers' experiences, I used a case study, which will be explained next.

Case Study

This research involves a case study methodology. Freebody (2003) defined case study as a “focus on one particular instance of educational experience and attempt to gain theoretical and

professional insights from a full documentation of that experience” (p. 81). Johnson and Christensen (2000) suggested case study is a “story about a bounded system [that involves] a set of interrelated elements that form an organized whole” (p. 327). Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted there is a range in how case studies can be conceived, for example, from “a slice of life” to an “[in] depth examination of an instance” (p. 360). If we believe Lincoln and Guba, collection method within a study can also vary “from a few test scores for an individual to volumes of demographic, social, industrial, and cultural information for an entire society” (p. 361). Given the range of approaches in collecting information there is the possibility that interviews might provide a helpful and meaningful way to gather information. Seidman (1998) and others such as Kvale (1996) provide strong arguments that the use of interviews can provide extensive and fulsome information relating to human circumstance. Given the need in this research to thoroughly investigate the nature of positive teacher-student relationships and their effects, I will employ interviews as the main data gathering method that focuses “on one particular instance of an educational experience” that act as a “set of interrelated elements that form an organized whole” providing an in depth examination of educator’s understanding. In effect, this series of interviews will constitute a case. The reasons why I used a case study will be examined next.

Why use a case study? I used a case study as my research design, because I was interested in the understandings of middle-years teachers who have positive relationships with their students; Thomas and Brubaker believed that if a researcher was interested in the “motives, values, beliefs, and interpretation of events” (p. 104) of their participants, a case study would be the research design to use. Mayan (2001) deemed case studies are useful in finding data that normally would not be available to the researcher; by getting to know the participants, the researcher acquires an understanding of the personal experiences of the participants. Bogdan and

Biklen (2007) noted researchers should be practical in choosing a research design that is compatible with the researcher's resources and abilities. A case study was economically feasible for me to complete. A case study could be done in a suitable time frame for this study. A case study suited this study, because I wanted to examine and understand each teacher's experiences in detail. This study used a case study involving five middle-years teachers.

Participants

Hart (2005) defined sampling as "a procedure for generalizing about a population without researching every unit in that population" (p. 338). Qualitative sampling aims to understand the experience the researcher is interested in (Mayan, 2001). Data were collected from a purposeful sample of five middle-years teachers from one school division in Saskatchewan. Hart indicated, in purposeful sampling, "[units] are hand-picked on the basis of how they represent a population or category to which they belong" (p. 347). Purposeful sampling was used, because I wanted participants that have positive relationships with students. I requested specific teachers to participate in the interviews, teachers who I recognized as having positive relationships with students. I informally gathered information about teachers who had reputations as having positive teacher-student relationships. This information was collected from school-based administrators, colleagues, and current and former students of these teachers. I also had the opportunity to informally view these teachers interacting with students. The participants chosen for this study were not employed in the same school as me. Additional details about the selection process must be withheld due to confidentiality issues. Choosing participants with whom I was acquainted made it a convenience sample.

Convenience sampling is when participants are "chosen because they [are] convenient to study . . . the value of such research resides in what it tells about the people who participated

directly” in the study (Thomas & Brubaker, 2000, p. 117). Convenience sampling was used, because of the accessibility of the participants to me. I was acquainted with the teachers who participated in the interviews, therefore a relationship had already been established and the participants were already at ease before the interview process began (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

I attempted to represent different genders, different levels of teaching experience, and different age groups in the sample to gain a collection of data that would give a broad view of the subject matter. I gained access to the sample population by an initial phone call and face-to-face appointments. The method of data collection that was used in this study will now be discussed.

Interviewing: Method of Data Collection

The method of data collection used in this study was interviewing. Thomas and Brubaker (2000) noted interviews “serve the purpose of enabling people to report information about themselves – about their life condition, beliefs, or attitudes” (p. 149). Seidman (1998) indicated the purpose of interviewing “is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 3); the aim of the researcher is to demonstrate in detail the participants’ experiences, so that others can relate to their experiences, learn how these experiences came to be, and intensify their understanding of the issues the interview raises.

Types of Interviews

Thomas and Brubaker (2000) noted there are four types of interview strategies: (a) loose, (b) tight, (c) converging, and (d) response-guided. Thomas and Brubaker deemed a loose-question strategy uses open-ended questions to “reveal the variable ways respondents interpret a general question” (p. 151). A tight-question strategy aims to “discover which selections respondents prefer among the several limited options” (p. 151). They indicated a converging-question strategy aims to integrate both loose- and tight-question strategies. A response-guided

question strategy “consists of the interviewer beginning with a prepared question, then spontaneously creating follow-up queries relating to the interviewee’s answer to the opening question” (p. 152). This strategy made it possible for me to examine the participants’ understanding of the issues involved in the interview.

The type of interview strategy for this study was response-guided, beginning with a prepared question, and spontaneously generating follow-up questions (Thomas & Brubaker, 2000). Thomas and Brubaker deemed this strategy facilitates an in depth examination of the participant’s understanding of the question posed. The response-guided interview strategy suited the usage of semi-structured interviews in this study, which will be examined next.

The method of data collection used in this study was semi-structured interviews. Mayan (2001) defined semi-structured interviewing as “[collecting] data from individual participants through a set of open-ended questions asked in a specific order” (p. 15). Morse and Richards (2002) defined semi-structured interviews as “open-ended questions [that] are prepared in advance, along with prepared probes” (p. 91); they deemed “[unplanned], unanticipated probes may also be used” (p. 91). Kvale (1996) defined semi-structured interviewing as “[having] a sequence of themes to be covered, as well as suggested questions . . . there is an openness to changes in sequence and forms of questions in order to follow up the answers given and the stories told by subjects” (p. 124). Kvale’s definition of semi-structured interviews was used for this study, because it suited the response-guided interview strategy (Thomas & Brubaker, 2000) the researcher utilized. The next section will explain why I used interviews as my method of data collection.

Why Use Interviews?

Thomas and Brubaker (2000) noted that there are several advantages to using interviews. The time and care it takes to organize and execute personal interviews implies to participants that the researcher values their opinions; this demonstration of sincerity in the opinions of participants can positively influence the thoroughness of the participants' interview responses. In addition, the researcher has the opportunity to clarify topics that the participants may find ambiguous. Interviews also enable the participants to elaborate on their responses and to move off on tangents that may be valuable to the researcher. Interviews can also examine a detailed understanding of the participant's responses to the interview questions, as well as a deeper understanding of the participant's motivations, logic, and emotions involved with the interview topics.

Procedures

Drawing on information from the literature review and from my experience, I prepared non-leading, open-ended questions prior to the interviews. I also prepared follow-up questions to probe for more in depth information within the interview. Questions were logical and clear and focused on "just one issue each" (Mayan, 2001, p. 17). The questions were developed to encourage answers that provided description and exploration (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The teachers interviewed were personally contacted by telephone beforehand to ascertain their interest in participating in the study. After obtaining consent from the teachers, appointments were made with the participating teachers to be interviewed.

Interviews took place in a location other than the participant's school to ensure confidentiality. Each interview was approximately one-hour in length and focused on collecting and clarifying the data given by the interviewees. I interviewed each participant alone, so that

participants would feel comfortable sharing their understandings with me. Following data collection, transcription, and analysis, additional contact was made with the participants. A follow-up interview was scheduled with each participant, as I determined some information needed to be clarified.

Interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed in order to categorize information into a coding scheme. The transcript lengths ranged 15 to 25 pages resulting in the analysis of a comprehensive set of interview information. After transcribing the interview, I made the transcript available to the interviewee in order to review and agree to the transcribed data.

Data Analysis

Mayan (2001) defined data analysis as “the process of observing patterns in the data, asking questions of those patterns, constructing conjectures, deliberately collecting data from specifically selected individuals on targeted topics, [and] confirming or refuting those conjectures” (p. 21). Further, Mayan indicated analysis would continue, more questions would be asked, and more data would be sought; data analysis continues with “sorting, questioning, thinking, constructing and testing conjectures” (p. 21). This section will explain how data analysis was managed in this study.

After each interview, I recorded my post-interview ideas. Wengraf (2001) believed the subjective perceptions of the researcher are an important piece of data; therefore, while transcribing the interview, I made notes on the interview experience to take advantage of the ideas that resulted by hearing the recorded interview for the first time. I then examined the entire interview transcript to code the information related to the study.

Content Analysis

Most qualitative data are latent content analyzed (Mayan, 2001). Latent content analysis “is the process of identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data” (p. 22). Latent content analysis was the process used in analyzing the research data in this study. I examined the information within the data and chose a suitable category for that information.

Coding the data. In conducting content analysis, I coded the data. Mayan (2001) defined coding as “[the] process of identifying persistent words, phrases, themes, or concepts within the data so that the underlying patterns can be identified and analyzed” (p. 22). I used coding to familiarize myself with the data and to organize the data. Mayan noted coding involves reading and rereading the data, highlighting sections of the data, and making comments about the data including general ideas, interesting points of view, and strategies for using the data. After the data has been coded, Mayan deemed it is then ready to be categorized.

Categorizing the data. When categorizing, Mayan (2001) noted the researcher reads through the data again, cuts and pastes highlighted portions, and groups these portions into categories in separate folders. Pieces of data may fit into two separate categorizes; in that case, the researcher will cross-reference this data and place it in both folders. Once the data is categorized, each folder will be read through again. Sub-categories may emerge during this process. All of the data will be represented using this process. A summary will then be written for each category and sub-category. The categories will then be assessed by asking if the data suits the category it has been placed in and if the category seems logical. I met with a colleague to make certain the categories were valid. The next step is to integrate the categories and find themes.

Integrating the categories and finding themes. I then integrated the categories to reflect on the data and find themes. I: (a) determined the relationship between the categories, (b) determined the repetition of key patterns in the data, and (c) made conclusions based on the data (Mayan, 2001). I progressed to a more advanced analysis of the data by determining the relationships and commonalities in the data.

Mayan (2001) noted “[content] analysis is a circular process” (p. 25). As new data is added, new categories may develop and relationships between the categories may change. By following the content analysis strategy outlined in this thesis, I was able to acquire a clear understanding of the data.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted trustworthiness includes (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. In addition to examining the trustworthiness of this study, this section will contain information about the pilot study conducted prior to this study.

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) deemed a credible study has certainty in the finding accuracy. They indicated techniques used for establishing credibility are: peer debriefing and member checks.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted peer debriefing is a technique for establishing credibility. Peer debriefing is defined as “a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (p. 308). Thomas and Brubaker (2000) noted peer review provides the researcher with the opportunity to reflect on

their work. Mayan (2001) suggested that peer review enables the impartial party to “[ask] questions about the researcher’s values, conjectures, and decisions” (p. 28); the impartial party may also recommend possible future actions for the researcher to take. I utilized a colleague to participate in peer debriefing for the study. I explained the study, the concerns I encountered, and the results I found to this colleague, who questioned my choices throughout the study. This helped me to improve the credibility of the study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) deemed member checks can establish credibility. They indicated member checks are when data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are assessed by the study’s participants; this technique determines validity of the study. Thomas and Brubaker (2000) noted that member checking involves “sharing interview transcripts, analytical thoughts, and/or drafts of the final report with research participants” (p. 260); member checking ensures that the participants’ views are accurately represented. Mayan (2001) indicated member checks “[verify] developing hypotheses, preliminary categories, and interpretations” (p. 28) with the participants of the study; obtaining feedback from the participants makes certain the researcher accurately understood the participants’ views. The teachers who were interviewed were able to comment on the researchers’ interpretations of the data and were able to elaborate on their initial responses. Participants were provided with a transcript of their interview to review and agree to the transcribed data.

Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) deemed a study that is transferable is one in which the findings are relevant in other contexts. They indicated a technique for establishing transferability is thick description. Thomas and Brubaker (2000) noted thick description “allows the reader to enter the research context” (p. 260). The researcher used thick description to describe the findings in this

study. Thick description included detailed descriptions of the study's participants, their school setting, the methods used in the study, and the participant's experiences as related by them.

Dependability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated a dependable study has consistent and replicable findings. They deemed a technique for establishing dependability is an inquiry audit. Inquiry audits give an impartial party the opportunity to test the procedure and findings of the study. Thomas and Brubaker (2000) noted, "[having] an outside person examine the research process and product through 'auditing' your field notes, research journal, analytic coding scheme" (p. 260) fosters the validity of a study. I utilized a colleague to examine the research study during the process and after its completion. This colleague also functioned as the peer debriefer, as explained earlier in Chapter Three.

Confirmability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) deemed a confirmable study is objective. They noted techniques for establishing confirmability include confirmability audits and audit trails. Lincoln and Guba noted a confirmability audit entails an impartial party examining the process and product of the study, similar to an inquiry audit. The researcher used a colleague to complete a confirmability audit. Lincoln and Guba deemed an audit trail is a description of all of the steps the researcher has taken during the process of the research study. An audit trail includes: (a) the raw data, (b) products of data reduction and analysis, (c) products of data reconstruction and synthesis, (d) process notes, (e) materials relating to objectives, and (f) information involving instrument development. Mayan (2001) noted an audit trail "enables another researcher to clearly follow the *decision trail* used by investigator in the study" (p. 28). The researcher created an audit trail of the process of the research study.

Pilot Study

Mauch and Park (2003) noted a pilot study is a tool that can determine the potential risks of a research design; a pilot study can improve research procedures and “can enhance the quality of a subsequent study” (p. 21). The pilot study was carried out on November 3, 2008. The purpose of the pilot study was to check if the interview questions were understood by the participant, if the interview questions were in a logical order and were consistent with the study’s conceptual framework, and if the interview questions generated data regarding positive teacher-student relationships and their effects on students. I interviewed a Grade 9 teacher in an urban Saskatchewan school. This pilot study was helpful to determine the viability of the study. I determined the interview questions had a sufficient degree of validity, because they were able to obtain information on positive teacher-student relationships and their effects on students. Through conducting the pilot study, I was able to determine that the interview procedure was appropriate for the study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines of confidentiality and anonymity for this research study were followed to ensure that no information, of an identifiable nature, was appropriately disclosed. All interview data was treated as confidential, and only personnel directly involved in the research had access to the raw data. Permission to conduct the research was sought and granted from the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Research Ethics Board and the selected school division, and their guidelines were followed.

Summary

The methodology used to conduct this study was the focus of this chapter. This study employed qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews. Using semi-structured

interviews allowed the study's participants to reconstruct their experiences with positive teacher-student relationships and the effects of those relationships on students. The following research questions provided the direction for this study:

1. In what ways do middle-years teachers create positive teacher-student relationships?
2. What are middle-years teachers' understandings of the effects of positive teacher-student relationships?
3. What are middle-years teachers' understandings of why positive teacher-student relationships are important?

The interview participants' responses to these questions will be presented the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

This chapter presents the data obtained using the methodologies described in Chapter Three. Five middle-years Saskatchewan teachers were interviewed. These teachers were asked to share their experiences regarding positive middle-years teacher-student relationships and their effects on students. Upon completion of the interviews and integration of the data, three themes emerged: how positive teacher-student relationships are created, the effects of positive teacher-student relationships, and the importance of positive teacher-student relationships. This chapter begins with an explanation of how positive teacher-student relationships are created, which includes participants' descriptions of using classroom management and discipline, having high expectations for behavior and academics, communicating with students and parents, being positive, and spending time with students outside of the classroom. The effects of positive teacher-student relationships will be presented, which include effects on the students and effects on the school. The effects on students are a sense of belonging and a motivation to learn. The effects on the school are a decrease in student misbehavior and a safe school environment. The participants' perceptions of the importance of these effects are also presented. A description of the interview participants precedes the presentation of the data.

Description of the Interview Participants

The interview participants involved with this study were five middle-years teachers in Saskatchewan schools. Participants will be described according to the following: teaching experience, class size, school size, ability level of classes, and cultural milieu of the school.

Participant #1: Jackie

Jackie has 12 years of teaching experience, some of which has been overseas. She teaches in a Saskatchewan community school, which has a population exceeding 60% Metis and First Nations students. This school is situated in an inner city setting. The school's student population surpasses 350 students. Jackie's class sizes range from 20 to 35 students. Her students come from low socio-economic backgrounds. The school has a highly transient student population.

Participant #2: Christine

Christine has taught a variety of different age levels from kindergarten to grade nine. She has 13 years of teaching experience. Her class sizes range from 20 to 35 students. Her students come from low socio-economic backgrounds. As well, the student population at the school in which she teaches is highly transient. She is currently situated at a Saskatchewan community school, with a percentage of Metis and First Nations students that exceeds 70%. The student population exceeds 350 students. This school is situated in the inner city.

Participant #3: Steven

Steven has been teaching for 11 years. He has taught a variety of ages, including middle years and high school students. His class sizes vary in size from 20 to 25 students. His students are mostly average in ability. He teaches at a rural school with a student population that exceeds 300 students.

Participant #4: Helen

Helen has been teaching for 21 years. She has a wide range of teaching experiences, including teaching overseas. She has taught a variety of grade levels, from elementary students to high school students, and a variety of subjects. Currently, she teaches at the middle-years

level. Her class sizes vary in size from 15 to 30 students. She teaches at a rural school with a student population that maintains an enrollment exceeding 300 students. The students she teaches are mostly average in ability.

Participant #5: Nathan

Nathan has been teaching for four years. He teaches at a large urban high school which serves a variety of students with a range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The high school population is in excess of 1000 students. He teaches Grade 9 students. His class sizes vary from 20 to 35 students. His students have a wide range of academic abilities. There is also some transience in the student population.

How Positive Teacher-Student Relationships are Created

The interviewees believed positive teacher-student relationships were created through: using classroom management and discipline, having high expectations for behavior and academics, communicating with students and their parents, being positive with students, and spending time with students outside of the classroom.

