Teacher-Student Relationships:

Exploring the Perceptions of Students Who Exhibit Challenging Behaviors

By

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Allyson L. Satter

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Chairperson          Dr. Wayne Sailor

Dr. Deb Adams

Dr. Tom Skrtic

Dr. Ann Turnbull

Dr. Amy McCart

Dr. Nikki Wolf

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The Dissertation Committee for Allyson L. Satter certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

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______________________________
Chairperson Dr. Wayne Sailor

Date approved _________________
Abstract

This qualitative study describes and analyzes the perspectives of students with challenging behaviors regarding what they believe contributes to student teacher relationship quality. The conceptual framework guiding this study was informed by research in the following areas: transactional theory, self-efficacy theory, and teacher-student power dynamics. The research design utilized focus groups of students in grades 5-12 attending one of two alternative public schools for students with disabilities who exhibit challenging behaviors. Follow up focus groups were conducted at each of the alternative schools to check for the accuracy of data. Additionally, one focus group of teachers was also conducted at a different alternative school to provide comparison data to student responses. The following research questions were explored: 1) How do students who exhibit challenging behaviors define positive student teacher relationships, for example, what factors do they believe contribute to positive relationships? *How do their perceptions compare with teacher perceptions?* 2) How do students who exhibit challenging behaviors define negative student teacher relationships, for example, what factors do they believe contribute to negative relationships? *How do their perceptions compare with teacher perceptions?* 3) Is there any indication that students believe teacher behaviors; student choices in classrooms; and students’ self-efficacy influence teacher-student relationship quality? *How do their perceptions compare with teacher perceptions?*
The findings suggest current service delivery models create barriers to developing and sustaining positive teacher-student relationships.
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CHAPTER 1: Introduction and Review of Literature

Introduction

“Kids don’t learn from people they don’t like,” educator Rita Pierson exclaimed in a recent TED talk, while making the argument that in order for educators to teach, they first need to connect with their students and build positive relationships with them (2013, May). Research supports this argument: Mounting evidence suggests there is a connection between positive teacher-student relationships and improved student outcomes (Liew, Chen, & Hughes, 2010; O'Connor & McCartney, 2007; Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). However, not all students experience positive relationships with their teachers. Imagine what school must be like for students who lack the skills needed to develop a positive relationship with their teacher. Then, consider the teacher who is intimidated by a student with significant challenging behaviors, and therefore distances himself from the student. For most students and teachers developing positive relationships often comes naturally, but for the most difficult students, both teachers and students may find it difficult to forge those relationships. If “kids don’t learn from people they don’t like,” how do we remove that barrier to ensure students have the opportunity to learn at school?

Background

Students who exhibit challenging behaviors are at a disadvantage when it comes to navigating the social and academic challenges of school. When students exhibit a consistent pattern of externalizing (acting out) or internalizing (self-directed) behaviors (Lane, Menzies, Kalberg, & Oakes, 2012), they often struggle to
develop appropriate peer and adult relationships, which makes academic and behavioral success in a school setting exponentially more difficult (Lane, Barton-Arwood, Nelson, & Wehby, 2008). Therefore, it is no surprise that students’ challenging behaviors are associated with negative student-teacher relationships (Hamre, Pianta, Downer, & Mashburn, 2008), and students with challenging behaviors are at an increased risk of school failure (Farley, Torres, Wailehua, & Cook, 2012).

Students who exhibit these behaviors may be provided IDEA services through the Emotional Disturbance (ED) diagnosis, but with less than 1% of the population receiving these services it is expected that the number of students with challenging behaviors is likely much higher than this (Forness, Freeman, Paparella, Kauffman, & Walker, 2012; Forness, Kim, & Walker, 2012). Challenging behaviors are also often a comorbid component of other disabilities such as learning disabilities (Toro, Weissberg, Guare, & Liebenstein, 1990), developmental disabilities (Hanley, Iwata, & McCord, 2003), and autism spectrum disorders (Machalicek, O’Reilly, Beretvas, Sigafoos, & Lancioni, 2007). Furthermore, there is a high likelihood that many students with challenging behaviors are never identified (Forness, Freeman, et al., 2012).

Students who exhibit challenging behaviors are more likely than their peers to drop out of school (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005) and end up in juvenile correction facilities (Gagnon & Barber, 2010); while in school, these students are more likely to struggle academically (Siperstein, Wiley, & Forness, 2011) and ultimately end up in segregated settings (Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta,
2008; Crimmins & Farrell, 2006). However, research shows their outcomes in these more restrictive settings do not improve (Lane et al., 2008; Lane, Wehby, Little, & Cooley, 2005a, 2005b).

Although the prognosis for students with problem behaviors appears dim, there is some research that shows positive teacher-student relationships can play a role in improving these outcomes, by resulting in decreases in problem behaviors over time (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Silver, Measelle, Armstrong, & Essex, 2005). For example, Silver et al. (2005) found close relationships with teachers were related to decreases in problem behaviors; whereas, low levels of closeness with teachers predicted future behavior problems, which is concerning considering one of the defining characteristics of ED is “an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers” (IDEA) (20 U.S.C. 1401 Sec. 300.8(c)(4)(i)). The implications for determining how to build upon and improve student teacher relationships with students who struggle to maintain positive relationships with their teachers are abundant. Because the quality of student-teacher relationships is related to improving the outcomes of students with challenging behaviors, it is important to consider how behaviors are related to relationship quality and how students with behavioral challenges define positive student-teacher relationships.