Classroom Management and Discipline

The interviewees referred to classroom management and discipline as the organization and set-up of the classroom and the appropriate behavior of the students in that classroom. Interviewees talked about two areas of classroom management and discipline: establishing classroom expectations and routines and being fair and consistent with students.

Classroom Expectations and Routines

The participants expressed that establishing and teaching expectations and routines in the classroom were important in creating positive teacher-student relationships. They defined behavioral expectations as the rules the teachers used in the classroom to manage student

behavior. They defined routines as the daily habits and customs of the classroom, which helped the classroom operate efficiently. The participants discussed when they introduced expectations and routines to students, how they taught expectations and routines to students, and how they involved students in determining what the expectations and routines should be.

The participants said they introduced classroom expectations and routines to their students at the beginning of the school year. Jackie introduced the classroom rules and routines at the beginning of the school year saying, “we continually refer to them throughout the first few weeks.” Christine also practiced her rules and routines with her class during the first weeks of the school year. Helen noted, “[You] need to set the tone at the very beginning of the year as to how you want your class to be run . . . The students need to feel a sense of security and they need to know exactly what you’re expecting.” She said, “[Setting] parameters up in the early stages of the year makes for a smoother time”. Steven also thought it was important to establish rules and routines “at the beginning of the year in the classroom.” Nathan noted he discussed classroom expectations with his students at the beginning of the school year.

The interviewees indicated how they taught classroom expectations and routines to their students. Jackie explained:

I have them posted. I have a big bulletin board on them. And we are constantly referring to them. Like what to do when you’re finished work. There’s no uncertainty. They know exactly what to do when they’re finished. If someone hits them with a ruler, they know exactly how to respond. I’m big on routine and rules and they follow them. It helps because they know what to do.

Christine spoke about how she taught expectations and routines to her students:

It’s all listening games. I go over the basic rules at the beginning. When I [do this], you need to sit and listen. Then we practice that. We do different games . . . [that] go really well with getting the kids to listen and follow directions. I would incorporate games that use a lot of the management rules that I have . . . I have hand symbols. We practice that over and over again. They eventually get it and do it for the rest of the year.

Steven said he talked to his students about how he expected them to act like adults and how he would treat them like adults. He noted, “I don’t have a lot of guidelines. I have one rule that they have to follow: they can’t take advantage of me. It goes back to treating them like a young adult and giving them the respect that they deserve.” He commented on what he did when students misbehaved:

When it’s happened and I’ve had to talk to the kids about it, it’s almost a growing experience for us. We’ll talk. Listen, what has happened here? Now, look what I have to do, it’s my job to do this now. I’ve rarely come into a situation when the students haven’t been understanding of that. I almost treat it as a growing experience for them. In life, you make mistakes. You have to learn from those mistakes and then go from there.

Jackie, Christine, and Steven taught their classroom expectations and routines to their students, while Helen and Nathan involved their students in determining what the classroom expectations should be. Helen explained:

We talk about what they expect from me. Do you expect me to be prepared? Do you expect me to have interesting subject matter? Do you expect me to show you a variety of things? And generally speaking, they will say yes. Then I’ll talk about their role. What is your role? What is your job?

Nathan commented, “[The students] understand what I think is acceptable. They know what the school thinks is acceptable. And then they bring what they think is acceptable to the classroom.” By using students’ ideas, as well as their own and the school’s, they established their classroom expectations.

Participants discussed how establishing classroom expectations and routines were important in creating positive teacher-student relationships. Interviewees said they introduced expectations and routines to their students at the beginning of the school year. Jackie, Christine, and Steven taught expectations and routines to their students, while Helen and Nathan involved students in determining what classroom expectations should be. Establishing classroom rules

and routines was seen by the participants as an important part of classroom management. Being fair and consistent was also deemed to be an important part of classroom management, and will be discussed next.

Fairness and Consistency

The participants said being fair and consistent helped them create positive teacher-student relationships. The interviewees defined fairness and consistency. As well, they discussed how they were fair and consistent.

The participants explained their definitions of fairness. Jackie defined fairness as, “the consequence fits the crime . . . treating students equally.” Helen defined being fair as, “If you say something, you need to follow through . . . [the students] need to know exactly what you’re expecting. And if you say, these are my expectations, you need to stick to them.” Steven talked about his definition of fairness:

I think it's important when you put in your class rules, don't let them have a grey area. If your assignments are due at the beginning of the class, they're due at the beginning of class. They're not due one week at 1:15 and other weeks at 1:00. Make it known and stick with it. Being fair to everyone.

Nathan said, “Being fair is allowing everyone to be comfortable.” He felt it was important to “not get your back up and . . . [to] look at it from [another] person’s perspective.” He deemed looking at things from another perspective was the basis for fairness. The participants said being fair was applying the rules to all students, having clearly communicated expectations for students, following through with consequences, and being able to look at situations from others’ perspectives.

The definition of fairness and consistency was seen as being interrelated by Christine. She commented, “Consistent is my definition of fairness. Whatever the consequence is, you would be consistent with it, and that would be fair to the people involved . . . Consistency is part

of fairness.” When defining fairness and consistency, Christine thought fairness and consistency were dependent upon each other.

The participants discussed their definitions of consistency. Jackie said being consistent was being, “very regular . . . the kids know what to expect every time . . . no big surprises.” Steven defined consistency as, “Do it all the time. If you’re going to do it at the beginning of class, do it at the beginning of class. There’s no grey areas . . . If you make certain things, you got to stick with it.” Helen agreed with Steven when she said, “If you say something, you need to follow through.” Nathan defined consistency as “always letting them know what your morals are, your expectations are, and demonstrating that too. You can’t tell them one thing and then go back on the other.” The participants described consistency as being reliable and habitual, and letting the students know what to expect. The interviewees also discussed how they were fair and consistent.

The participants spoke about how they were fair with their students. Jackie said she ensured she “[treated] students equally.” Christine felt she was fair to students when her actions were “purposeful . . . doing it to help [them].” Helen commented, “The ones that tend to be more of a challenge have an over-developed sense of fairness. If they perceive that you are treating them in a different manner to others, they’ll point that out to you.” Helen shared an example of this:

The other day in class, one particular student who tends to be fairly vocal, he was saying something and interrupted me. I stopped and he knew right away because I just stopped talking, and I looked at him and said, and you have something to say to me? He said, I’m sorry to interrupt you. And I said, thank you. And then we kept going on and another student interrupted me that doesn’t normally interrupt but does sometimes, so then I thought, if I [said something to] so and so then I need to [say something to you], so I said, excuse me, you interrupted, so I’d be expecting the same response from you that I did from the other student. So he said, sorry. They like you to be equitable. They have a very developed sense of fairness at that age.

Steven talked about how he was fair, “Sometimes you want to give breaks to your favorite students. You can’t allow that. Your rules have to be to everybody whether it’s your favorite or non-favorite.” Nathan talked about how he tried to be fair with his students:

I always ask them to tell me what was going on first if there was a situation. Or tell them what I see and if what I see is not accurate. Maybe I missed an argument previous between two students that set it all off and got the person just retaliating. Always asking questions and finding out the whole picture before jumping to any conclusions.

The participants were fair with their students by treating them equitably, being purposeful in their actions, applying their classroom rules to all of their students, and looking at a situation from all perspectives before reacting to it.

The participants discussed how they were consistent in their classrooms. Nathan said he was consistent when he used routines in his classroom. He commented, “[The students] know what I’m going to do probably the first hour they are in the classroom with me.” Jackie said she was consistent by, “constantly referring to [the classroom rules and routines] . . . There’s not uncertainty. [The students] know exactly what to do.” Jackie said she consistently taught expectations and routines and followed up with consequences when students did not abide by the rules. An example she related was when students were behind on their work or made mistakes in their work, they would have to “redo their work in . . . correction time.” Jackie related this was a consequence that was part of the classroom routine and was consistently applied when students were not done or made mistakes in their schoolwork. Christine spoke about how she was consistent, “I’m fairly consistent with the management.” Similar to Jackie, Christine said she was consistent in following up with consequences when students did not follow the rules and routines in her classroom. Helen noted she acted in a consistent manner with students when she gave the same consequences to every student who broke classroom rules. Steven said he was

consistent because he had “no grey areas” in his classroom rules. He commented, “Your rules have to be [for] everybody . . . Sometimes you want to give breaks . . . You can’t allow that.”

The participants said they were consistent when they used routines in their classrooms, followed up with consequences when students did not abide by classroom rules and routines, and applied the rules to all students in the classroom.

Fairness and consistency were seen by the participants as a part of classroom management and discipline. The participants defined fairness and consistency, and discussed how they were fair and consistent in their classrooms.

When using classroom management and student discipline in their classrooms, the participants found there were two areas: establishing expectations and routines and being fair and consistent. Using classroom management and discipline was one characteristic of positive teacher-student relationships. Another characteristic of positive teacher-student relationships was having high expectations for behavior and academics.

Having High Expectations for Behavior and Academics

The participants noted that having high expectations for behavior and academics helped to create positive teacher-student relationships. They discussed what their expectations were and why students would want to meet those expectations.

The participants discussed what their expectations were. Jackie explained her expectations. “I have high expectations in terms of everything, their behavior, their politeness, their work . . . I expect them to do their best. Best effort is really important.” Christine summarized her behavioral and academic expectations for students by saying, “Basically, I expect them to improve.” She said, throughout the school year she wanted students’ skills to progress, making and striving to reach goals they set for themselves. She explained she wanted

students to show improvement on the ability level they started with at the beginning of the school year. Steven expected students to be “willing to try.” He said, students “may be low academically, but if they’re happy, they’ll give it a try. Not to say they can do it, but they are at least willing to try.” Helen thought expectations should be “reasonable and fair.” She said, “You’re best to be fair and have input from [the students] and that gives them empowerment.” Helen believed students should have input into classroom expectations. She felt giving students input would make them feel more responsible for achieving expectations, because they would feel ownership of the expectations. Nathan said, “The expectations are different for each student. I realize that some people aren’t capable of getting that 90%, but every student is capable of progressing and showing improvement.” The participants expected their students to give their best effort and show improvement. It was also suggested students should have input into setting their own expectations.

The participants discussed why students wanted to meet the expectations set by their teacher. Jackie said:

They want to work towards my expectations because we do lots of fun things in my class. They don’t want to miss out on the fun stuff. Correction time, the students who don’t have corrections are having fun. They’re playing games or they’re playing on the Smart Board. It’s very rewarding for students to be not behind on their work and not having to redo their work in my class.

Christine indicated students wanted to meet her expectations, because they “feel like they’re important and they’re contributing.” She added, “The student is eager to please and keep that positive relationship.” Steven said:

More often than not, students look toward teachers as being a role model. I think they want to please you as best they can. Also, from my experience, students like to be pushed. They like to be challenged . . . they want to reach that goal, they want challenges, they want goal setting.

Helen thought students would want to meet her expectations, because she “[involved] the students in . . . [setting] the standards.” As well, she thought when students “know what they are striving towards”, they would be motivated to try to reach the standards set for them. Nathan explained why students would want to work towards his expectations, “Number one is obviously grades. Every student likes to see a good grade on their paper.” Also, he said students “[feel] like they’re almost letting me down if they aren’t trying.” He said, “They want to meet my expectations to get praise from me.” The participants explained students would want to meet expectations, because they were eager to please, wanted praise or rewards, liked to be challenged, and wanted good grades. They would also want to meet expectations when they were involved in setting the expectations.

The interviewees believed high expectations for behavior and academics were important in creating positive teacher-student relationships. They indicated having high expectations for behavior and academics was one aspect of positive teacher-student relationships. In the next section, another aspect of positive teacher-student relationships will be presented: creating and maintaining open communication between the teacher, the students, and the parents.

Communication

The participants indicated communication with students and parents was an important characteristic of positive teacher-student relationships. They noted communication included face-to-face contact, phone calls, and e-mails to convey a message. The way the interviewees communicated with students and parents differed. A discussion of how communication took place with students and how it took place with parents will be included in this section.

How to Communicate with Students

The participants interviewed believed there were three aspects to communicating with students: paying attention to students, encouraging student input, and sharing personal experiences with students.

The interviewees believed paying attention to students was important in creating a positive teacher-student relationship with them. Jackie explained how she paid attention to her students:

I really try to listen to what they are saying. I try to talk to every student, make sure I have contact with each student every day, especially at the beginning of the school year. Some of them will slip under the radar. So I really try to talk to them and have them respond.

Christine talked about how she paid attention to her students:

Sometimes I comment, oh nice hair cut, or something like that. I pay attention to them sometimes when there's something that I notice . . . If I see them doing something well, I'll say good job or you're doing that nicely or whatever. They get attention that way. When they talk to me, I'll listen to what they have to say.

Steven paid attention to his students by showing interest in their lives outside of the classroom.

Steven said, "I enjoy talking to them. You went to the movies last weekend. What'd you think of it? How is this going and that going?" Helen spoke about how she paid attention to a student who Helen noticed was having a difficult time:

I went up and asked her quietly if everything was all right. She shook her head. So I said, come outside for a minute. In the hallway, I said, is everything all right? She started to cry. She said no. I said, well can I help you? You can tell me and it's just between you and I. And she said that her mom had left, and that she wasn't in the home, and she didn't know where her mother was. Her dad wouldn't let her talk to her mom. So I gave her a hug. I asked if she wanted to talk to the counselor about it. And she said no. I asked if she would like to go to the washroom for a minute [to get herself together]. She said sure. She went off to the washroom. She was gone for a few minutes. I asked another girl in our class, who I know is responsible and nonjudgmental, to go and check on her, which she did. They came back together after a little while. I think that made the student make a connection with that other student too. I check in on her quite a

bit. Things have worked out okay. She's allowed to see her mom again [and] she seems happier.

Nathan noted, "Paying attention is being an active listener. Keeping up with the conversation. Not just sluffing them off and saying yeah, yeah. Ask them a question back. Find out a deeper answer." Nathan agreed with Jackie that listening to students was an important part of paying attention to students. The participants said they paid attention to students by talking and listening to them, making comments about them, and noticing when they are having difficulties. The interviewees agreed paying attention to students was part of communicating with students. Encouraging student input was also seen by the interviewees as an aspect of communication with students.

The participants believed giving students input into classroom decisions aided in creating positive teacher-student relationships. They defined input as students contributing their opinions to classroom decisions. Jackie talked about how students gave input in her classroom, "Every Monday morning we have buzz groups. The kids get a chance to share . . . and I always share." Christine commented how students had input into classroom activities. She said, "Sometimes a kid will have a really good suggestion." Steven talked about how he gave students input, "[giving] them some say in evaluation, some say in discussions, some say in some of the topics. I say some because obviously the teacher is still the person who is going to make all the decisions." Helen commented, "You need to allow students to have some sort of input . . . So I always give them an opportunity." Nathan explained how he gave students input, "they have input . . . they bring what they think is acceptable to the classroom." The participants gave students the opportunity to give input about classroom activities, evaluation, and discussion topics. The participants thought encouraging student input was part of communicating with

students. The participants also communicated with their students by sharing personal experiences with them.

The participants felt sharing appropriate personal experiences with students helped to foster positive teacher-student relationships, and was an aspect of communicating with students. Jackie remarked, “I do share my feelings about things. I’m pretty frank where it’s appropriate.” Christine told students about an experience “when [she] broke [her] collarbone playing football.” She said, “I tell them that . . . because it’s a good safety story.” Steven commented, “It’s about lessons learned and things of that nature. The things I share with them, there’s always a reason for it. I would say, when this happened this is how I handled the adversity and how does that connect to what we are talking about.” Helen noted, “Sometimes I’ll relate anecdotes from my own life. For sure if it has a point.” Nathan commented:

I’m constantly sharing what’s going on in my life . . . always talking about different things. If something in the news pertains to what I’m doing right then. I’m involved in different community organizations. I’ll talk about those. Trying to stir the volunteerism with my students. And I expect them to do the same and they do.

The participants shared appropriate personal experiences with their students by conveying their feelings about issues, connecting personal experiences to classroom learning, and passing on life lessons learned.

Communicating with students helped the interviewees to create positive teacher-student relationships. They thought communicating with students included: paying attention to students, giving students input in the classroom, and sharing appropriate personal experiences with them. The participants noted open communication between the school and home also helped to maintain positive teacher-student relationships.

How to Communicate with Parents

The interviewees indicated communicating with parents helped to foster positive teacher-student relationships. Participants used a variety of ways to communicate with parents.

Jackie commented on how she communicated with her students' parents:

At the very beginning of the school year, it's written communication between me and the home. And it happens for every student. They have an agenda that they have to fill out every day, whatever is due or important things that their parents need to know. And I sign every single student's agenda. After that, I let students taper off the agenda if they can handle it. Initially, I'm communicating with every parent. As the year goes on, it ends up being the students who need to be closely monitored. There are about twelve students every school year who I write notes to their parents every single day.

Christine explained how she collaborated with other teachers before she contacted a parent. She noted the student may have been having an issue in another classroom, so she met with the other teachers who worked with the student. She explained the teachers discuss the student's issue, and then one teacher communicates with the parent. She reasoned this process ensured the parent was not contacted about the same issue more than once. She thought this process helped the student, parent, and teachers work on the issue together.

Steven found it easy to establish a positive rapport with parents, because he saw them frequently at school events, "You see them at a lot of different things, at events that the school puts on, they're there." He added, "We see parents and relatives all the time at tournaments and games. They're always there. I don't know if it's just because of the small school. We have dialogue with them." He noted, "When you have dialogue with them, it's easier when there's a conflict. They're accessible."