Existing literature shows student behaviors consistently contribute to teacher-student relationship quality, and that the largest percentage of the variance in teachers’ reports of conflict in their relationships with students was accounted for by teacher perceptions of behavior (Hamre et al., 2008). Although few studies
actually report the number of students with behavior problems in their sample (Roorda et al., 2011), Murray and Greenberg (2001) did find students with ED were more dissatisfied with their relationships with their teachers than students without disabilities. Because student behaviors play an integral role in the quality of teacher-student relationships and positive teacher-student relationships are associated with increases in prosocial behaviors (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Silver et al., 2005), this study seeks to fill a gap in current knowledge by describing and analyzing the perspective of students who exhibit challenging behaviors. Additionally, Lewis (2009) identified improving teacher-student relationships as one of the critical features needed to promote academic success at the high school level. However, he acknowledged future research is needed to identify the common features of positive student-teacher relationships, so they can be measured and studied more closely. Therefore, this study was also designed to explore the positive features of student-teacher relationships, so they can be operationalized and measured in future studies.

**Literature Review of Student Teacher Relationships**

**Defining Student-Teacher Relationships**

Student-teacher relationships are defined differently across the literature. Mihalas, Morse, Allsopp, and McHatton (2009) define relationship as “an interaction between adults and students, whereby the adult does what is best for the welfare of the student, taking into account the student’s developmental level and associated needs” (p. 110). Furthermore, they contend positive relationships are demonstrated in a classroom when a teacher cares for the student by
acknowledging the students’ feelings, addressing their needs, and reflecting on how their actions influence student outcomes.

Student-teacher relationships are also defined in the literature by the tools used to measure their quality. Most of the studies that measure student teacher relationships with young children use different versions of the Student Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS), which assesses the relationship quality from the teacher perspective and is done with students in early childhood and early elementary school (Denham, Ji, & Hamre, 2010). The STRS measures relationship quality based on "whether the relationship is conflicted, warm, troubled, open, or dependent" (Denham et al., 2010, p. 33). Studies have demonstrated evidence of the reliability, concurrent validity, predictive validity, and convergent validity of the STRS (Doumen et al., 2009). Although adapting the STRS results in some limitations for use with older students, the “benefits of high levels of closeness and low levels of conflict show to be significant from childhood through adolescence” (Koomen, Verschueren, van Schooten, Jak, & Pianta, 2012, p. 217). The Teacher Student Relationship Inventory (TSRI) is used to measure teacher perceptions of student-teacher relationships with adolescents (Suldo, McMahan, Chappel, & Bateman, 2013). It is based on three dimensions: the teacher's perception of how willing a student is to ask for help, satisfaction with the relationship, and conflict that may result in limiting interactions (Ang, 2005). Suldo et al. (2013) found that student ratings of student-teacher relationship quality were related to teacher ratings on the TSRI of satisfaction and conflict. Although teacher perceptions of relationship quality are more common for young students, student self-report measures are more often
used with adolescents (Suldo et al., 2013). For example, Lucio, Hunt, and Bornvalova (2011) used a scale that measured whether students perceive that their teacher’s care about them and their success at school and Murray and Greenberg (2001) used People in My Life, a scale that includes questions about how students perceive their relationships with their teachers.

**Student Outcomes and Teacher-Student Relationships**

The following studies showing the association between teacher-student relationships and student outcomes were described and analyzed: three studies examining the impact of teacher-student relationships on students’ academic outcomes, three studies examining the correlation of teacher-student relationships and students’ behavioral outcomes, five studies examining how teacher-student relationships correlate with both academic and behavioral outcomes, and one meta-analysis examining the correlation between teacher-student relationships and students’ school engagement and achievement.

**Studies on academic correlations.** Four studies reviewed found positive correlations between teacher-student relationships and student academic outcomes. These studies included subjects from preschool and early elementary school (first-through third-grade). All of these studies included sample sizes of more than 500 students. Each study examined different variables and different aspects of academic achievement.

The study by O’Connor and McCartney (2007) examined the impact of teacher-student relationships on achievement and found the quality of teacher-student relationships was a significant predictor of academic achievement. The
study, which included a sample of 880 children, compared the quality of teacher-child relationships from preschool through third grade with third grade achievement. Achievement was measured using an Achievement Subscale of the Woodcock Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery Revised. A subscale of the Student Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) was used to measure teacher perceptions of the teacher-child relationship. Other variables analyzed included: gender, race, socioeconomic status (SES), cognitive ability, maternal attachment, maternal education, child’s classroom engagement, peer relationships, child behavior, and teacher interactions. Individual growth modeling was done to determine changes in quality of the teacher-child relationship over time. The results were then used to predict achievement at third grade, which was regressed on sets of predictor variables.

The results of the analyses by O’Connor and McCartney (2007) indicated change in quality of the teacher-student relationship and quality of the teacher-student relationship at third grade both significantly predicted achievement, even when controlling for other variables. These results suggest teacher-student relationships have not only a significant effect but also an independent effect on achievement. Interestingly, the study also found that the effect of the quality of teacher relationships on achievement was impacted by teacher behaviors. For example, children with better teacher relationships were more engaged in class; however, teachers attended more to students with whom they had lower quality relationships. In these cases, teacher attendance was negatively related to achievement.
Two studies considered effortful control as a variable that impacted teacher-student relationships and children’s academic achievement. Effortful control includes the capacity to deliberately stop or slow motor activity and change focus or attention (Liew, Chen, and Hughes, 2010). Fine motor tasks require effortful control to complete tasks accurately. Research has shown that effortful control contributes to academic achievement (Liew et al., 2010).

The study by Liew et al. (2010) found that positive teacher-child relationships positively influenced the academic achievement of students with low effortful control. Participants included 761 first-grade academically at-risk children who were not receiving special education services. Tests of effortful control, general cognitive ability, and reading and math achievement were given to participants when they were in first and second grade. Teachers were given questionnaire packets to assess teacher-student relationships. To assess effortful control, which is indicated by inhibitory control and task accuracy, students completed four tasks from a behavioral battery designed for the purpose of measuring effortful control. For example, inhibitory control was measured by having students complete tasks as slowly as possible. Task accuracy was measured by having students trace a shape and counting errors when the students traced outside the lines. Variables of age, sex, IQ, race, and economic adversity were accounted for using regression analyses.

Valiente, Lemery-Chalfant, Swanson, and Reiser (2008) also examined the relationship among effortful control, teacher-student relationships, and academic competence. Results of their study indicated effortful control was positively related to teacher-child relationship, social competence, and classroom participation, all of
which were significantly related to student grade point averages. The purpose of the study was to see if effortful control predicted academic competence and if it was dependent on children’s relationships and classroom participation. The participants included 22 teachers, 122 boys and 142 girls between the ages of 7 and 12 years old, and their parents. Effortful control was measured based on children and parents reports on subscales from the Early Adolescent Temperament Questionnaire, and teacher-student relationships were measured by ratings from teachers and students on the Teacher-student Relationship Scale. Teacher-student relationships and students’ effortful control were then compared to academic competence, which was measured using school records.

Results of the Liew et al. (2010) and Valiente et al. (2008) studies indicated a positive correlation between effortful control, positive teacher-student relationships and academic outcomes. Liew et al. (2010) found the following correlations during first grade: inhibitory control and task accuracy were positively correlated, task accuracy was correlated with teacher-student relationships, inhibitory control positively correlated with reading, and positive teacher-student relationships positively correlated with reading and math achievement. Positive teacher-student relationships resulted in a protective factor for students with low task accuracy. The study found that if students with low task accuracy had a positive teacher relationship they performed as well academically as students with high task accuracy. Valiente et al. (2008) also found that effortful control was positively related to grades and teacher-student relationships. Furthermore, Valiente et al.
(2008) found teacher-student relationships were positively related to grades beyond the effects of effortful control.

Several limitations emerged in the studies that examined correlations between teacher-student relationships and academic outcomes. For example, although the O’Connor and McCartney (2007) study found teacher attendance was negatively related to achievement when a lower quality teacher-student relationship existed, the study did not describe whether the increased attention included positive or negative interactions. Future research in this area is needed to identify the impact of different types of teacher attendance on achievement levels. None of the three studies included any information on whether subjects with disabilities were included or whether disability was a variable that influenced teacher-student relationships. Another limitation is that two of the studies only considered teacher perceptions when measuring teacher-student relationships. The study by Valiente et al. (2008) was the only one of the three studies that considered student perceptions of the quality of teacher-student relationships.

Despite limitations, the studies that compared teacher-student relationships with students’ academic outcomes are supportive of promoting positive teacher-student relationships as an effort to improve academic achievement. The study by O’Connor & McCartney (2007) is relevant to the question proposed because it showed that a change in teacher-student relationship quality is predictive of academic achievement and that high quality teacher-student relationships support children’s academic achievement. The Liew et al. (2010) study is relevant because it indicated that positive teacher-student relationships can compensate for students
with low levels of task accuracy. Liew et al. (2010) showed that children with positive teacher relationships and low task accuracy performed as well as children with high levels of task accuracy. All three of the studies showed the effects of teacher-student relationships on achievement when controlling for contextual variables. The number of variables considered in all of these studies strengthens the support of the significant effect of teacher-student relationships on achievement.

Studies on behavioral correlations. The findings of three studies that examined the correlation between student behaviors and teacher-student relationships indicated that positive teacher-student relationships are closely associated with decreases in inappropriate behaviors and increases in pro-social behaviors. These studies included elementary school aged subjects ranging from kindergarten through third grade.

The studies by Silver, Measelle, Armstrong, and Essex (2005) and Birch and Ladd (1998) both looked at the impact of kindergarten teacher-student relationships on student behavior. Both studies found that children’s relationships with their kindergarten teachers were predictive of future behaviors.

Silver et al. (2005) found that conflict in teacher-student relationships contributed to increases in students’ externalizing behaviors, such as verbal and physical aggression and refusing to comply with teacher directions. The study also found teacher-student closeness was linked with decreases in externalizing behaviors of students. Like the Connor and McCartney (2007) study, the Silver et al. (2005) study also looked at contextual variables and teacher-student relationships over time; however, Silver et al. (2005) focused on their contribution to
externalizing behaviors. The study included a sample of 283 children and included information collected from preschool through third grade. Externalizing behavior was measured using the Mental Health Subscales of the MacArthur Health and Behavior Questionnaire, whereas relationship quality was measured using Kindergarten teachers ratings of relationship quality with a target child using a shortened version of the STRS. Data was analyzed using random regression growth curve models.