Helen commented, "The parents, usually I find, are pretty receptive . . . It's all to do with communication I suppose. You don't get on the phone and start blaming. You try and be as tactful as possible. Bring them on board. Ask them to help you with whatever it is." She added,

“most parents are very willing to help you because it is their child. They want them to do well. You put it to them in such a way, you start with a positive and then you come around to what you want to talk about.”

Nathan noted:

If something good happens in the classroom, I'll call a parent and say, you know you should be really proud of your little Johnny today. He had a great day at school. He got all of his assignments done. He got this mark on his last test. It was awesome. Whatever you are doing right now is really working. We should keep working on this.

He added, “If all of a sudden, I see a nosedive, I'll call the parents and I'll say we were doing this really good. This is slipping . . . maybe they have a second job, maybe they're in swimming, maybe there's a divorce going on in the family. But then I try and find that out.”

The participants communicated with parents in writing, in person, and by phone. Communication with students and parents helped to create positive teacher-student relationships. Being positive also helped to create positive relationships, which will be discussed in the next section.

Being Positive with Students

The participants thought being positive was important in creating positive teacher-student relationships. The interviewees described being positive as being a role model for students, showing kindness and care toward students, being interested in the students' lives, and being encouraging towards students.

Being a Role Model

The participants stressed that teachers should be role models for students. The interviewees described a role model as a person who is a good example with their words and

actions. The participants described how they were role models and why it was important to be a role model.

The participants explained how they were role models for their students. Jackie spoke about how her words and actions made her a role model for students, “I really, really love my job. And every day I look forward to going to school. And I don’t dread the start of the school year. The kids know this. They know that I like being there.” Christine talked about how she models a healthy lifestyle for her students:

I try to role model positive relationships with others . . . being positive. I try to be respectful with other students . . . It’s pretty easy for me to practice what I preach, [not] smoking, drinking, drugs, appropriate language, that’s my own lifestyle to begin with. It’s really easy to role model that.

Helen talked about how she was a role model for students:

I’m well organized. I’m prepared . . . they are being led somewhere and going somewhere because of the way [I] present [myself]. I also don’t allow a lot of colloquialisms, things that might offend others, and speech that isn’t generally acceptable in the classroom.

Steven talked about how to be a role model. “I think number one you’ve got to be yourself as a teacher.” He said, “Whatever you do, be genuine.” Nathan noted how he was a role model:

I model organizational skills such as putting due dates up, calling parents, making agendas, sending newsletters home. And just in life. If I have a decision to be made, I talk about it with them sometimes. I talked about buying a house with them. I talked about buying new vehicles.

The participants modeled what they felt were positive behaviors for the students. These behaviors included enjoying their time at school, living a healthy lifestyle, being structured and organized, being genuine, and making informed decisions. The participants also discussed why being a role model was important.

The participants discussed the importance of being a role model. Jackie commented on why she tried to be a role model, “If [the students] have a positive relationship with their teacher,

that's another role model for them to follow, that they'll want to follow." She added, "I have [students] who might want to be like me in some ways." Christine commented, "The kids see [the modeling] and hopefully see it's important to be respectful and listen." Helen commented, "you need to be a model, because school is preparation for life." She thought when students had a model to follow, it helped to prepare them for their future. Nathan talked about why it was important to be a role model for students:

Everyone needs a role model. Nobody is just their own island. And it all depends on which role model you choose to follow, a good one or a bad one, a strong one or a weak one. I think it's important as a teacher, we are a strong role model, a forceful influence. If we aren't, if we take a backseat, then I think we are letting the kids down. Or at least not giving them the opportunity to have that good role model.

The participants thought being a role model was important, because students needed responsible adults to look up to, respectful examples, people to help prepare them for their future, and positive influences. The interviewees believed being a role model contributed to being positive toward students. They also deemed showing kindness and care toward students contributed to being positive toward students.

Showing Kindness and Care toward Students

Being kind and caring toward students was an important part of being positive. Showing kindness and care toward students contributed to creating positive teacher-student relationships.

Jackie talked about her positive relationships with the students. "I'm really kind to them and respectful and smiley. I'm really playful with students. I like to joke around. They know that I really care for them and enjoy them. I try to do lots of fun things in my classroom."

Christine noted, "I think that positive reinforcement shows that you care. I do that quite a bit, good job, high five, pat on the back." Christine also showed kindness and caring by talking to students about things they were interested in and finding out what was new in their lives.

Helen commented on being kind and caring with students:

A couple of students have said to me over the years, you're kind of like the mother, you're the motherly type. Maybe I am, I don't know. A couple of them have come to me, because they've felt like maybe I was the motherly type. Or they felt they could confide in me. I'm not going to betray their secrets.

Steven explained being kind and caring toward students:

I think it's important to treat them with the amount of respect that I think you would want to be treated. I think sometimes teachers think that just because you're the teacher, you should be treated with just as much respect or more respect. Just like what you tell students, respect is earned. You've got to earn their respect. You can do a lot of things once you earn their respect. If you do something wrong, they understand. You're human. If you need to talk to them from a discipline point of view, they understand where you're coming from. They know you're in their corner.

Nathan commented on showing kindness and care toward students:

Personal comments. Having conversations with them. You look tired today. Something go on last night? Eventually they tell you. They see a genuine concern. It might be from an educational perspective, but I think they realize the importance of that and that there is a relationship between me and them.

The participants thought kindness and caring included being respectful toward students, having conversations with students, being trustworthy, and showing concern for them. Being kind and caring helped teachers create positive relationships with their students. Showing kindness and care toward students is a part of being positive, as is showing interest in students' lives.

Showing Interest in Students' Lives

The participants noted that it was important to show interest in students' lives. The interviewees said they tried to take notice of each student every day, as a part of being positive with students.

Jackie explained how she showed interest in students, “I compliment them and I ask them about their lives. I try and remember little things about them.” Jackie tried to have contact with each student she teaches every day.

Steven showed interest in his students’ lives by “talking to them . . . How is this going and that going?” He showed interest in his students’ activities outside of the school, such as going to the movies or attending a sporting event.

Helen noted how she took notice of students, “Have empathy towards them. You can be fairly perceptive with your students. You can tell if there is something wrong, if they’re not their usual selves . . . taking the time to take notice of what they might be wearing that day or the way they presented themselves.”

Nathan spoke about how he talks with his students. “For the most part, there is a respect between us. I bring my life into the classroom quite a bit and I ask about theirs”. He talked about how he showed interest in students’ lives:

If I notice something that is familiar to me, I might bring that up. If they have a lake hat, I might say, hey I go up to [that] lake all the time. You ever play the golf course up there? This is where our trailer is. I love that lake. There’s a good fishing spot. Just making a connection with them on some level. Something that you have in common with them.

The participants thought showing interest in students’ lives included talking to them, remembering things they’ve related, having empathy towards them, respecting them, and asking about their life outside the classroom. When the participants showed interest in their students’ lives, it helped the participants to build positive relationships with their students. Showing interest in students’ lives contributed to being positive, as did being encouraging toward students.

Being Encouraging

Being encouraging toward students was an important part of being positive with students. Being encouraging contributed to fostering positive relationships with students.

Jackie used encouragement with her students. She ensured students knew she cared about them. Jackie enjoyed spending time with students in her classroom. She said, “I try to do lots of fun things in my classroom.” Jackie said she also reinforced and encouraged her students when they followed the classroom expectations and routines.

Christine was encouraging with her students. She found “positive reinforcement shows that you care.” She said, “I do rewards . . . give little treats for the kids that have exhibited good listening and following directions.”

Helen was encouraging toward students. She related a story about a student who had left the school in her elementary years and had returned for Grade 9:

[She] has had a rather difficult childhood in a number of ways, not abused or those sorts of things, but lots of changes, lots of moves, schools, province to province. And there was a family breakup this year. I think when the student returned to the school, they had a sense that they were coming home. And at first, it wasn't that easy, because she was sort of judged because she's a little different. She had to fit back into some sort of mold within the school and find her way, because at first, she wasn't so keen to be there. I remembered her and I welcomed her back. [I] made a point of talking to her every day, asking how she was doing and everything. So I think she appreciated that.

Steven used encouragement with his students. He encouraged students to “get . . . involved in things.” He saw being encouraging as an important part of being positive with students.

Nathan talked about how he encouraged his students:

I encourage them through positive comments, positive notes, showing them where they've come from [with regards to academics]. You're sitting at a 60 here. We did these two assignments. You're up to here. Or you're going to be at least up to here if you get this on this assignment and so far I think you're on the right

track to do that. Kind of dangle the carrot with assignments, like if they're sitting at 75 and they want to do a little better, I say you know what if you draft this one more time you're probably going to improve on this part of the rubric and that's going to bump you to this.

The interviewees were encouraging with their students by welcoming them into the school, using positive reinforcement, urging them to get involved in school, and commenting on their progress in school. The teachers deemed that being positive helped to create positive relationships with their students. Being positive included: being a role model, showing kindness and care, showing interest, and being encouraging. The teachers also agreed that spending time with students outside of the classroom helped to create positive teacher-student relationships.

Spending Time with Students Outside of the Classroom

The participants agreed that spending time with students outside of the classroom was an important part of creating positive teacher-student relationships. They indicated this time spent outside of the classroom included involvement with extra-curricular activities as a coach, a spectator, or a staff advisor. The participants talked about how they spent time with students outside the classroom and why they spent time with students outside the classroom.

How Participants Spent Time with Students Outside of the Classroom

The interviewees spent time with their students outside of the classroom. Jackie described her involvement in extra-curricular activities and the extra time she spent with students outside of the classroom:

I do lots of coaching and I'm involved in lots of extra-curricular things every year. Sometimes I go watch them do important things, like I'll go watch a hockey game or watch them play basketball or even play intramurals, things that I know they would love to have me or another adult watching them do.

Christine talked about her involvement with extra-curricular activities:

Intramurals is a big one for me . . . Coaching for sure . . . Even supervision, because you walk around and talk to the kids outside of the classroom. Lots of

times you can have little conversations, say good morning, smile at them, hopefully they like that. Sometimes I'll go out and do something extra, like go out and play with them [at recess] and it was kind of fun . . . Traveling with kids, driving them to events, that's a way to really get to know them.

Steven explained how he spent time with students outside of the classroom, “coaching, high school sports . . . S.L.C. [student leadership council] . . . pep rallies . . . a school dance.” He added:

I'd advise any teacher to get involved. I know it's tough. Teachers have family, they're trying to have a personal life, but I would recommend to get involved with [students]. It can be small, it doesn't have to be coaching every weekend six months of the year. But whatever you do, be genuine. If you're going to do drama club, be genuine.

Helen described how she spent time with students outside the classroom:

Whenever there's something going on in the school that involves the whole school body, I'm always involved. If there's a spirit week, if there's something that I have at home that I can wear, then I do that . . . And then just being around the school, talking to students, making positive comments about their appearance, those sorts of things.

Nathan talked about his involvement with students outside of the classroom:

I do a lot of extra-curricular. I coach [this] team. I coach [that] team. I try and be in the hallways as much as I can. I'm not one of those teachers who sluffs off supervision. I always talk to the kids in the hallway, kids I've taught before, kids I'm teaching now. I see lots of students in the community because I do a lot of different activities in the community. I go to events.

He spoke about a student whom he encouraged to try out for a school team:

I remember saying to him, I know you're interested in volleyball. Get out to the volleyball team. You're coming with me. I'm going to the tryouts. You're coming to the tryouts. Away we went. And they've played volleyball ever since. Basketball season, the next season up, I made sure they were on my team too, which kind of carried on through that. And when fundraisers . . . came up, I made sure they were involved with that. They've taken off. Now they're doing it on their own. They're playing senior sports. They kept doing that. They're a good person for it. And otherwise, they were having a really tough time, and might not have made it through Grade 9.

The participants spent time with students outside the classroom through coaching sports, being involved in extra-curricular activities, supervising intramurals, supervising in the hallways, and spending time with students at recess or breaks. The next section discusses why participants spent time with students outside the classroom.

Why Participants Spent Time with Students Outside of the Classroom

The interviewees discussed why they spent time with students outside the classroom. They felt spending time with students outside the classroom was an important part of building a positive teacher-student relationship. Jackie commented on attending her students' extra-curricular activities, "I enjoy watching them. I love it and they're so happy to see me." Christine commented on spending time with students in intramurals, "I really find that's how I get to know those girls. Those are always the ones that I remember years later when I meet them on the street or wherever." She explained, "It's the kids that I spend more time with that I have better relationships with, kids that are on teams, kids that come out to intramurals." She felt that spending time with students outside the classroom was important, "because you get to talk about other things and just hang out. You're more relaxed." Steven commented, "When kids see that you are involved in their lives, they see you're on their side." He noted, "My best relationships I've had have been with kids I've been involved with in an extra-curricular mode." Helen said, "It's a good way to establish relationships with students outside of the classroom . . . I think they like that when you take an interest in them." Nathan commented on why it was important to spend time with students outside the classroom:

Because you might learn a different thing about them. The kid that's getting 65 in your English class may not enjoy that as much as being out there smashing volleyballs on the court. I've found that a lot. I learn so much about kids going on the road with them. We're together for 48 hours in a van, in a hotel, and on the court. You just find out more about them as a person, as an individual. You almost become friends with them.

The participants thought spending time with students outside the classroom was important, because it made students happy that an adult wanted to spend time with them; it helped teachers get to know their students on a personal level; and it made students feel as though the teacher was supporting them. Spending time with students outside the classroom also helped to create positive teacher-student relationships.

In summary, the interviewees believed positive teacher-student relationships were created through: establishing and maintaining classroom management and student discipline, having high behavioral and academic expectations, openly communicating with students and parents, being positive with students, and spending time with students outside the classroom. What the interviewees determined the effects of positive teacher-student relationships were will now be examined.

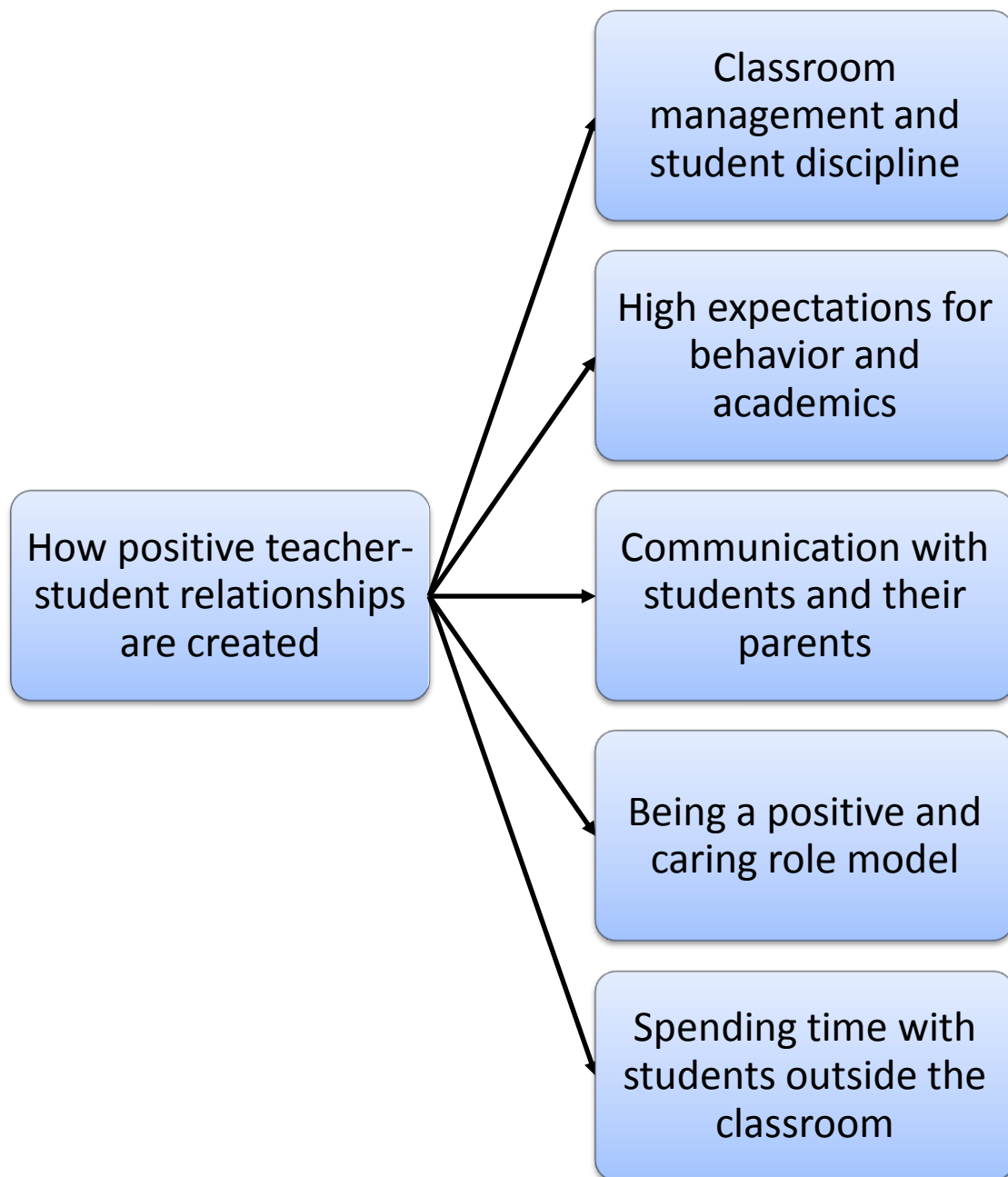


Figure 2. Graphic Summary: How Positive Teacher-Student Relationships are Created

The Effects of Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

The participants noted the effects of positive teacher-student relationships. The effects on students were a sense of belonging and a motivation to learn. The effects on the school were: a decrease in student misbehavior and a safe school environment. The participants also indicated that the effects of positive teacher-student relationships were important because of the positive effects they had on students and the school. The effects of positive teacher-student relationships on students will be presented first.