The longitudinal study by Birch and Ladd (1998) examined the relation between kindergartners’ behaviors and relationships with their first grade teachers. The study found that kindergarten children’s behaviors predicted teacher-student relationships in the first grade. The study also found that teacher-student relationships predicted changes in student’s behaviors and students with conflictual teacher relationships were less likely to exhibit prosocial behaviors. The sample included 199 kindergarten children and their teachers. Children’s behavior was measured using teacher and peer ratings. Teacher-student relationships were measured using teacher ratings. Correlational analyses were conducted to compare teacher-student relationship data collected in kindergarten and first grade and to examine the association between children’s behaviors and teacher relationships. Kindergarten antisocial behaviors were related to conflictual, dependent, and non-close relationships with first grade teachers. Regression analyses were used to evaluate whether kindergarten teacher relationships contributed to first grade children’s behaviors.
Both Silver et al. (2005) and Birch and Ladd (1998) found that conflict in teacher-student relationships was associated with declines in prosocial student behaviors, while close teacher-student relationships was correlated with prosocial behaviors. The results of the Silver et al. (2005) analyses show that teacher-student relationships had the strongest effect on students who had above average levels of externalizing behaviors at baseline. For example, students who started school exhibiting more serious behaviors and did not have a close relationship with their teacher were more likely to exhibit growth of externalizing behaviors. On the other hand, those students with close relationships with their teacher were more likely to decrease externalizing behaviors over time. These results indicate close teacher-student relationships have a protective impact for children who already exhibit externalizing behaviors. Results of the Birch and Ladd (1998) study showed that students’ behaviors were related to the relationships that students formed with teachers. For example, Birch and Ladd (1998) found students who exhibited antisocial behaviors in kindergarten were more likely to have high levels of conflict with kindergarten and first grade teachers, which led to decreases in prosocial behaviors over time.

Meehan, Hughes, and Cavell (2003) also examined the association between quality of teacher-student relationships and student behaviors; however, they specifically considered children’s aggression levels when accounting for race and parenting factors. The study found that positive teacher-student relationships were more beneficial for aggressive African American and Hispanic students than aggressive Caucasian children. The sample included 140 second and third grade
children who were identified by their teachers as being physically or relationally aggressive. Separate hierarchical multiple regression analyses were performed for teacher and peer-rated aggression controlling for initial levels of aggression, race, and negative parenting.

The results of the Meehan et al. (2003) study found that teacher support levels predicted lower levels of student aggression as reported by teachers. Although Meehan et al. (2003) found teacher support levels predicted lower levels of student aggression for African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian children, teacher support levels accounted for a higher percentage of variance in aggression scores for African American and Hispanic children than Caucasian children. According to these findings aggressive African American and Hispanic students may be more responsive to positive teacher relationships, even though the authors also found that aggressive African American and Hispanic students experienced less positive relationships with their teachers. In other words, the students who most benefited from positive relationships were least likely to experience them.

Like the studies that examined academic correlations, the behavioral studies also did not report if the samples included any students with disabilities. Although the studies indicated that students in the sample exhibited antisocial behaviors, they did not report if any participants had been identified as having an emotional or behavioral disorder. The authors of the Silver et al. (2005) study also identified low base rates of negative behaviors as a limitation. Like the O’Connor and McCartney (2007) and Liew et al. (2010) studies, all of the behavioral studies relied on a
measure of teacher-child relationships that was based solely on teacher reports and did not consider student perceptions of relationships.

Despite the limitations, these three studies are powerful and relevant to determining the impact of teacher-student relationships on student outcomes because they showed a correlation between teacher relationships and student behaviors. For example, the study by Silver et al. (2005) identified how positive teacher-student relationships can benefit students who start school exhibiting externalizing behaviors. It also established that conflict in teacher relationships could be detrimental to students who enter school already exhibiting negative behaviors. The study was particularly relevant because rather than referring to relationships broadly as positive or negative it examined specific aspects of teacher-student relationships such as conflict and closeness. One component of promoting positive teacher-student relationships is determining what specific characteristics and interactions result in positive relationships. The Birch and Ladd (1998) study was relevant because it established a link between closeness in teacher-student relationships with increases in prosocial behaviors while conflict in the relationship contributed to increases in antisocial behaviors. Although all three of these studies showed that positive teacher-student relationships are associated with positive student behaviors, the Meehan et al. (2003) study also suggested the strength of the effect of positive teacher-student relationships was based on ethnicity, finding African American and Hispanic students may be more responsive to positive teacher-student relationships.
Studies involving both academic and behavioral correlations. The five studies reviewed that examined the correlation between teacher-student relationships and both academic and behavioral outcomes found teacher-student relationships predicted students’ school adjustment. These studies were important because they simultaneously compared teacher-student relationships on both academics and behavior. This allowed the authors to compare the strength of the effects to determine if teacher-student relationships were more powerful indicators of academics or behaviors. These studies also looked at how teacher-student relationships predicted outcomes over time.

The study by Pianta, Nimetz, and Bennett (1997) examined the association between child-mother and child-teacher relationships and the degree to which they predict early school outcomes. The study found mother-child interactions are more strongly related to preschool and kindergarten outcomes than teacher-child relationships, but the quality of both mother-child and teacher-child interactions predicted children’s development in preschool and was associated with school outcomes. The sample included 55 children in a preschool program in a small city. Correlations were computed to examine the association among scores for mother-child relationship, teacher-child relationship, and school outcomes.

The results of the study by Pianta et al. (1997) study found that mother-child relationships were correlated with teacher-child relationships. For example, children in problematic mother-child relationships formed teacher-child relationships that were characterized as insecure, conflicted, and dependent. Teacher-child relationships characterized by conflict were negatively associated
with kindergarten teachers’ reports of child work habits, frustration tolerance, and overall competence. Teacher-child relationship measures were more highly correlated with the Boehm Test of Basic Concept scores than the kindergarten teachers’ reports. The Boehm test measures knowledge of age appropriate concepts and language (Pianta, Nimetz, & Bennett, 1997). More positive teacher-child relationships predicted higher Boehm scores.

The study by Buyse, Verschueren, Verachtert, and Van Damme (2009), part of a large-scale longitudinal study in Belgium, examined both academic and behavioral implications of teacher-student relationships and found that teacher-student relationships predicted both psychosocial and academic adjustment. The study examined the impact of teacher-child relationships in first grade on children’s second and third grade psychosocial adjustment, such as aggressive behaviors, popularity with peers, and feelings of well-being. It also examined the impact of teacher-student relationships on academic adjustment in reading and math. Data was gathered on a sample that ranged from 3,784 to 3,582, and teacher-student relationships were measured using teacher ratings on a Dutch version of the STRS. Psychosocial adjustment was measured by teacher ratings on subscales of the Child Behavior Scale, the popularity-with-peers subscale from the PRIMA study and a scale that they developed for the study to measure feelings of well-being at school. Academic achievement was measured using the word reading test, a shortened form of an adapted Dutch language test, and curriculum based math achievement tests designed for the study. Multiple hierarchical regression analyses were conducted for each of the outcome variables.
One finding of the Buyse et al. (2009) study was that higher levels of teacher conflict with students resulted in lower levels of psychosocial adjustment. Another finding was that teacher-student relationships in first grade were predictive of math achievement. For example, more conflict in teacher-student relationships resulted in lower math achievement scores. The study also found effects of teacher-student relationships are strongest in first grade, but still exist in third grade.

The study by Baker (2006) also examined the contribution of teacher-student relationships to both academic and behavioral aspects of school adjustment and found that positive teacher-student relationships had a protective effect for students with behavioral and learning problems. Participants included 1,310 kindergarten through fifth grade students and relationships were measured by teacher reports on the STRS. A behavior rating scale was used to measure behavioral outcomes and reading scores from standardized tests were used to measure academic outcomes. Regression analyses using generalized linear models were used to test associations between teacher-student relationship quality and school outcomes, while computing for different variables.

The Baker (2006) study found close teacher-student relationships were moderately associated with reading grades and more strongly associated with social skills. The study also found conflict in the relationship was significantly negatively related to all school outcomes measured. Furthermore, they found students with behavior problems and close teacher relationships had better school outcomes than students with similar problems who lacked a close teacher relationship.
Two of the studies examined the effect of teacher-student relationships in kindergarten on students’ outcomes in middle school (sixth through eighth grade). The studies by Hamre and Pianta (2001) and Jerome, Hamre, and Pianta (2009) compared students’ relationships with their teachers in kindergarten to their school adjustment over time. Hamre and Pianta (2001) examined the predictive quality of kindergarten teacher relationships on the outcomes of students in middle school. Jerome et al. (2009), on the other hand, compared how teacher-student relationships changed through elementary school into middle school.

The Hamre and Pianta (2001) study found that kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of their relationships with students predicted academic and behavioral outcomes for students through the eighth grade, especially for boys and students with more behavior problems. The participants included 179 children from a small city school district. Information was collected from 26 kindergarten teachers and school records through eighth grade. Kindergarten teachers rated both children’s behaviors and the quality of the teacher-student relationship, and follow-up data was collected through the eighth grade. Data was collected on academic grades, standardized test scores, work habit ratings, and discipline records. The data was analyzed by examining associations between kindergarten teachers’ ratings of the quality of their relationship with each child and the child’s academic and behavioral performance through the eighth grade.

The Jerome et al. (2009) study examined teacher ratings of conflict and closeness with students from kindergarten through sixth grade and found both conflict and closeness were moderately stable over time. Specifically, average
levels of conflict increased over time, whereas average levels of closeness decreased over the seven years. The sample included 878 children and their teachers. Growth curve modeling was used to examine trajectories of teacher conflict and closeness over time. Variables measured included the following: teacher-student relationships, demographic characteristics, maternal sensitivity, child attachment, quality of home environment, quality of non-maternal childcare, academic achievement, and behavior. Gender, race, academic ability, quality of non-maternal care and externalizing behaviors all contributed to teacher-student relationships.

Both the Hamre & Pianta (2001) and Jerome et al. (2009) studies examined teacher-student relationships and outcomes over an extended time period. The Hamre and Pianta (2001) study found that teacher-student relationships predict academic and behavioral outcomes through upper elementary school and negative relationships predict behavior into middle school. Although the study found teacher-student relationships predict both academic and behavioral adjustment in school, the study indicated teacher-student relationships more strongly predicted behavioral outcomes than academic outcomes.

The Jerome et al. (2009) study found that teacher-student relationship quality changed for individual students over time. This finding has implications for teachers because it indicates the same child would develop different relationships with teachers at different times, suggesting some teachers were better at developing more positive relationships. Additionally, the study found conflictual relationships were more stable over time, suggesting perhaps levels of conflict are more influenced by students’ behavioral characteristics than levels of closeness. Another
important finding of the study is that over time levels of conflict increased while
closeness levels decreased. These findings have implications for the development of
positive relationships in late elementary and middle schools.

The five studies that examined both academics and behavior are also limited
by their reliance on teacher perceptions of relationships. They do not include any
student perceptions of relationships; therefore, results should be considered
cautiously as they may reflect teacher biases.

As with previous studies, these five studies also did not report whether any
members of the sample had disabilities. The Baker (2006) study, for example,
identified students with learning and behavioral problems and considered those
variables in the analysis. The study did not indicate whether the students had been
identified through eligibility criteria as having a disability. Because the study
showed a protective effect of positive teacher-student relationship for students with
behavior problems, it would be beneficial to see if that effect was noted for students
identified as having emotional/behavioral disorders. Conversely, it would be
beneficial to know if disability identification influenced teacher-student
relationships.