The Effects of Positive Teacher-Student Relationships on Students

The participants indicated positive teacher-student relationships had positive effects on students. The effects on students were a sense of belonging and a motivation to learn.

Sense of Belonging

The interviewees noted an effect of positive teacher-student relationships was students felt a sense of belonging within the school. They interviewees indicated what a sense of belonging was, why students felt a sense of belonging, and why having a sense of belonging was important.

The interviewees discussed what a sense of belonging was for students. Jackie commented, “[Students] feel worthy and more important . . . [they] feel like they matter, like they’re real people, like they are important to you . . . students feel respected, loved.” Jackie added, “Students know when they’re liked. They know when they’re loved. They can feel it and they can see it. I think it makes them feel empowered, like they’re worthwhile, like they belong.” She noted, “If they have a good relationship with their teacher, they’re going to feel way more secure, more confident. They just know that they belong.” Christine explained what a sense of belonging was:

[Students] can relax. They feel as though they belong. They feel better about themselves. And they can not have their guard up. They feel safe and secure and welcome. If I go into a situation in which I don't feel like I belong, I always have my guard up. I'm not really relaxed. Kids feel like they want to be there, if they don't have that extra defense system up.

Steven thought a sense of belonging was, “A pride within the school . . . if they support the school, they'll support the teacher . . . With a sense of belonging, one of the biggest factors is they have to believe in themselves.” Helen talked about what a sense of belonging was:

If a student is engaged in the school, if they've got friends, if they have teachers who care about them, that go the extra mile, show an interest in them, and the school gives the students some sort of voice and has input from the students throughout the year. I think it all adds to the feeling that school is not such a bad place to be.

Nathan defined a sense of belonging, “A sense of belonging is making it feel comfortable, that you are of value to that place . . . [students] have a purpose. They know their purpose. They feel that. And they still feel a part of the team.” Nathan believed students felt a sense of belonging when, “they feel a purpose, they feel a connection. It's welcoming. They aren't looked down upon.” Nathan thought students would feel a sense of belonging when they got involved and were given responsibility. He said, “I think responsibility is a really good thing and lets them feel a part of the community and a purpose to the community.” The participants thought a sense of belonging was when students felt worthy, supported, and connected to the school. As well as explaining what a sense of belonging was for students, the interviewees clarified why students felt a sense of belonging.

The participants discussed why students felt a sense of belonging to the school. Some of the interviewees felt students felt a sense of belonging, because they had a caring and comfortable relationship with a teacher. Jackie explained, “They definitely trust their teacher . . . They'll want to come to school . . . They have a better general feeling about school. It's a good

place to be. There's someone there who cares about me." Helen indicated students feel as though they belonged when they have a positive relationship with a teacher. Helen said the teacher would "go the extra mile [and] show an interest in them." Nathan thought students felt a sense a belonging in school, because of "the feeling of comfort . . . They're self-conscious of what people think of them, their bodies, their minds, how they dress. If they don't feel comfortable . . . they're just going to go home as fast as they can." While some of the participants felt a sense of belonging was a result of a caring and comfortable relationship with a teacher, the other participants thought it was the result of students being involved in school activities.

Some of the teachers thought students felt a sense of belonging, because they were involved in extra-curricular activities. Christine commented on why students felt a sense of belonging:

They obviously like being there, so maybe they don't want to go home because they feel like they belong. And home might not have that feeling with it. Especially those coaches that really make those kids feel special, why wouldn't they want to go there, because they probably feel like they're important and they're contributing. It's giving them something positive to do with their life that they can feel good about, so they would want to stay at the school and do those extra things.

Steven noted students feel a sense of belonging because of what the school did for them:

[Promoting] school spirit . . . They support the school. We do a lot of pep rallies, SLC activities . . . Belonging to your oneself. We do a lot of inservices of student self-esteem, healthy decisions. So hopefully through those kinds of things, we can generate a good sense of belonging from a personal level. In the classroom, dealing with bullying issues, dealing with students who are having personal trouble, counselors in the school . . . maybe you involved them with some for the decision making. Because of that, they feel a little more responsible for academic success.

The interviewees believed students felt a sense of belonging, because of caring and comfortable relationships with their teachers and because of involvement in extra-curricular activities.

The interviewees believed it was important for students to feel as though they belonged. Jackie thought a sense of belonging was important. She said, “I think it’s a basic need for humans to feel like they belong. To feel like they’re not left out . . . Students feel safer and more happy if they belong to something.” Christine believed it was important that students felt a sense of belonging in school. She thought students felt “better about themselves . . . They feel safe and secure.” She noted a sense of belonging was important, because students got “attention and compassion.” She added, “If they belong, I think that helps their self-concept . . . The kids feel better about themselves.” Steven noted the importance of having a sense of belonging, “It gives [students] a good experience at school. They feel better about themselves.” Steven thought students liked being at school more when they felt a sense of belonging. Steven said when students feel a sense of belonging, “the kid feels better . . . They’re more acceptable to change . . . Everything becomes easier.” He added, “Overall people feel better about themselves. It’s easier to promote a positive school environment.” He added, “I think it’s human nature. Everyone wants to be liked or to belong to something . . . it’s just human nature to be happy, to be accepted, to have self-esteem.” Helen talked about why having a sense of belonging was important for students:

That tends to minimize issues that tend to come up. If the students are unhappy at school and they feel hard done by or wronged in some way, then it’s much more difficult to teach them, because they have their minds on other things.

Helen noted if students felt a sense of belonging in school, they felt happier and were more motivated to learn. Nathan felt having a sense of belonging was important for students, because “[Teenagers] are so fragile right now. They’re either going to go one way or the other. So it’s important that we do have a positive relationship with them. If we see their self-concept sliding, maybe we can help them.” Nathan remarked on the importance of a sense of belonging, “I think

it creates memories for them. Positive memories. I think they all leave with a positive experience.” Nathan felt a sense of belonging was important, because “[it] bodes well for student involvement, student behavior, student learning, and just becoming a good person.” He added a sense of belonging was important, “because [students] feel a purpose, they feel a connection.” The participants believed having a sense of belonging was important for students, because they thought it was human nature to want to belong; students want to feel secure at school; it helps students’ self-concept; and it leaves students with good memories of school.

The participants believed a sense of belonging was one of the effects of positive teacher-student relationships. Another effect of positive teacher-student relationships was students were motivated to learn.

Motivation to Learn

The participants noted students were motivated to learn when they had a positive relationship with their teacher. The participants defined motivation to learn, explained why students were motivated to learn, and discussed why it was important for students to be motivated to learn.

The participants defined motivation to learn. Jackie noted being motivated to learn meant students “will be driven to be productive. Being productive in terms of school work . . . [Students] care more.” She thought students were also more “responsible”, because they were concerned about their schoolwork. Christine defined motivation to learn as “[enjoying] the class . . . they feel more comfortable . . . they try more too because they enjoy being there.” Christine added, “they try harder.” Steven said being motivated to learn meant, “[Students] are far more willing to try more things academically. Trying new techniques in classrooms. More willing to take risks. Not scared to make mistakes in class or scared to fail.” Helen believed students

would work harder at their academic work when there was a positive teacher-student relationship. Helen indicated when students were motivated to learn, “they’re going to want to do what you ask them to do.” Nathan said when students are motivated to learn, they are:

willing to try something new. Not just following the steps. You can just have a 90 student who just knows how to follow the steps and can get perfect scores on the rubric and things like that. But they don’t try anything else new. Give them a new strategy and they don’t really like that. You might have the 65 student who’s willing to try anything. I think that’s the real purpose of learning is willing to do new things, different things in different ways.

The interviewees defined being motivated to learn as being productive with schoolwork, trying and working harder, and willing to try something new. Their explanation of why students were motivated to learn is next.

The participants discussed why students were motivated to learn. Jackie noted, “They care more. They want to please. They know you care about them . . . If they have a good relationship with you, they’re less willing to tune you out.” Jackie added, “The relationship, it makes them want to try.” Christine also noticed that students put forth more effort when they had a positive relationship with their teacher. She said, “I think if I have a positive relationship with them, they try harder.” She thought, “When kids feel happy and safe in your classroom, they can learn, and do what you expect them to do . . . I think that the student is eager to please and keep that positive relationship.” Steven talked about why students were motivated to learn, “They want to make us happy. They want us to challenge them. When you have that relationship with them, it’s easier to push students.” Helen related, “If you have a good relationship with [the students], then they’re going to want to please you.” She thought a reason why students would be motivated to learn was because they wanted to please their teacher. She added:

When you have a good connection with a student, then they want to do well for you. They want to please you . . . Generally speaking, I think we all want to please others, and for students one way to do that is to do well [academically].

Nathan thought students were motivated to learn, because “Every student likes to see a good grade on their paper . . . also they want . . . to get praise from me.” The participants thought students were motivated to learn, because they were eager to please their teacher and get a good grade. The interviewees explained that a positive teacher-student relationship resulted in students being motivated to learn. They also explained why being motivated to learn was important for students.

The participants explained why it was important students were motivated to learn. Jackie commented, “I don’t think they will learn if they are not motivated. They’ll put more effort into it. If a person doesn’t care about something, they’re not going to put effort into it. And then they’re not going to get as much out of it. Get what you give.” Christine commented on why being motivated is important, “If they’re trying harder, [students] have less time to fool around.” Christine thought students would make more progress academically when they were putting in more effort and attention into their schoolwork. Steven found being motivated to learn was important, because it made things easier for the student and the teacher. He commented, “If you can make [the students] buy into what you’re selling, everything becomes easier. You can make your job easier when the kid almost does more work than you, because they’ve [bought] in.” He thought students put more effort into their school when they were motivated to learn. He believed this made less work for the teacher, because the teacher would not have to spend time compelling the student to learn. Helen thought it was important for the students to be motivated to learn, so they could “do well” and progress in their schoolwork. She believed being motivated to learn was important for students, because then “they’re going to want to do what you ask them

to do.” Nathan felt it was important that students were motivated to learn, “so as a school, we aren’t just a cookie cutter, punching students out. It’s important to the students so they are able to go on to a different place and succeed just as well, not just following the routines very well at one place and failing at another.” Nathan thought it was important that students were motivated to learn because, as a teacher, he ultimately wanted students to succeed and progress to the next grade level. The participants thought being motivated to learn was important, because students would progress academically; students would not be misbehaving; and it makes the teacher’s job easier.

The participants found students being motivated to learn and having a sense of belonging were effects of positive teacher-student relationships. The participants also noted positive teacher-student relationships had positive effects on the school.

The Effects of Positive Teacher-Student Relationships on School

The participants believed positive teacher-student relationships had effects on the school. Those effects were a decrease in student misbehavior and a safe school environment. What the interviewees said about a decrease in student misbehavior will be presented first.

Decrease in Student Misbehavior

An effect of positive teacher-student relationships was a decrease in student misbehavior. The participants felt the students treated others with kindness, because they were happier. The interviewees deemed when students had a positive relationship with their teacher, they seemed to relate to others in a positive way, thus the reduction in student misbehavior. The interviewees also discussed why a decrease in student misbehavior was important.

Jackie commented on the decrease in student misbehavior when she developed positive relationships with her students:

The positive teacher-student relationships in my classroom really have effected my classroom management, because I don't really have to do much discipline because they don't want to misbehave in my classroom. Classroom management has never really been an issue for me. They want to be good.

Jackie noted, "One thing I do know is that kind people are happier. If students are happier, they are more willing to be kind. If they're miserable, they're more willing to lash out." She added:

I know lots of students who are unhappy and I know lots of teachers who do not have good relationships with their students, and the kids sludge off to class and then they get in a fight, get suspended, don't come to school. School right now is their life. It's their job. So if you have a good relationship with the most powerful person at school, it just opens up so many more doors. If you have a good role model, you might want to do what they do.

Christine agreed with Jackie in that students didn't want to misbehave because they didn't want their teacher to be disappointed in them.

I think if you have positive relationships with the student, if they like you, they aren't going to want to be as bad for you. They don't want you to be disappointed or dislike them . . . I see [the students] around so much. I have so much contact with them at noon, with teams and stuff like that, they seem to behave better. They just seem to behave better if you have that positive relationship.

Christine noted, "I think if you see good deeds, you will be more likely to go do good deeds. If you see kindness around you, you will be more likely to do that. As opposed to being around a lot of negative behavior, you're more apt to do that." Steven noted a decrease in student misbehavior when there was a positive teacher-student relationship. He said, "When you have a relationship, there's less discipline. You can talk to the kid versus discipline the kid." He thought, when there was a decrease in student misbehavior, he could have a respectful conversation about what he needed the student to do, rather than reprimand the student for not doing what his teacher wanted. Steven related a story about a student whose misbehavior decreased when they developed a positive teacher-student relationship:

I have this one kid in Grade 9. He gets into conflicts with teachers all the time. It's just a power struggle with him all the time. But the more you talk to him, the

more you understand where he's coming from. A lot of it is coming from home. It's always a power struggle at home. So the more you talk with him, the more he understands where you're coming from. It's so much easier when you deal with him. He's so much easier to understand.

Steven added, "When students feel good about themselves, there's less discipline [problems]."

Helen commented on why student misbehavior decreased when there was a positive teacher-student relationship. Helen said, "It's a basic human need that we want to be accepted and we want to belong. And if they feel comfortable with you and other students in the classroom, then it's a natural progression for them to want to please you or themselves." Nathan talked about why having positive teacher-student relationships resulted in less discipline issues in the classroom. "It goes back to basic human nature. When you have mutual respect for each other, then you'll understand what's acceptable and what's not acceptable." He said:

The [inappropriate] behavior just diminishes because [the students] know what I expect from them . . . It all comes down to respect. The students respect the teachers and respect what the teachers are saying, and understand why the teachers are saying it. I believe that people are generally all good. If you give them a good position to be in, then they are going to react in a positive way.

The participants believed an effect of positive teacher-student relationships was a decrease in student misbehavior. They thought there was a decrease in student misbehavior, because the students did not want their teacher to be disappointed in them; when students are happy, they are kinder; and they have a respect for their teacher, so they do what the teacher expects them to do. Why a decrease in student misbehavior was important will be discussed next.

The participants believed a decrease in student misbehavior was important, because students were able to learn with less distraction and the school environment was safer. Jackie thought a decrease in student misbehavior was important, because:

I think they learn more when they don't act up. In class they learn more when they're not busy trying to make everyone laugh or trying to make the teacher angry. When they're actually focused on the learning. Out of the classroom if a

student is misbehaving and they get in trouble, it's a big snowball effect. They get in trouble, then they get angry, then they simmer, then they're thinking about getting in trouble, they're not going to go back in the classroom and think about Social Studies. They're going to be dwelling on the incident. It's just so negative.

Christine commented on why a decrease in student misbehavior was important, "When kids feel happy and safe in your classroom, they can learn, and do what you expect them to do." She added, "I think they try more too because they enjoy being there . . . And if they're trying harder, they have less time to fool around." Christine believed a decrease in student misbehavior was important, so students "can not have their guard up. They feel safe and secure." She added, "Kids feel like they want to be there, if they don't have that extra defense system up." Steven commented on why a decrease in student misbehavior was important, "When students feel good about themselves . . . they want to give school a try." He said:

I've seen situations where students haven't had good school experiences and that transfers into the future and it transfers to later down the road. I think that if most students have a good experience, they'll pass that on . . . I think that's really important.

Steven added, "If problems are happening, they're not learning. They're focusing on other things. Not only students but the teacher, as well. You're not focusing on instructive practices . . . It's distracting you. From both ends it's important." Helen believed a decrease in student misbehavior was important. She thought the classroom environment was more predictable when there was a positive teacher-student relationship. There was a reduction in disruptions by students. "It's not as much stress for you as the teacher and also the students appreciate it too. There's not a lot of turmoil." She added: "It's just a pleasant thing. As a human being, we all like a minimum amount of stress in our lives." Nathan thought a decrease in student misbehavior was important "for the sake of getting along and for [students] being able to take the same educational and relationship journey." He thought behavior issues and the time it takes to

give out consequences would hinder both the learning process and relationship building in the classroom. He remarked that a school would “have a lot more problems with discipline” when positive teacher-student relationships are not present. As well, he said, “I think you will have lower achieving students.”

The participants believed a decrease in student misbehavior was important, because the students feel safe and secure; they can learn without distraction; and there is less stress for both the students and the teacher. A decrease in student misbehavior was an effect of positive teacher-student relationships. Another effect of positive teacher-student relationships the participants found was a safe school environment.

Safe School Environment

The participants found an effect of positive teacher-student relationships was a safe school environment. The participants thought students made better choices, because they cared about others. They also surmised, when a positive teacher-student relationship was there, students felt comfortable confiding in their teacher if they knew about an inappropriate or violent incident. The interviewees thought positive teacher-student relationships made the school environment safe. The participants also commented on why a safe school environment was important.

First, the participants described how positive teacher-student relationships resulted in a safe school environment. Jackie noted the school environment became safer because of positive teacher-student relationships:

The relationship, it makes them look forward to school. If you have to go somewhere everyday that you're dreading, it's going to effect your life. But if you're going somewhere everyday that you're looking forward to, that's all the difference. It makes a happy person.