Limitations also existed in the data collection procedures. For example, the
Hamre and Pianta (2001) study did not collect teacher-student relationship data
beyond kindergarten and the Jerome et al. (2009) study did not collect data on
predictive variables past 54 months. Therefore, the data do not reflect changes that
could have occurred over time.
The results of these studies are relevant because they identify a connection between teacher-student relationships and both behavioral and academic achievement simultaneously. This also allows for comparisons of strength of relationships in predicting academic and behavioral outcomes. For instance, the Hamre and Pianta (2001) study was able to show that teacher-student relationship quality is a stronger predictor of behavioral outcomes than academic outcomes.

The studies also demonstrate the importance of relationships on multiple factors of student adjustment. Although each study showed a correlation with teacher-student relationships and student outcomes, they each measured different variables and therefore provide unique relevance. For example, the Buyse et al. (2009) study is important because it demonstrated the effect of teacher-child conflict on mathematics achievement. This is notable because many of the studies that look at the connection between teacher-student relationships and academic achievement focus on reading or overall grade point averages.

The Baker (2006) study is significant because it compared students with behavioral problems and positive teacher-student relationships to students with similar problems and negative teacher-student relationships. Baker (2006) found a positive effect of teacher-student relationships for students with behavior problems in the areas of both behavior and reading. Surprisingly, Baker (2006) found this was not the case for students with learning problems. Positive outcomes associated with positive teacher-student relationships were noted for students without learning problems, but the results indicated that positive teacher-student relationships did not increase academic achievement when associated with
significant learning problems. The Pianta et al. (1997) study is relevant because it found a correlation between mother-child relationships and teacher-child relationships. Mother-child relationships should be further examined as a variable that contributes to the quality of teacher-student relationships.

The studies reviewed indicate a strong correlation between teacher-student relationships and the behavioral and academic outcomes of students. Because the studies did not involve experimental designs, they cannot show a causal relationship, but significant correlation sizes, use of large samples, and control for numerous variables make the results powerful. Therefore, the literature shows that teacher-student relationships are significant predictors of student outcomes and must be considered as a factor for improving academic and behavioral outcomes of students in elementary school classrooms.

Roorda, Koomen, Split, and Oort (2011) confirmed these findings by conducting a meta-analysis of 99 studies to compare teacher-student relationships to students’ engagement and achievement. They found, overall, medium to large effect sizes showing teacher-student relationships were significantly associated with student engagement. They also found significant, although smaller, effect sizes for correlations between teacher-student relationships and student achievement.

**Variables that Contribute to Teacher-Student Relationship Quality**

Several studies examined variables that contribute to teacher-student relationship quality. The review of literature showed student behaviors and demographic variables, such as gender, race, disability classification, and socio-economic status are all related to teacher-student relationship quality. Behavior
accounted for the largest percentage of variance in relationship quality (Hamre et al., 2008); therefore, targeting student behaviors should be a key component of any intervention designed to improve teacher-student relationships.

**Student variables.** In the studies reviewed, student behaviors consistently contributed to measures of teacher-student relationship quality. Thijs and Koomen (2009) and Thijs, Koomen, and van der Leij (2008) explored teacher reports of their relationships with kindergarten students. Teachers reported more conflictual relationships with hyperactive children when compared to average children (Thijs & Koomen, 2009; Thijs, Koomen, & van der Leij, 2008). Similarly, Houts, Caspu, Pianta, Arseneault, and Moffitt (2010) found that when children at age five exhibited more challenging behaviors, such as impulsivity and hyperactivity, their teachers reported that seven years later it required more effort to teach them, thus showing children’s challenging behaviors affected teacher effort toward the same child over time. Henricsson and Rydell (2004) reported similar findings by comparing students exhibiting externalizing behaviors (n=26), internalizing behaviors (n=25), and non-problematic behaviors (n=44). They reported children with externalizing behaviors had more conflictual relationships with teachers. Additionally, they found students with internalizing behaviors had more conflictual and dependent relationships with teachers when compared to children with non-problematic behaviors.

Rudasill and Rimm-Kaufman (2009) used parent ratings of their children’s behaviors at age 4 to compare children’s temperament to teacher-student relationship quality in first grade. They also found teachers reported more
conflictual and negative relationships with children who displayed disruptive externalizing behaviors. In addition, they found that although shyer children did not have conflictual relationships with their teachers, they were also less likely to have close relationships. They argued shy children, “who are less connected or even unnoticed in the classroom may be at risk for feeling dissociated from school, and begin to fall through the cracks at a very early age” (Rudasill & Rimm-Kaufman, 2009, p. 117). Hamre, Pianta, Downer, and Mashburn (2008) compared individual and classroom factors related to conflictual relationships before and after adjusting for children’s problem behaviors. They studied a sample of 2,282 preschoolers and 597 teachers and found over half of the variance in teachers’ reports of conflict in teacher-student relationships was accounted for by teacher perceptions of children’s problem behaviors. Research clearly demonstrates that students’ challenging behaviors contribute to teachers’ perceiving more conflictual, negative teacher-student relationships.