She added, “Happier kids and the whole environment will be better.” Jackie thought positive teacher-student relationships made students mindful of keeping the school safe:

Students might feel as though they can confide in someone they trust, confide about bullying, bullying that’s happening to them or bullying that’s happening to others. I’ve had students come to me and tell me who’s been smoking dope on the playground after school, who’s after whom, who is in a gang. They’ll tell you more if they trust you and if they respect you. And it does make a school safer. If a Grade 7 boy comes to school and he really likes his teacher and cares about her, instead of going and picking a fight in the hall, he might go and visit with his teacher. He might even care about what she’s going to think or do. He might care about his relationship with that person. It might effect him to make a good choice.

Christine commented on how positive teacher-student relationships made the school safer, “It’s the whole spreading kindness thing. If [students] feel good about their classes, they’ll act better in the hallways and to other people around them.” She added, “I think that the kids that are going to be violent probably don’t have a good relationship with lots of people. And that may be why they’re like that. [Having a positive teacher-student relationship] might change the way they act in that situation.” She noted, “I think [students] feel safer because they know they can come talk to you if there was a situation. I think if there was a situation in my class, they would come to me because they feel like they can.” Christine added:

The more kids that feel safe in the building makes it a safe place because the kids are feeling safe. When kids see positive behavior, it’s easier for them to continue that, those acts of kindness spread. When they see a bunch of kids behaving negatively, that’ll spread. If there’s a positive atmosphere and positive vibe with kids in the classroom, I would think that spreads to the other kids as well. That would decrease the negative behavior which would cause the unsafe feeling.

Steven noticed the school became safer when students had positive relationships with their teachers. He said the students “[see] that you’re on their side.” He added, “When you have that relationship, it effects the school because it’s easier for [students] to get . . . connected and to help and be onside with a lot of things . . . it makes so many things easier.” Helen commented

on how positive teacher-student relationships made the school environment safer, “[Students] are more accepting of differences in people and allowing them to be themselves, to be who they are, and not always putting them down.” She added, “I think if students feel happy with their lot in life, they don’t have too many grievances. Generally, the population of the school, if it’s got a good feel to it, kids take that with them out into their lives.” She thought the school seemed safer when there were positive teacher-student relationships, “because it’s a place where people want to be. It’s a place where they want to come. They want to come to school and they want to feel safe.” Nathan talked about why the school was safer when there were positive teacher-student relationships:

Because everyone takes responsibility. Everyone realizes that they fit into that school and has a purpose there. If they don’t feel safe there, they’re going to let somebody know because they have that positive relationship. If a problem happened in the gym and they’re getting bullied, if they don’t have a positive relationship with the supervisor at the time or a teacher or someone to tell, then they aren’t going to tell anybody, so then nobody can act on that and rectify the problem or nip it in the bud.

The participants said a safe school environment is a place where kindness is spread; students are generally happy; students are comfortable reporting incidents of bullying; and the likelihood of school violence is lessened. The participants noted positive teacher-student relationships made the school environment safe. They also thought a safe school environment was important.

The interviewees explained why they believed a safe school environment was important.

Jackie said:

I think the students are more likely to behave themselves. Also, if there is a problem like bullying or something, they might be more willing to tell because they can trust their teacher or their parents. Also, it could be preventative. I have lots of kids telling me about bullying incidents or that somebody’s going to get beat up after school. They’re more willing to give you the red alert.

Jackie thought a safe school environment was important, so “students will want to go there and they’ll be happier and they’ll thrive more if they feel safe.” Christine commented, “I can think of all the kids I’ve had positive relationships with, none of them [would] be violent.” She noted if students who had a tendency to be violent had a positive relationship with one or more of their teachers, “It might change the way they act in that situation.” Helen thought it was important to have a safe school environment for the students. She said, “[Students are] more accepting of differences in people and allowing people to be themselves. To be who they are. And not always putting them down.” She added, “Generally the population of the school if it’s got a good feel to it, kids take that with them out into their lives.” Steven explained why a safe school environment is important, “Better relationships. Better things are going on. Students are happy. They’re doing different things. They’re not focused on getting back or being disruptive. They know that the school and teachers are on their side, which is important.” Nathan said a safe school was important, because everyone should “feel totally safe walking through those doors.” He thought positive teacher-student relationships lessen the likelihood of school violence. He said, “Definitely the tragic violence it will stop.” The participants thought a safe school environment was important, because students were more likely to be happy; they were more likely to behave appropriately; and school violence was more likely to be prevented.

In summary, participants discussed the effects of positive teacher-student relationships on students and on the school. The effects on students included a sense of belonging and a motivation to learn. The effects on the school included a decrease in student misbehavior and a safer school environment. Participants indicated a decrease in student misbehavior had effects on students’ motivation to learn. As well, participants found a decrease in student misbehavior

resulted in a safe school environment (see Figure 3). The participants also explained why they thought the effects of positive teacher-student relationships were important.

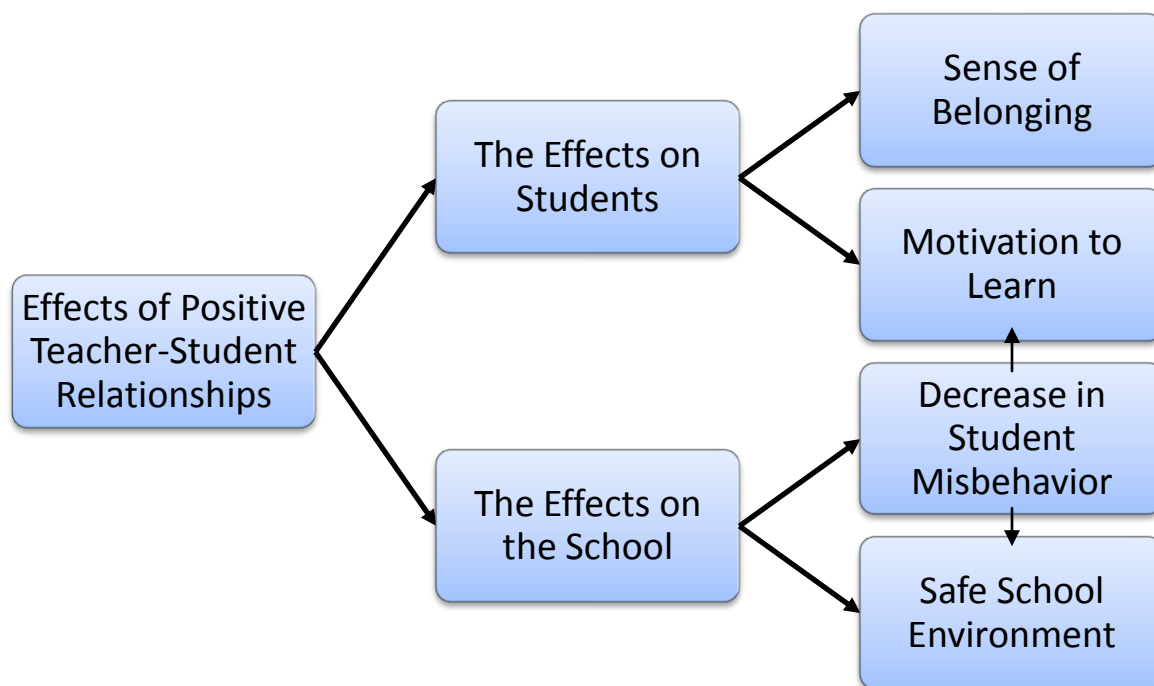


Figure 3. Graphic Summary: The Effects of Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

Summary

This study sought to discover the ways middle-years teachers created positive teacher-student relationships, the effects of those relationships, and why those relationships were important. This presentation of the data showed five ways the participants created positive teacher-student relationships, including: using classroom management and discipline, having high expectations for behavior and academics, communicating with students and parents, being positive with students, and spending time with students outside of the classroom. Positive teacher-student relationships had effects on both students and the school. The effects on students were a sense of belonging and a motivation to learn. The effects on the school were a decrease in student misbehavior and a safe school environment. Participants indicated a decrease in student misbehavior had effects on students' motivation to learn. In addition, participants found a decrease in student misbehavior resulted in a safe school environment (see Figure 4). The participants thought positive teacher-student relationships were important, because of the positive effects on students and the school.

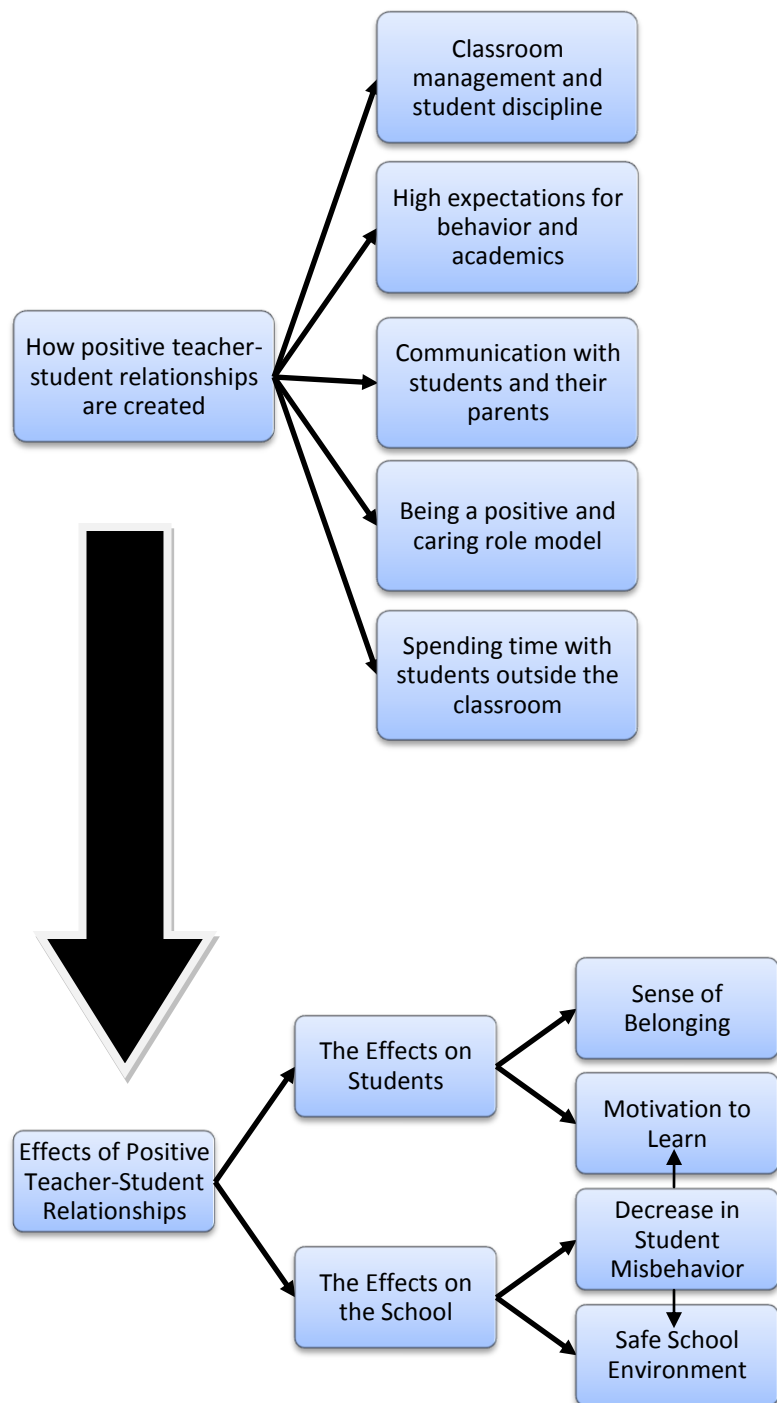


Figure 4. Graphic Summary: Presentation of the Data

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter presents a summary of the findings from this study. It includes a review of the research questions and a review of the methodology. The data from the study will be presented, in which the three research questions will be answered and the data will be contrasted and compared to the literature from Chapter Two. A revised conceptual framework will also be presented. As well, this chapter has a discussion of the recommendations for practice, for research, and for policy. A review of the research questions will be presented first.

Review of the Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to describe and understand positive middle-years teacher-student relationships and their effects on students. The following three research questions provided the direction for this study:

1. In what ways do middle-years teachers create positive teacher-student relationships?
2. What are middle-years teachers' understandings of the effects of positive teacher-student relationships?
3. What are middle-years teachers' understandings of why positive teacher-student relationships are important?

Review of the Methodology

A review of the methodology used in this study is outlined below. The review includes a summary of the research design, the sample used, and the method of data collection. It also outlines the study's procedures and the process of data analysis. The review of the methodology concludes with a summary of the trustworthiness of the study, the pilot study, and the ethical guidelines that were followed.

Qualitative research was utilized in this study. A case study of five middle-years teachers was used. Johnson and Christensen (2000) suggested case study is a “story about a bounded system [that involves] a set of interrelated elements that form an organized whole” (p. 327). I employed Kvale’s (1996) semi-structured interviews as the main data gathering method that focused “on one particular instance of an educational experience” that acted as a “set of interrelated elements that form an organized whole” providing an in depth examination of the teachers’ understanding. Kvale defined semi-structured interviewing as “[having] a sequence of themes to be covered, as well as suggested questions . . . there is an openness to changes in sequence and forms of questions in order to follow up the answers given and the stories told by subjects” (p. 124). Using semi-structured interviews, data were collected from a purposeful sample of five middle-years teachers from one school division in Saskatchewan. I chose participants with whom I was acquainted, thereby making it a convenience sample.

Drawing on information from the literature review and from my experience, I prepared open-ended questions prior to the interviews. I also prepared follow-up questions to probe for more in depth information within the interview. The teachers interviewed were personally contacted by telephone beforehand to ascertain their interest in participating in the study. After obtaining consent from the teachers, appointments were made with the participants to be interviewed. Interviews took place in a location other than the participant’s school to ensure confidentiality. Each interview was approximately one-hour in length and focused on collecting data from the interviewees. Following data collection, transcription, and analysis, additional contact was made with the participants. A follow-up interview was scheduled with each participant to clarify data. Interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed in order to categorize information into a coding scheme. The transcript lengths ranged 15 to 25 pages,

resulting in the analysis of a comprehensive set of interview information. After transcribing the interview, I made the transcript available to the interviewee in order to review and agree to the transcribed data.

After each interview, I recorded my post-interview ideas. While transcribing the interview, I made notes on the interview experience to take advantage of the ideas that resulted from hearing the recorded interview for the first time. I then examined the entire interview transcript to code the information related to the study. Mayan's (2001) latent content analysis was the process used in analyzing the research data in this study. I coded and categorized the data, integrated the categories, and found themes.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted trustworthiness includes (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. Credibility was achieved by: peer debriefing and member checks. Transferability was established by using thick description. An inquiry audit was utilized to establish dependability. Confirmability was achieved by confirmability audits and audit trails. A pilot study was also done to check whether the interview questions were understood by the participant, if the interview questions were in a logical order and were consistent with the study's conceptual framework, and if the interview questions generated data regarding positive teacher-student relationships and their effects on students. Permission was sought and granted from the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Research Ethics Board and the selected school division. Ethical guidelines were followed.

In summary, this section reviewed the qualitative methodology, the sample of five middle-years teachers used, and the method of data collection which were semi-structured interviews. It outlined the study's procedures and the process of data analysis that was latent

content analysis. The review of the methodology concluded with a summary of the trustworthiness of the study, the pilot study, and the ethical guidelines that were followed.

Discussion of the Findings

The discussion of the findings will answer the research questions from the data collected. The findings will also be integrated with the literature that was reviewed in Chapter 2. Data will be answered on how positive teacher-student relationships were created, the effects of those relationships, and why those relationships are important. The section will conclude with a review of the conceptual framework, an explanation of the revised conceptual framework, and a figure of the revised conceptual framework. The three research questions will now be discussed.

In What Ways do Middle-Years Teachers Create Positive Teacher-Student Relationships?

The teachers in this study indicated five ways to create positive teacher-student relationships: through classroom management and discipline of their students, by having high expectations for their students' behavior and academics, by communicating with both students and their parents, by being positive with students, and through spending time with their students outside of the classroom. The data on using classroom management and student discipline to create positive teacher-student relationships will be discussed first.

Using Classroom Management and Student Discipline

Using classroom management and student discipline was one method interviewees created positive teacher-student relationships. Participants defined classroom management and student discipline. They indicated *how* they used classroom management and student discipline. Participants also noted *why* they used classroom management and student discipline. The definitions of classroom management and student discipline will be examined next.

Interviewees noted the definitions of classroom management and student discipline. Interviewees defined classroom management as the organization and set-up of the classroom. They defined student discipline as the enforcement of appropriate student behavior. Interviewees also suggested student discipline consisted of using classroom expectations and routines and being fair and consistent with students. Similarly, Wong and Wong (2001) noted expectations should be fair and reasonable. Participants noted routines should be constant and habitual, which is consistent with research done by Deiro (2005). Deiro defined routines as “activities that are performed the same way each time they are introduced” (p. 43). In addition to identifying *what* classroom management and student discipline were, participants spoke about *how* they used classroom management.

Participants discussed how their classrooms were managed. Some participants developed their classroom expectations and routines themselves. Jackie explained how she taught expectations and routines, “I have them posted. I have a big bulletin board . . . and we are constantly referring to them.” Christine outlined how she taught expectations and routines to her students, “I go over the basic rules at the beginning . . . We do different games . . . [that] go really well with getting the kids to listen and follow directions. I would incorporate games that use a lot of the management rules that I have . . . We practice that over and over again.” Other participants developed expectations and routines using student input. Through classroom discussions, Helen developed the classroom expectations and routines using student input. Helen explained:

We talk about what they expect from me. Do you expect me to be prepared? Do you expect me to have interesting subject matter? Do you expect me to show you a variety of things? And generally speaking, they will say yes. Then I'll talk about their role. What is your role? What is your job?

Beyond classroom management, participants also used discipline with their students.

Interviewees explained how they used student discipline in their classrooms.

Interviewees indicated expectations and routines were part of student discipline. Christine described how she used classroom expectations and routines, “We practice [them] over and over again. [The students] eventually get it and do it for the rest of year.” Just as participants advocated classroom routines should be demonstrated and practiced, so too did research done by Wong and Wong (2001). Wong and Wong suggested teachers show students the procedures for how they want things done in the classroom. Participants also explained how they were fair with students. Helen said, “If you say something, you need to follow through . . . [the students] need to know exactly what you’re expecting. And if you say, these are my expectations, you need to stick to them.” Steven talked about how he was consistent with students, “Do it all the time. If you’re going to do it at the beginning of class, do it at the beginning of class. There’s no grey areas there . . . If you [specify] certain things, you got to stick with it.” In addition to describing *how* they used classroom management and student discipline, the participants also explained *why* they used management and discipline in their classrooms.

Participants clarified why they used classroom management and student discipline.

Participants developed expectations and routines so students would know what to expect in the classroom. Jackie explained, “There’s no uncertainty . . . [the students] know what to do.” Participants also felt expectations and routines brought order to their classrooms. The study’s information appeared to mirror information from the research. For example, Vincent (1999) noted classroom expectations and routines helped classrooms run smoothly. Interviewees also thought classroom expectations and routines helped them to develop positive teacher-student relationships, which was consistent with information from the research. For instance, Griffin

(1998) maintained positive teacher-student relationships were created by using expectations and routines. Likewise, Shafii and Shafii (2001) thought using discipline with students results in positive teacher-student relationships. Alternatively, Pass (2007) found classroom management was fundamental for student learning. Besides using classroom management and student discipline, participants indicated having high expectations for student behavior and academics also helped them to develop positive teacher-student relationships. The data on having high expectations for behavior and academics will be discussed next.

Having High Expectations for Behavior and Academics

Participants noted having high expectations for behavior and academics were part of creating positive teacher-student relationships. Likewise, Griffin (1998) noted one of the characteristics of positive teacher-student relationships was high expectations. Interviewees defined high expectations. Interviewees also indicated why they used high expectations. The definition of high expectations will be examined first.

Participants defined high expectations as expecting each student to do their *best*. Jackie said, “I expect them to do their best. Best effort is really important.” Participants expected their students to improve and make an effort. Nathan commented, “[Every] student is capable of progressing and showing improvement.” The study’s information seemed to be consistent with the information from the research in that Deiro (2005) defined high expectations as teachers “clearly conveying a belief in [students’] capabilities” (p. 36). Similarly, Wong and Wong (2001) defined high expectations as “the teacher believes in the learner and that the learner can learn” (p. 10). In addition to explaining *what* high expectations were, participants also discussed *why* they used high expectations.

Participants thought having high expectations for student behavior and academics helped them to create positive teacher-student relationships. Similarly, Griffin (1998) and Deiro (2005) believed teachers who had high expectations for student behavior and academics had more positive relationships with their students. Alternatively, Akiba and Han (2007) found teachers' academic expectations result in student learning. Participants also created positive teacher-student relationships by communicating with students and parents, which will be discussed next.

Communicating with Students and Parents

Communicating was another avenue interviewees believed they created positive relationships with their students. Participants defined communication as conveying a message through face-to-face contact, phone calls, or e-mails. Similarly, Griffin (1998) found dialogue “[allowed] people to get to know each other and develop and maintain caring relationships” (p. 39). Moreover, Deiro (2005) defined *networking* as “mak[ing] personal connections with the people who are important to our students” (p. 38). Interviewees indicated communication needed to happen with both students and parents. The data on communicating with parents will be examined first.

Communicating with parents. Participants talked about how they communicated with the parents of their students. Of all the data, Nathan's account encompassed the participants' viewpoints of how communication with parents happened. Nathan shared how he communicated about the positive things that occurred in his classroom:

If something good happens in the classroom, I'll call a parent and say, you know you should be really proud of your little Johnny today. He had a great day at school. He got all of his assignments done. He got this mark on his last test. It was awesome. Whatever you are doing right now is really working. We should keep working on this.

Nathan also indicated how he conveyed negative things to parents. Nathan said, “If all of a sudden, I see a nosedive, I’ll call the parents and I’ll say we were doing this really good. This is slipping . . . maybe they have a second job, maybe they’re in swimming, maybe there’s a divorce going on in the family. But then I try and find that out.” In addition to explaining *how* they communicated with parents, participants also indicated *why* they communicated with the parents of their students.

Participants noted why they communicated with parents. Steven elaborated, “When you have dialogue with them, it’s easier when there’s a conflict.” Nathan pointed out conflict with a student may be resolved by communicating with their parent. The participants felt having communication with parents helped develop positive teacher-student relationships. Similarly, Griffin (1998) claimed positive teacher-student relationships were created by *networking* with parents. Also, Lions Club (2005b) suggested having parents involved in the school helps create a positive school environment. As well, Wong and Wong (2001) correlated parent involvement in the school with student academic success. Participants found communication needed to happen with students as well as parents. The data on communicating with students will be discussed next.

Communicating with students. Participants noted communicating with students created positive teacher-student relationships. Likewise, Griffin (1998) indicated positive teacher-student relationships were created by creating dialogue with students. The study’s participants elaborated what communication with students was. Participants indicated communicating with students included: paying attention to students, allowing students to have input, and sharing personal experiences with students. Interviewees defined student input as students contributing their opinions to classroom decisions. Deiro (2005) defined sharing personal experiences or

practicing self-disclosure as “the act of sharing or disclosing the teacher’s own feelings, attitudes, and experiences with students in ways that are helpful to the students and enhance their learning process” (p. 32). Interviewees explained *how* they communicated with students. Interviewees also discussed *why* they communicated with students. The data on *how* interviewees paid attention to students will now be discussed.

Participants indicated paying attention to students was part of communicating with students. Jackie encompassed what the participants said when she described how she paid attention to her students. Jackie explained, “I really try to listen to what they are saying. I try to talk to every student, make sure I have contact with each student each day.” Likewise, Stern and Repa (2001) indicated paying attention to students resulted in positive teacher-student relationships. Besides paying attention to their students, participants also allowed students to have input in their classrooms.

Interviewees thought allowing students to have input was part of communicating with students. Jackie talked about how students gave input in her classroom, “Every Monday morning we [share] . . . The kids get a chance to share . . . and I always share.” One of the ways Helen got students’ input was listening to their opinions about classroom expectations and their opinions about their role as a student in her classroom. Allowing students to have input and paying attention to students were two components of communicating with students. Another component of communicating with students was sharing personal experiences with students.

Participants talked about how they shared personal experiences with students. Steven explained, “It’s about lessons learned and things of that nature. The things I share with them, there’s always a reason for it. I would say, when this happened this is how I handled the

adversity and how does that connect to what we are talking about.” In addition to explaining *how* they communicated with students, participants noted *why* they communicated with students.

Participants explained why they communicated with their students. Participants suggested sharing personal experiences with students helped develop positive teacher-student relationships. Similarly, Griffin (1998) indicated using *appropriate self-disclosure* or sharing personal experiences with students was a characteristic of positive teacher-student relationships. In his study using student questionnaires, Cayanus (2002) suggested self-disclosure improved student learning. As well, Deiro (2005) found positive teacher-student communication resulted in positive teacher-student relationships. In addition to communicating with students and parents, interviewees indicated they created positive teacher-student relationships by being positive with students. The data on being positive with students will be discussed next.

Being Positive with Students

The study’s participants indicated being positive with students resulted in positive teacher-student relationships. Participants said being positive included: being kind and caring, being a role model, showing interest in students, and encouraging students. The data on being kind and caring will be examined first.

Being kind and caring. Participants indicated being kind and caring was part of being positive with students. Participants told me how they were kind and caring toward students. Jackie said, “I’m really kind to them and respectful and smiley. I’m really playful with the students. I like to joke around. They know that I really care for them and enjoy them. I try to do lots of fun things in my classroom and I think that helps.” Besides explaining how they were kind and caring toward students, interviewees discussed why they were kind and caring.

Being kind and caring toward students was important to the participants. Nathan said, “Sometimes that’s [the kindness and caring the teacher gives] the only kindness and caring they get . . . If they don’t feel cared about, why would they want to go [to school] . . . I think it’s important that we show that we want them there.” The study’s data coincided with Erickson, Mattaini, and McGuire’s (2004) findings, in that both indicated teachers could create positive relationships with their students by encouraging and modeling caring and respect. Likewise, Brownlie and King (2000) suggested teachers being kind and caring toward students begets caring behavior from students. In addition to being kind and caring, participants found being a role model was part of being positive. The data on being a role model will be discussed in the next section.

Being a role model. Interviewees said teachers needed to be role models to create positive teacher-student relationships. Interviewees defined a role model as a person who is a good example with their words and actions. Participants indicated being a role model was part of being positive with students. Participants also noted why being a role model was important.

Interviewees explained why they were role models. Nathan said, “Everyone needs a role model. Nobody is just their own island . . . I think it’s important as a teacher, we are a strong role model, a forceful influence.” The participants noted being a role model helped them to create positive teacher-student relationships. Likewise, Wong and Wong (2001) suggested when teachers were role models for their students, positive teacher-student relationships would develop. Similarly, Stern and Repa (2001) noted when teachers modeled appropriate behavior, the result was positive connections with their students. Also, Brownlie and King (2000) indicated modeling acceptance, cooperation, and appreciation for others resulted in positive teacher-student relationships. Interviewees noted, in conjunction with being a role model,

showing interest in students was a part of being positive with students. The data on showing interest in students will be discussed in the next section.

Showing interest in students. Participants found showing interest in students helped develop positive teacher-student relationships. Participants noted showing interest in students was part of being positive. Interviewees indicated *how* interest was shown in students and *why* showing interest in students was important.

Participants noted how they showed interest in students. Jackie said, “I compliment them and I ask them about their lives. I try and remember little things about them.” Helen suggested, “[Check] in with them and notice them. I think they like that, taking the time to take notice of what they might be wearing that day or the way they presented themselves. I think they like it when someone notices them.” In addition to discussing *how* they showed interest, interviewees indicated *why* they showed interest in their students.

Helen characterized the participants’ thoughts on why they showed interest in their students, when she explained why showing interest in students was important to her. Helen thought it was important to “have empathy towards them. You can be fairly perceptive with your students. You can tell if there is something wrong, if they’re not their usual selves.” The participants felt showing interest and concern for students helped develop positive teacher-student relationships. Similarly, Brown (2005) found positive teacher-student relationships were created when students felt their teacher demonstrated interest and concern for their well-being. Interviewees noted, as well as showing interest in students, encouraging students was a part of being positive with students. The data on encouraging students will be examined next.

Encouraging students. Interviewees indicated encouraging students was part of being positive. Participants noted *how* they encouraged students and *why* it was important to encourage students.

Jackie talked about how she encouraged her students, “They know that I really care for them and enjoy them. I try to do lots of fun things in my classroom and I think that helps.”

Jackie wanted to “make them feel like they matter, like they’re real people, like they are important.” Nathan explained how he encouraged his students:

I encourage them through positive comments, positive notes, showing them where they’ve come from [with regards to academics]. You’re sitting at a 60 here. We did these two assignments. You’re up to here. Or you’re going to be at least up to here if you get this on this assignment and so far I think you’re on the right track to do that. Kind of dangle the carrot with assignments, like if they’re sitting at 75 and they want to do a little better, I say you know what if you draft this one more time you’re probably going to improve on this part of the rubric and that’s going to bump you to this.

In addition to explaining *how* they encouraged their students, participants also discussed *why* they encouraged them.

Interviewees noted why they encouraged their students. Nathan indicated encouraging students was important because, “If you have no idea where you are supposed to get to, why would you even try getting there?” Participants thought encouraging students influenced the development of positive teacher-student relationships. Likewise, Spitalli (2005) suggested teachers have an enormous influence on their students, an influence that should be positive and encouraging. Another way the participants developed positive relationships with their students was through spending time with students outside the classroom. In the next section, the data on spending time with students will be discussed.

Spending Time with Students Outside the Classroom

Interviewees indicated spending time with students outside the classroom was a way to create positive teacher-student relationships. Participants noted *how* they spent time with students outside the classroom and *why* it was important to spend time with students outside the classroom. The data on how interviewees spent time with students outside the classroom will be examined first.

Interviewees spent time with students outside the classroom through extra-curricular activities. Christine epitomized the thoughts of the participants when she explained her involvement with extra-curricular activities:

Intramurals is a big one for me . . . Coaching for sure . . . Even supervision, because you walk around and talk to the kids outside of the classroom. Lots of times you can have little conversations, say good morning, smile at them, hopefully they like that. Sometimes I'll go out and do something extra, like go out and play with them [at recess] and it was kind of fun . . . Traveling with kids, driving them to events, that's a way to really get to know them.

Likewise, Deiro (2005) argued teacher involvement in extra-curricular activities resulted in positive teacher-student relationships. As well as discussing *how* they spent time with students, participants explained *why* they spent time with students outside the classroom.

Participants indicated spending time with students outside the classroom allowed them to get to know their students better. Christine noted, "I really find that's how I get to know those girls. Those are always the ones that I remember years later when I meet them on the street or wherever." She explained, "It's the kids that I spend more time with that I have better relationships with, kids that are on teams, kids that come out to intramurals." She felt that spending time with students outside the classroom was important, "because you get to talk about other things and just hang out. You're more relaxed." Similarly, Deiro (2005) argued when teachers were involved in extra-curricular activities with students, their relationships with those

students positively improved. Also, Deiro noted being involved in activities with students outside the classroom gave teachers the opportunity to learn more about their students on a personal level. Participants argued spending time with students outside the classroom was an important part of creating positive relationships with their students. Likewise, Deiro indicated this involvement outside the classroom resulted in positive teacher-student relationships.

In summary, the middle-years teachers in this study created positive teacher-student relationships in five ways: through classroom management and discipline of their students, by having high expectations for their students' behavior and academics, by having communication with both students and their parents, by being positive with students, and through spending time with their students outside of the classroom. Noticeably, participants did not refute any information included on the conceptual framework presented in Chapter Two (see *Figure 1* on p. 26). The participants' understandings of the effects of positive teacher-student relationships will be examined next.

What are Middle-Years Teachers' Understandings of the Effects of Positive Teacher-Student Relationships?

The effects of positive teacher-student relationships were the focus of the second research question. The participants indicated positive teacher-students had effects on both students and the school. The interviewees found the effects of positive teacher-student relationships on students were: having a sense of belonging and being motivated to learn. The teachers noted the effects of positive teacher-student relationships on the school were: a decrease in student misbehavior and a safe school environment. The effects of positive teacher-student relationships on students will be discussed first.

The Effects of Positive Teacher-Student Relationships on Students

Positive teacher-student relationships had effects on students. The effects of positive teacher-student relationships on students included: having a sense of belonging and being motivated to learn. The data on having a sense of belonging will be examined next.

Having a sense of belonging. The study's participants indicated an effect of positive teacher-student relationships on students was having a sense of belonging. Participants noted *what* a sense of belonging was and *why* students felt they belonged. The definition of a sense of belonging will be examined first.

Participants defined a sense of belonging. Jackie's definition encompassed the participants' opinions when she said, "[Students] feel worthy and more important . . . [they] feel like they matter, like they're real people, like they are important to you . . . students feel respected, loved." Similarly, Gordon (2001) suggested building positive relationships with students helped students to feel supported and important. As well, participants thought improved self-concept and increased feeling of security and attachment were a part of a sense of belonging. Likewise, Epp (1995) indicated an improved self-concept and an increased feeling security and attachment were the result of positive teacher-student relationships.

Interviewees noted why students felt a sense of belonging. Helen said the reason students felt like they belonged was when students, "[are] engaged in the school, . . . [have] friends, . . . have teachers who care about them, that go the extra mile, [and] show an interest in them." Helen noted students felt like they belonged when, "the school gives the students some sort of voice and has input from the students throughout the year." Similarly, Shafii and Shafii (2001) believed positive teacher-student relationships make students feel connected to and have a *stake* in their school. Participants found another effect on students of positive teacher-student

relationships was being motivated to learn. The data on the effect of being motivated to learn will be discussed in the next section.

Being motivated to learn. Interviewees believed an effect of positive teacher-student relationships on students was being motivated to learn. Likewise, Griffin (1998) suggested an improved motivation to learn was a result of positive teacher-student relationships. Utilizing classroom observation, questionnaires, formal and informal interviews, and student surveys, Duval (1999) found positive teacher-student relationships enhanced student motivation and learning. Also, Osterman (2003) noted the quality of teacher-student relationships had a positive effect on student learning. Participants noted *what* being motivated to learn was and *why* students were motivated to learn. The definition of being motivated to learn will be discussed first.

Participants defined a motivation to learn as making an effort and being productive with academic work. Jackie noted being motivated to learn meant students “will be driven to be productive, being productive in terms of school work . . . I expect them to do their best. Best effort is really important.” Beyond explaining *what* being motivated to learn was, interviewees discussed *why* students wanted to be motivated to learn.

Participants suggested students wanted to make an effort with their academics for two reasons. The first reason was because students wanted to please their teacher. The second reason was because students wanted to receive good grades. Christine discussed the first reason, “When kids feel happy and safe in your classroom, they can learn, and do what you expect them to do . . . I think that the student is eager to please and keep that positive relationship.” Similarly, Lantieri (2001) found “[relationships] mean everything, in terms of motivation. Students want to mean more to [teachers] than just their grade” (p. 35). Using field observation,

student interviews, and analysis of student work, Akerman (2004) discovered positive teacher-student relationships improve student motivation to learn. Participants also indicated students were motivated by grades. Nathan noted, “Every student likes to see a good grade on their paper.” Similarly, Deiro (2005) indicated positive teacher-student relationships enhance student learning and encourage students to strive for their highest potential. Interviewees indicated positive teacher-student relationships, not only had effects on the students, but had effects on the school as well, which will now be discussed.