**Demographic variables.** In 1974, Brophy and Good reported on the role that student race, gender, and socioeconomic status played in teachers’ perceptions and treatment of their students (Brophy & Good, 1974). Thirty years later, research shows these variables continue to influence teacher perceptions and interactions. Murray and Murray (2004) found “student race, gender, and disability status were also related to teacher perceptions of teacher-student relationships” (p. 759). Teachers reported more conflict with African American students, more closeness with females than males, and students with disabilities had more conflict and less closeness (Murray & Murray, 2004). Hughes, Gleason, and Zhang (2005) also found
differences for students’ race and gender. They found teachers’ perceived that White and Hispanic students were given more teacher support than African American students, and girls received more teacher support than boys. Rudasill and Kaufman (2009) also found differences between teacher-student relationship quality of girls and boys. They reported boys were more likely to have conflictual relationships. Auwarter and Aruguete (2008) used hypothetical scenarios to gauge teacher attitudes towards students with academic and behavioral challenges. They discovered teachers were more likely to display negative attitudes towards boys with low socioeconomic status. Montague and Rinaldi (2001) studied students who were at risk for developing learning, emotional, and behavioral disorders in grades 2 and 3 and found significant differences between the amount of negative responses from teachers towards students identified as at-risk for disability when compared to their peers.

**Teacher variables.** Gregory and Ripski (2008), Thijs et al. (2008), and Leflot, Onghena, and Colpin (2010) compared teacher-student relationship quality and teacher’s pedagogical practices, such as how they disciplined students and the types of support they offered. Gregory and Ripski (2008) interviewed and surveyed 32 teachers and 32 students. They discovered when teachers used a relational approach that emphasized developing personal relationships with students, the students had more trust in their teacher’s authority and, therefore, exhibited fewer defiant behaviors. Hamre et al. (2008), also found teacher support predicted lower levels of significant problem behaviors, which are related to teacher-student relationship quality. Thijs et al. (2008) only used teacher reports to identify
associations between relationship characteristics and teachers’ practices. Interestingly, they ascertained teacher perceptions of their own levels of support related to conflicted, dependent, and distant relationships, suggesting teacher perception of support is not a key component of positive teacher-student relationships. Also, students and teachers may have different perceptions of what constitutes positive relationship qualities (Thijs et al., 2008). Leflot et al. (2010) studied whether teacher-child interactions contributed to students’ self-concept. They used teacher and child questionnaires to assess interactions and self-concept. They found teacher-child interactions contributed to children’s academic and social self-concept. More specifically, they contended “the more teachers reported to be respectful towards a child’s opinions and ideas, stimulate him/her to explore his/her interests, and explained the relevance of learning activities at the beginning of the school year, the higher that child’s academic self-concept at the end of the year” (Leflot, Onghena, et al., 2010, p. 397). However, they also found teacher-child interactions did not significantly affect children’s behavioral and global self-concepts.

Yoon (2002) surveyed 113 elementary teachers to examine whether teacher stress, negative affect, and self-efficacy predicted teacher-student relationship quality. Yoon (2002) found teacher stress was “significantly correlated with negative affect, self-efficacy, and negative relationships,” although self-efficacy and negative affect did not predict beyond what was explained by stress, suggesting teacher stress made a unique contribution to predictions of teacher-student relationship quality (p. 489).
Garrett, Barr, and Rothman (2009) asked 155 sixth and ninth grade students to complete a qualitative questionnaire to suggest what their favorite teachers do to show they care about students. The purpose of the study was to determine whether students’ perceptions of caring differed across race and grade level. Although minimal differences emerged, students ranked teachers’ personality and academic support as the most important factors in caring, regardless of race or grade level.

The Roorda et al. (2011) meta-analysis also looked across 99 studies of student and teacher characteristics that moderated teacher-student relationship quality. They determined age significantly impacted the effect of teacher-student relationship quality; surprisingly, positive relationships contributed more in secondary school studies and the effects of negative relationships were stronger in primary schools. Additionally, they found student gender, ethnicity, SES, and learning difficulties all moderated teacher-student relationship quality. Effect sizes of relationships compared to engagement were larger for boys, but when compared to achievement they were larger with girls. Effects for positive relationships and achievement were bigger with minority students. Studies including more students with learning difficulties had stronger correlations between negative teacher-student relationships and students’ engagement and achievement. Teacher gender only affected correlations with engagement, resulting in larger effects for male teachers. Both teacher experience and ethnicity showed stronger associations between positive relationships and achievement; however, the effect of gender of teachers was only significant with the inclusion of studies done in secondary schools.

**Interventions that Target Student Teacher Relationships**
The review of literature shows a correlation between teacher-student relationships and student outcomes. The literature also reveals variables, such as behavior, that contribute significantly to the variance in teacher-student relationship quality. However, few current studies exist that analyze interventions aimed at improving teacher-student relationship quality. In a review of literature from 2000 to present, only one intervention was identified, Banking Time (Driscoll & Pianta, 2010; Driscoll, Wang, Mashburn, & Pianta, 2011), which met the criteria of targeting and measuring relationship quality among teachers and children. Four studies targeted teacher-student relationships or interactions as a way to improve student behaviors or academic adjustment (Cheney et al., 2009; Helker & Ray, 2009; Leflot, van Lier, Onghena, & Colpin, 2010; McIntosh, Rizza, & Bliss, 2000; Morrison & Bratton, 2010; Murray & Malmgren, 2005).

**Teacher-student Relationship Intervention.** Only one intervention specifically addressed the teacher-student relationship as the targeted outcome. The Banking Time intervention was designed to develop supportive teacher-student relationships through one-on-one interactions in early childhood classroom settings (Driscoll & Pianta, 2010; Driscoll et al., 2011). It includes regularly scheduled meetings between the teacher and a child, in which they participate in an activity chosen and led by the child. Meanwhile, the teacher observes and narrates the child’s actions, labels the child’s feelings and emotions, and develops relational themes (Driscoll & Pianta, 2010).