The Effects of Positive Teacher-Student Relationships on the School

The participants found positive teacher-student relationships had effects on the school. The participants indicated the effects on the school of positive teacher-student relationships were: a decrease in student misbehavior and a safe school environment. The data on a decrease in student misbehavior will be examined first.

Decrease in student misbehavior. An effect of positive teacher-student relationships on the school was a decrease in student misbehavior. Similarly, Schultz (2006) indicated positive teacher-student relationships prevented misbehavior in school. The participants noted *what* a decrease in student misbehavior was and *why* student misbehavior decreased. The data on what a decrease in student misbehavior was will be discussed next.

Participants discussed what a decrease in student misbehavior was. Participants indicated students treated others with kindness, because they were happier. Interviewees believed when students had a positive relationship with their teacher, they seemed to relate to others in a positive way, thus the reduction in student misbehavior. Epp (1995) noted an effect of positive teacher-student relationships was an increased desire for others’ well-being. The study’s participants agreed; however, they added when students had a desire for others’ well-being,

students acted more appropriately; therefore, there was a decrease in inappropriate student behavior. Besides explaining *what* a decrease in student misbehavior was, participants indicated *why* student misbehavior decreased.

Jackie described why student misbehavior decreased in her classroom, “I don’t really have to do much discipline because they don’t want to misbehave in my classroom. Classroom management has never really been an issue for me. They want to be good.” Jackie explained why student misbehavior decreased, “One thing I do know is that kind people are happier. If students are happier, they are more willing to be kind. If they’re miserable, they’re more willing to lash out.” Christine noted, “I think if you see good deeds, you will be more likely to go do good deeds. If you see kindness around you, you will be more likely to do that. As opposed to being around a lot of negative behavior, you’re more apt to do that.” Likewise, Brownlie and King (2000) found a caring environment in the classroom encouraged students to be caring individuals. As well, Brownlie and King indicated a caring environment is fundamental to a safe school. Using student surveys, Gladden (2005) found students who have a positive relationship with a teacher are less likely to behave negatively. Beyond a decrease in student misbehavior, the participants indicated an effect of positive teacher-student relationships on the school was a safe school environment. The data on a safe school environment being the result of positive teacher-student relationships will be discussed in the next section.

Safe school environment. The interviewees noted an effect of positive teacher-student relationships on the school was a safe school environment. Likewise, Gladden (2005) believed positive teacher-student relationships reduced student hostility and resulted in a safer school environment. The participants indicated *how* and *why* positive teacher-student relationships

resulted in a safe school environment. The data on how the school is safer will be examined first.

Participants indicated how positive teacher-student relationships resulted in a safe school environment. Christine said students feeling secure results in a safe school environment. She explained:

When kids see positive behavior, it's easier for them to continue that, those acts of kindness spread. When they see a bunch of kids behaving negatively, that'll spread. If there's a positive atmosphere and positive vibe with kids in the classroom, I would think that spreads to the other kids as well. That would decrease the negative behavior which would cause the unsafe feeling.

Similarly, Lions Club International (2005b) indicated positive behavior begets a positive environment. Using teacher surveys, Price (2008) found positive teacher-student relationships resulted in a safe school environment. Utilizing a semi-structured interview, classroom observation, and document analysis, Boire (2003) suggested positive teacher-student relationships created a positive environment in the classroom and in the school. Besides noting *how* the school environment was safer, participants indicated *why* the school environment was safer.

Interviewees discussed why positive teacher-student relationships resulted in a safe school environment. Christine explained, "It's the whole spreading kindness thing. If [students] feel good about their classes, they'll act better in the hallways and to other people around them." She added, "I think that the kids that are going to be violent probably don't have a good relationship with lots of people. And that may be why they're like that. [Having a positive teacher-student relationship] might change the way they act in that situation." She noted, "I think [students] feel safer because they know they can come talk to you if there was a situation. I think if there was a situation in my class, they would come to me because they feel like they

can.” Like the data, Gladden (2005) deemed positive teacher-student relationships lowered the likelihood of violence in schools, therefore making the school environment safer. Also, Stephens (1995) found when students felt a sense of belonging, the result is a positive school environment. Alternatively, in a study using annual school profiles and student surveys, Case (2007) suggested a safe school environment enhanced student learning.

In conclusion, participants understood positive teacher-student relationships had effects on students and on the school. Participants indicated the effects of positive teacher-student relationships on students were: having a sense of belonging and being motivated to learn. Participants noted the effects of positive teacher-student relationships on the school were: a decrease in student misbehavior and a safe school environment. Again, participants seemed to agree with the information outlined on the conceptual framework presented in Chapter Two (see *Figure 1* on p. 26). The middle-years teachers’ understandings of why positive teacher-student relationships are important will be examined in the next section.

What are Middle-Years Teachers’ Understandings of Why Positive Teacher-Student Relationships are Important?

The focus of the third research question was why positive teacher-student relationships were important. The study’s participants found positive teacher-student relationships were important, because there were positive effects on students and there were positive effects on the school. The data on the positive effects of positive teacher-student relationships on students will be examined first.

Positive Effects on Students

Participants found positive teacher-student relationships were important, because they had positive effects on students. The positive effects on students included: having a sense of

belonging and being motivated to learn. The data on the importance of having a sense of belonging will be discussed next.

Having a sense of belonging. Participants indicated positive teacher-student relationships were important, because students gained a sense of belonging. Nathan explained why a sense of belonging was important, “I think it creates memories for [students], positive memories. I think they all leave with a positive experience.” He indicated having a sense of belonging “bodes well for student involvement, student behavior, student learning, and just becoming a good person.” Nathan added, “[Students] feel a purpose. They feel a connection.” Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio, and Turner (2004) also thought having a sense of belonging was important, because students feel secure. Participants indicated another important positive effect of positive teacher-student relationships was students being motivated to learn, which will be examined in the next section.

Being motivated to learn. Participants found positive teacher-student relationships were important, because students became motivated to learn. Jackie indicated why being motivated to learn was important, “I don’t think [students] will learn if they are not motivated. They’ll put more effort into [their academics]. If a person doesn’t care about something, they’re not going to put effort into it. And then they’re not going to get as much out of it. Get what you give.” Similarly, Deiro (2005) noted positive teacher-student relationships were important, because student learning improved and students were encouraged to work towards their highest potential. Utilizing student questionnaires and a student focus group, McNally (2005) found positive teacher-student relationships improve student achievement. As well, Ackerman (2004), Brownlie and King (2000), and Stefanou et al. (2004) also indicated positive teacher-student relationships were important, because they had a positive effect on students’ academic success.

Beyond having positive effects on students, the interviewees noted positive teacher-student relationships were important, because of their positive effects on the school. The data on the importance of the positive effects on schools will be discussed next.

Positive Effects on the School

The study's participants believed positive teacher-student relationships were important, because of their positive effects on the school. Participants indicated positive effects on the school included: a decrease in student misbehavior and a safe school environment. The data on the importance of a decrease in student misbehavior will be examined first.

Decrease in student misbehavior. Participants thought a decrease in student misbehavior was important. Jackie explained why it was important, "I think [the students] learn more when they don't act up. In class they learn more when they're not busy trying to make everyone laugh or trying to make the teacher angry, when they're actually focused on the learning." Likewise, Gladden (2005) suggested proper student behavior was important, so students would be focused on their learning. Christine noted why positive teacher-student relationships were important, "[Students] can not have their guard up. They feel safe and secure." She added, "Kids feel like they want to be there, if they don't have that extra defense system up." Helen believed a decrease in student misbehavior was important. She thought the classroom environment was more predictable when there was a positive teacher-student relationship. Helen noted, "There's not a lot of turmoil." She added, "It's just a pleasant thing. As a human being, we all like a minimum amount of stress in our lives." Similarly, Schultz (2006) noted appropriate student behavior was important, because the result was a positive classroom environment. Schultz indicated positive teacher-student relationships prevented misbehavior in school, thus making schools safer. Participants also found a safe school environment was a positive effect of positive

teacher-student relationships on the school. The data on the importance of a safe school environment will be discussed in the next section.

Safe school environment. Participants indicated positive teacher-student relationships were important, because they resulted in a safe school environment. Interviewees believed a safe school environment was important. Helen said, “[Students are] more accepting of differences in people and allowing people to be themselves, to be who they are, and not always putting them down.” She added, “Generally the population of the school, if it’s got a good feel to it, kids take that with them out into their lives.” Using teacher surveys, student surveys, and focus groups, Perone (1998) found positive teacher-student relationships resulted in a safe school environment. Likewise, McNally (2005) noted positive teacher-student relationships were important, because they produced a positive school atmosphere. Jackie indicated why a safe school environment was important:

I think the students are more likely to behave themselves. Also, if there is a problem like bullying or something, they might be more willing to tell because they can trust their teacher or their parents. Also, it could be preventative. I have lots of kids telling me about bullying incidents or that somebody’s going to get beat up after school. They’re more willing to give you the red alert.

As well, Gladden (2005) thought positive teacher-student relationships were important, because they reduced the amount of hostility and violence in schools. Price (2008) also found positive teacher-student relationships were important, because the result was an improved school climate. The study’s participants agreed with Gladden and Price, suggesting positive teacher-student relationships resulted in a safe school environment.

In summary, the middle-years teachers’ understandings of why positive teacher-student relationships were important were because of the positive effects on students and the positive effects on the school. The positive effects on the students included: having a sense of belonging

and being motivated to learn. Participants indicated having a sense of belonging was important, because students felt secure, connected, and positive about the school. The participants thought being motivated to learn was important, because students would be successful in their academic work and be able to progress to the next grade level. The positive effects on the school included: a decrease in student misbehavior and a safe school environment. Participants noted a decrease in student misbehavior was important, because students were able to focus on their learning and to feel more secure in their environment. The participants indicated a safe school environment was important, because students were more accepting of others and they are more willing to prevent bullying or other forms of violence. A review of the conceptual framework that guided this study will be presented next, followed by a revised conceptual framework that demonstrates how the three research questions are interrelated.

Review of the Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework was developed to guide this study. The conceptual framework outlined the characteristics of positive teacher-student relationships as: having high expectations, networking with parents, creating dialogue with students, practicing social skills, practicing appropriate self-disclosure, and using rituals and traditions in the classroom (Griffin, 1998). Five effects on students of positive teacher-student relationships were identified: improved self-concept, improved motivation to learn, increased desire for others' well-being, increased feeling of security and attachment, and increased desire to improve society (Epp, 1995). The revised conceptual framework will be outlined in the next section.

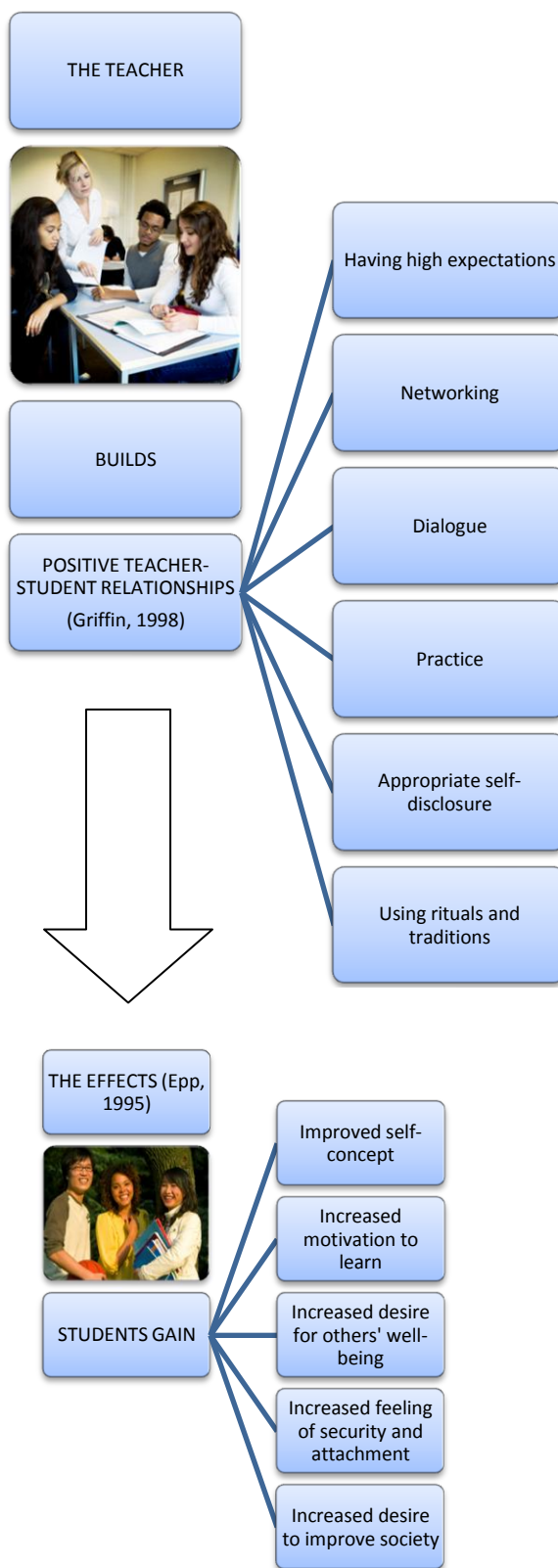


Figure 5. Original Conceptual Framework

Revised Conceptual Framework

The study's findings resulted in a revised conceptual framework. The revised conceptual framework included the characteristics of positive teacher-student relationships and the effects of those relationships. The characteristics of positive teacher-student relationships will be presented first.

The revised conceptual framework outlined the characteristics of positive teacher-student relationships as: communicating with students and parents, spending time with students outside the classroom, using classroom management and discipline, having high expectations for behavior and academics, and being positive with students. Communicating with students included: practicing appropriate self-disclosure, paying attention to students, and encouraging student input. Using classroom management and discipline included: using rituals and traditions (classroom expectations and routines) and being fair and consistent. Being positive with students included: being a role model which incorporated practicing social skills with students, showing kindness and care toward students, showing interest in students' lives, and being encouraging with students. The revised conceptual framework also outlined the effects of positive teacher-student relationships which will be presented next.

The revised conceptual framework showed the effects of positive teacher-student relationships on students as: an increased motivation to learn, an increased desire to improve society, an increased desire for others' well-being, and a sense of belonging that included improved self-concept and increased feeling of security and attachment. The effects of positive teacher-student relationships on the school were: a decrease in student misbehavior and a safe school environment. Participants indicated a decrease in student misbehavior had effects on students' motivation to learn. Also, participants found a decrease in student misbehavior

resulted in a safe school environment. These effects also demonstrated the importance of positive teacher-student relationships. Implications for practice will be discussed in the next section.

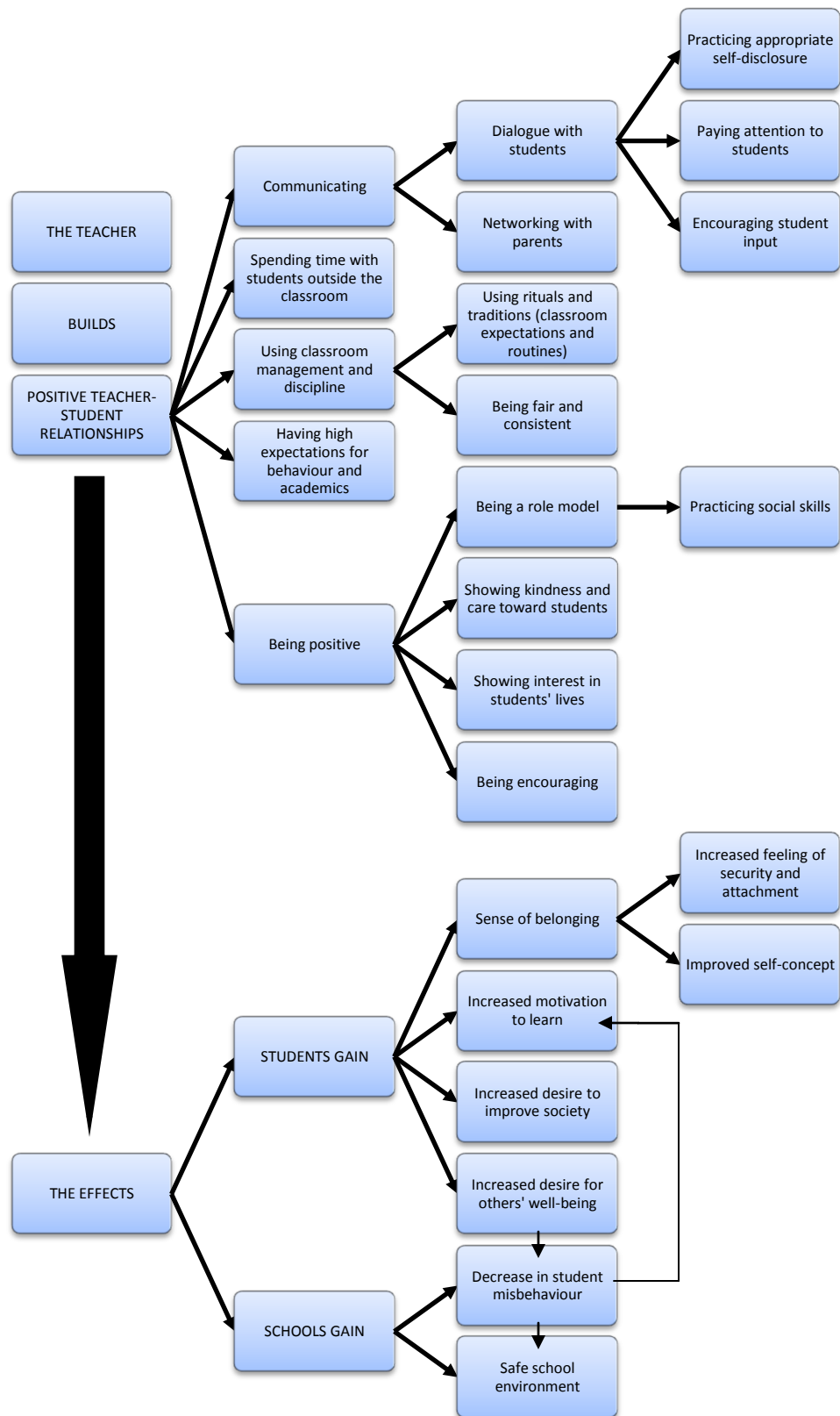


Figure 6. Revised Conceptual Framework

Implications for Practice

Based on the findings of this study, the following implications for practice are suggested:

- Teachers could be informed about how to create positive teacher-student relationships and their effects on students and the school. Some of the participants talked about how their colleagues were negative with students. The participants noted the result of that negativity was detrimental to the students and to the school. The interviewees thought it would be beneficial if all teachers knew how to create positive relationships with their teachers. By encouraging the opportunity to become familiar with positive teacher-student relationships, hopefully teachers will create positive connections with their students.
- School-based administrators could model the development of positive teacher-student relationships. The participants noted when administrators modeled the same behaviours they expected from the teachers, teachers were more likely to act in a similar fashion. By making this suggestion, I am hoping teachers will develop positive relationships with their students.

The implications for research will be presented in the next section.

Implications for Research

Good practice should be based upon research. Research is important to achieve the results teachers want from their students. Based on the findings of this study, the following implications for research are suggested:

- Research could be undertaken at different grade levels: the elementary (K-5) level and the high school (10-12) level. The study could determine if there would be differences in

younger and older grade levels of students with regards to creating positive teacher-students relationships and their effects on students.

- Research determining whether gender is a factor in teacher-student relationships could be undertaken. Differences in how female and male students react to female and male teachers could be studied.
- Whether there is a difference between lower economic communities versus higher economic communities in terms of how students respond to positive teacher-student relationships could be studied.
- This study used a sample of five teachers, which is not a large population. A small population is not a basis for generalization (Hart, 2005), while a larger population could be. Perhaps research could be undertaken with a larger sample of teachers.
- A study could be done to determine whether there are differences between the approaches of highly experienced (20+ years) and inexperienced (less than 5 years) teachers in creating positive teacher-student relationships.
- Research could be undertaken using a sample of students to gain understanding of their point of view on positive teacher-student relationships and their effects.
- A study using questionnaires, panel discussions, and/or observation to determine the characteristics and effects of positive teacher-student relationships could be completed.
- Triangulation was not used in this study, but it would have been beneficial to use as it is one way to make a study trustworthy. Using triangulation with interviews, observation, and questionnaires could be undertaken.

A reflective commentary will follow these implications for research.

Reflective Commentary

This reflective commentary will offer some of my personal insights about this study. I will comment on some of the unexpected things that arose from this study, which resulted in a revised conceptual framework. There are things I would do differently if I had to do the study again. I will also note the negative aspects of creating positive teacher-student relationships. The commentary will begin with how the study's data added to the original conceptual framework.

It was interesting to me how the data from this study added to the conceptual framework. The participants' responses were not only consistent with the conceptual framework; the data derived from those responses generated more facets and more concepts to the framework. For instance, the concept of communicating with students included the facets of practicing appropriate self-disclosure (included on the original conceptual framework), paying attention to students, and encouraging student input. An addition to the framework was spending time with students outside the classroom. All participants concurred this concept was an important part of creating positive teacher-student relationships. While the original conceptual framework included using rituals and traditions as a characteristic of positive teacher-student relationships, the study's data went into more detail by including classroom management (the organization and set-up of the classroom) and student discipline (the enforcement of appropriate student behavior). The study's data also included the concepts of fairness and consistency as part of classroom management and student discipline into the revised conceptual framework. Being positive was another concept participants felt was part of creating positive teacher-student relationships. Participants included the following concepts as facets of being positive: showing kindness and care toward students, showing interest in students' lives, being encouraging, and

being a role model. The participants indicated practicing social skills (included on the original conceptual framework) was a part of being a role model. As well as adding to the characteristics of positive teacher-student relationships, the study's data changed the conceptual framework with regards to the effects of positive teacher-student relationships.

The additions to the conceptual framework continued with the data derived from participants' responses to the effects of positive teacher-student relationships. The study's data included a sense of belonging to the revised conceptual framework. As well as having effects on the students, participants noted positive teacher-student relationships had effects on the school. They deemed the effects on the school were: a decrease in student misbehavior and a safe school environment. Interviewees noted an increased desire for others' well-being resulted in a decrease in student misbehavior. In addition, participants indicated a decrease in student misbehavior had effects on students' motivation to learn. Also, participants found a decrease in student misbehavior resulted in a safe school environment. As well as discussing the revisions to the conceptual framework, I will reflect on changes I would make to the methodology of this study.

As I reflect on this study, there are some things I would do differently. First, I would use triangulation in my study. Most likely, I would use observations, interviews, and questionnaires as my research methods. The reason I would do this is triangulation is one way to make a study trustworthy. Second, I would include students as part of the study's sample. I would do this, because I believe not including students was a limitation of this study. Third, I would approach principals to determine which teachers had positive relationships with their students. This would eliminate the bias I may have had in choosing which teachers I invited to participate in my study. Next, I will discuss the negative aspects of creating positive teacher-student relationships.

This study did not explore the trials and tribulations that can take place when developing positive teacher-student relationships. I would like to stress that creating positive teacher-student relationships is not a *cookie cutter* process where everything falls into place. Participants did not indicate the difficulty and effort it takes to develop positive teacher-student relationships. I also noticed participants did not talk about negative experiences they had with students. Perhaps I could have probed more while interviewing them to obtain this information. It is possible the participants did not bring it up because they tended to be positive people and did not want to dwell on the negative. It is important to note creating positive teacher-student relationships takes effort and can be a challenging process.

Conclusion

This chapter presented a summary of the findings from this study. It included a review of the research questions and a review of the study. The data from the study were presented, including the ways middle-years teachers created positive teacher-student relationships, the teachers' understandings of the effects of positive teacher-student relationships, and the teachers' understandings of why positive teacher-student relationships were important. The data were contrasted and compared to the literature from Chapter Two. A revised conceptual framework was presented which demonstrated how the three research questions were interrelated. As well, implications for practice and research were outlined. This chapter concluded with a reflective commentary about positive teacher-student relationships and their effects.

Exploring these and other findings could provide teachers, administrators, and researchers with some understanding of positive teacher-student relationships and their effects on students and the school. Hopefully, this understanding of positive teacher-student relationships can help middle-years teachers to develop positive connections with their students, thus

providing students with a sense of belonging, improving students' motivation to learn, decreasing student misbehavior, and improving the school environment.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER TO REQUEST PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH
TO THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

Tracy Dolezsar-Glarvin
Department of Educational Administration
College of Education
University of Saskatchewan
Tel: (306) 922-5949
E-mail: tld124@mail.usask.ca

March 1, 2009

Dear Director of Education;

Re: Permission to conduct research study

I am currently a master's candidate in the Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan. I am conducting research entitled *Positive Teacher-Student Relationships and Their Effects on Students: Five Middle-Years Teachers' Perceptions*. The study has three objectives. First, the study will determine the ways middle-years teachers create positive teacher-student relationships. Second, it will ascertain middle-years teachers' perceptions of the effects of positive teacher-student relationships. Third, the study will clarify middle-years teachers' perceptions of why positive teacher-student relationships are important.

The study has been approved by the Department of Educational Administration and the Behavioral Research Ethics Board of the University of Saskatchewan. I am seeking permission from you to contact middle-years teachers in your school division to assist me with this study. The research will involve semi-structured interviews to collect data.

Due to increased media attention on violent acts in schools, more focus is being put on how to make schools safe. The most effective safe school programs focus on proactive efforts, such as building positive teacher-student relationships. In addition to lessening the likelihood of violence in schools, positive teacher-student relationships significantly benefit students. It is hoped that the completed study will provide an opportunity for teachers to learn strategies that will assist them in creating positive teacher-student relationships.

There is a possibility that participants could be identified, due to the small number of participants in the study. However, measures will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants, and pseudonyms will be used to maintain anonymity, confidentiality and privacy when referring to individual participants and their schools and school divisions in data reporting.

If you have any questions or concerns, or if you require additional information, you may contact Dr. Warren Noonan, my advisor, at (306) 966-6249, myself, at (306) 922-5949, or the

Ethics office, at (306) 966-2084. You may call collect. If you prefer, you are welcome to use any of the alternate contact options listed at the top of this letter. Thank you for considering this request.

Yours sincerely,

Tracy Dolezsar-Glarvin

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF INFORMATION TO PRINCIPALS

Tracy Dolezsar-Glarvin
Department of Educational Administration
College of Education
University of Saskatchewan
Tel: (306) 922-5949
E-mail: tld124@mail.usask.ca

March 1, 2009

Dear Sir/Madam;

Re: Intent to conduct research study

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The purpose of this letter is to inform you that I have received permission from Saskatchewan Rivers School Division #119, the Department of Educational Administration and the Behavioral Research Ethics Board of the University of Saskatchewan to contact middle-years teachers in your school to assist me with this study. The research will involve semi-structured interviews to collect data.

Due to increased media attention on violent acts in schools, more focus is being put on how to make schools safe. The most effective safe school programs focus on proactive efforts, such as building positive teacher-student relationships. In addition to lessening the likelihood of violence in schools, positive teacher-student relationships significantly benefit students. It is hoped that this study will provide an opportunity for teachers to learn strategies that will assist them in creating positive teacher-student relationships.

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Yours sincerely,

Tracy Dolezsar-Glarvin

APPENDIX C

INVITATION OF PARTICIPATION TO TEACHERS

Tracy Dolezsar-Glarvin
Department of Educational Administration
College of Education
University of Saskatchewan
Tel: (306) 922-5949
E-mail: tld124@mail.usask.ca

March 1, 2009

Dear Participant;

I am currently a master's candidate in the Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan. I am conducting research entitled *Positive Teacher-Student Relationships and Their Effects on Students: Five Middle-Years Teachers' Perceptions*. The study has three objectives. First, the study will determine the ways middle-years teachers create positive teacher-student relationships. Second, it will ascertain middle-years teachers' perceptions of the effects of positive teacher-student relationships. Third, the study will clarify middle-years teachers' perceptions of why positive teacher-student relationships are important.

I am contacting you because I have identified you as a teacher that has positive relationships with his/her students. The director of education of your school division has given me permission to contact you and invite you to participate in this study. Thus, I am inviting you to participate in this study. The research will require one 60-minute semi-structured interview and a possible second interview if any information needs to be clarified.

Due to increased media attention on violent acts in schools, more focus is being put on how to make schools safe. The most effective safe school programs focus on proactive efforts, such as building positive teacher-student relationships. In addition to lessening the likelihood of violence in schools, positive teacher-student relationships significantly benefit students. It is hoped that this study will provide an opportunity for teachers to learn strategies that will assist them in creating positive teacher-student relationships.

There is a possibility that participants could be identified, due to the small number of participants in the study. However, measures will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants, and pseudonyms will be used to maintain anonymity, confidentiality and privacy when referring to individual participants and their schools and school divisions in data reporting.

I have enclosed two documents for you. A consent form and a copy of the questions that will be asked at the interview are included. If we need to schedule a follow-up interview, those interview questions will be made available to you prior to the follow-up interview. If you agree

to participate in this study, please sign the Consent Form and return it to me in the stamped envelope I have provided.

If you have any questions or concerns, or if you require additional information, you may contact Dr. Warren Noonan, my advisor, at (306) 966-6249, myself, at (306) 922-5949, or the Ethics office, at (306) 966-2084. Out of town participants may call collect. If you prefer, you are welcome to use any of the alternate contact options listed at the top of this letter. Thank you for considering this request.

Yours sincerely,

Tracy Dolezsar-Glarvin

APPENDIX D

POSSIBLE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. Which grade(s) and subject(s) do you teach?
3. What interested you to become a teacher?
4. In what ways do you create positive relationships with your students?
5. What are the characteristics of positive teacher-student relationships?
6. How do you use these characteristics of positive teacher-student relationships in your classroom?
7. Tell me about one particular student who stands out in your experience.
8. How do positive teacher-student relationships effect students?
9. Tell me about a student who has been effected by a positive teacher-student relationship.
10. Why are positive teacher-student relationships important?
11. How do building positive teacher-student relationships effect the likelihood of school violence?
12. How do positive teacher-student relationships relate to a safe school environment?
13. Is there anything more that you would like to add?
14. Do you have any further questions for me about the research study?

APPENDIX E

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in this research study *Positive Teacher-Student Relationships and Their Effects on Students: Five Middle-Years Teachers' Perceptions*. Please read this form carefully and feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns you might have.

Name of Researcher: Tracy Dolezsar-Glarvin, M.Ed. Candidate
 Department of Educational Administration
 College of Education
 University of Saskatchewan
 Tel: (306) 922-5949
 E-mail: tld124@mail.usask.ca

Name of Researcher Supervisor: Dr. Warren Noonan
 Department of Educational Administration
 College of Education
 University of Saskatchewan
 Tel: (306) 966-6249
 E-mail: warren.noonan@usask.ca

Purpose and Procedure: The purpose of this study is to describe and understand positive middle-years teacher-student relationships and their effects on students. The study has three objectives. First, the study will determine the ways middle-years teachers create positive teacher-student relationships. Second, it will ascertain middle-years teachers' perceptions of the effects of positive teacher-student relationships. Third, the study will clarify middle-years teachers' perceptions of why positive teacher-student relationships are important.

The study will be a qualitative case study. The data collection procedures are focused on semi-structured interviews. Data collection will be conducted from March, 2009 to September, 2009. It is anticipated that the time for each semi-structured interview will be 60 minutes. Each interview will be transcribed and a copy of your transcript will be provided to you for review and editing. Interview questions will be made available to you by mail prior to each interview. The interview questions are outlined in Appendix D.

The results of this study will be shared with the faculty of Educational Administration at the University of Saskatchewan and may later contribute to conference presentations. The findings will be reported by means of a master's thesis. This report will be a summative report that will utilize direct quotations by the participants of this study.

Potential Benefits: The study may be a window to allow society to learn about the characteristics of positive teacher-student relationships and the effect of these relationships on students. The study may provide teachers with the knowledge of how to develop positive relationships with their students. This study may contribute to the literature on positive teacher-student relationships, help in better understanding the effects of positive teacher-student relationships,

and suggest areas for further significant research. There is no guarantee that you will personally benefit from your involvement in this study.

Potential Risks: There is a possibility that participants could be identified, due to the small number of participants in the study. However, measures will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants, and pseudonyms will be used to maintain anonymity, confidentiality and privacy when referring to individual participants and their schools and school divisions in data reporting. You will be made aware of the purpose of the study and why you have been invited to participate. You will also be made aware that participation in the study is voluntary and that you may withdraw at any time up to the point where the data becomes aggregated with all other participants without penalty of any kind. You will be informed that if you choose to withdraw from the study, your digital recordings and interview data will be destroyed.

To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, all data will be securely stored and retained by the thesis supervisor, Dr. Warren Noonan, for a minimum of five years with the Department of Educational Administration in the College of Education in accordance with the Behavioral Research Ethics Board of the University of Saskatchewan guidelines.

In addition to having the opportunity to review transcripts following each interview, you will have an opportunity to peruse the final report prior to completion of the study.

Storage of Data: During the study, all data collected will be securely stored with the researcher in a locked filing cabinet in her residence. Upon completion of the study, Dr. Warren Noonan, research supervisor, will ensure the data, including interview transcripts, digital recordings, and field notes, are stored in a secure location for a minimum of five years. After five years, all documents pertaining to this study will be destroyed.

Confidentiality: As a participant, you will be informed that anonymity and confidentiality of your name and location will be promoted throughout the study by using pseudonyms. The documents containing the real names of the participants and other identifying information will be kept separately from the digital recordings, transcripts, analysis, and any written memos or summaries which result from this study other than the consent form. The information that is shared will be held in strict confidence and discussed only with the researcher.

Right to Withdraw: Your participation is voluntary, and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, up to the point where the data becomes aggregated with all other participants, without penalty of any sort, by contacting the researcher. If you withdraw prior to the aggregation of data from the research project, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed at your request.

Questions: If you have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researcher at the numbers provided if you have other questions. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Research Ethics Board on (insert date). Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084).

Out of town participants may call collect. Please note that at the completion of the study, you may request a summary of the findings.

Follow-Up or Debriefing: At the conclusion of each interview you will be reminded of the next steps that will be taken in the study and will be invited to ask questions of the researcher at that time or by means of the contact information provided. You will be informed that once the thesis is printed, the document will be available as a resource in the following two centers: The Education Library, College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan; the Educational Administration office, College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan. You may also request a copy of the complete thesis.

Consent to Participate: I have read and understood the description provided. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any time prior to the point where the data becomes aggregated with all other participants. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Signature of Researcher

APPENDIX F

CONSENT FOR RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPTS

In relation to the research study entitled *Positive Teacher-Student Relationships and Their Effects on Students: Five Middle-Years Teachers' Perceptions*, I, _____, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interview in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview with Tracy Dolezsar-Glarvin. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Tracy Dolezsar-Glarvin to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Signature of Researcher