Driscoll and Pianta (2010) used an experimental design to compare changes to teacher-child relationship quality, child behaviors, and interactions by randomly
assigning 116 children in Head Start to 1 of 3 conditions: Banking Time Intervention, within-class control, or wait-list control. Teachers completed pre and post ratings of relationship quality, showing modest gains in teacher-child relationships, such as increased perceptions of closeness with children in the intervention group. However, videotaped interactions did not show significant changes in children participating in the intervention, suggesting teacher attitudes may have influenced interactions more than the intervention. Driscoll and Pianta (2012) reported teacher attitudes influenced teacher-child interactions, child behaviors, and teacher-child relationships.

Driscoll et al. (2011) also researched the effects of Banking Time. They examined 252 preschool teachers' implementation of the intervention. Four children from each class were also randomly selected to participate. Teachers participated in one of three study conditions: 1) consultancy (materials, such as books and activities, access to a website describing Banking Time and providing resources, access to a teaching consultant), 2) web access (materials and access to the web site), or 3) control (materials and limited access to the website). The results of the multilevel logistic regression analysis found teachers were more likely to implement the intervention when they have more supports, such as working with a consultant. The results also showed children who participated in Banking Time had closer relationships with their teachers, although it did not affect the level of conflict between teachers and children.

The two studies investigating Banking Time had some limitations. Neither study purported to be a comprehensive analysis of outcomes associated with the
intervention (Driscoll & Pianta, 2010; Driscoll et al., 2011). Also, each study relied on reports from teachers. The 2010 study collected data from children, but it was not used because it was unclear whether the children comprehended the questions. Another limitation was that both studies lacked measures of fidelity of implementation; therefore, it is uncertain whether the quality of implementation influenced the outcomes.

**Interventions Using Relationships or Interactions to Target Student Outcomes**

Although only one intervention targeted and measured teacher-student relationships, six studies were reviewed that sought to improve student behaviors or academic outcomes by addressing teacher-student interactions or relationships (Cheney et al., 2009; Helker & Ray, 2009; Leflot, van Lier, et al., 2010; McIntosh et al., 2000; Morrison & Bratton, 2010; Murray & Malmgren, 2005).

**Child Teacher Relationship Training (CTRT).** Two studies examined the impact of CTRT on preschool children’s behavior (Helker & Ray, 2009; Morrison & Bratton, 2010). CTRT teachers are trained in how to build relationship skills during structured playtime. It is designed to “provide opportunities for teachers to gain a better understanding of children’s feelings, experiences, and needs; increase teachers’ awareness of ways to respond to children that build children’s confidence and self-esteem; and facilitate the development of more positive emotional relationships with children” (Helker & Ray, 2009, p. 72). Helker and Ray (2009) collected data at a Head Start center, using 12 pairs of teachers and classroom aids (six assigned to experimental and six assigned to control groups) and 32 child participants, who were selected based on their scoring in the borderline or clinical
range on the Child/Behavior Checklist Caregiver-Teacher Report Form (C-TRF).
The CTRT experimental group received training and coaching on CTRT and conducted weekly 30 minute videotaped play sessions to practice the skills, before engaging in unstructured play time using the CTRT skills. The purpose of the study was to determine if teachers who participated in CTRT used the relationship building skills and whether it resulted in decreases in children’s problem behaviors. The results showed there was a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups on the use of relationship building skills. The results also showed students in the experimental group had significant improvements in externalizing behaviors; however, statistically significant improvements were not found for internalizing behaviors.

Morrison and Bratton (2010) also investigated CTRT with 24 Head Start teachers and aides and 52 preschool children. The purpose of the study was also to explore the effect of CTRT on student behaviors. Again the experimental group received training on CTRT principles and skills and practiced during 30 minute videotaped play sessions with in-class coaches. The teachers and aides continued to receive support as they began to incorporate the CTRT skills into the classroom setting. As with the Helker and Ray (2009) study, the CTRT group in the Morrison and Bratton (2010) study also demonstrated statistically significant decreases in children’s externalizing behaviors, but only moderate effects for internalizing behavior problems.

One limitation of the two CTRT studies was that neither study measured student perceptions of the intervention or the teacher-student relationship. Also,
the studies relied on teacher ratings to measure student behaviors, which could have been problematic because pretest scores were gathered at the beginning of the year, when teachers may not have been able to adequately assess student behaviors. Also, both studies involved relatively small sample sizes and did not incorporate true randomization of groups.

**Teacher-Student Relationship Program.** Murray and Malmgren (2005) analyzed the effects of a program that sought to improve teacher-student relationships of adolescents with significant emotional and behavioral problems in an urban high school. Participants included eight teachers and forty-eight students. The teachers rated students behavioral, emotional, and academic adjustment before and after the intervention. The intervention was developed with teachers during school meetings and consisted of weekly meetings between teachers and students on the intervention list. Academic and personal goal sheets were used at the meetings to facilitate communication on identifying goals, strategies to meet goals, and progress toward goals. The intervention also included increased use of teacher praise and phone calls from teachers to parents one to two times per month to discuss progress. The results of the intervention did not show a significant effect on behavioral or emotional adjustment; however, a medium effect size was found for grade point averages. One major limitation of the study is that it took place over a five month time period, and the authors questioned if that was sufficient time. Another limitation the authors identified was that the intervention was only done with one teacher, even though the students had multiple teachers at the high school setting. They wondered if perhaps intervening with only one teacher was not
enough. Murray and Malmgren (2005) also recognized the limitation of relying on teacher ratings of behavioral and emotional variables. They expressed the need for validated measures of teacher-student relationship quality that can be used with adolescents.

**Teacher-Child Interaction Therapy (TCIT).** McIntosh, Rizza, and Bliss (2000) also implemented the TCIT intervention which is aimed at improving the behaviors of children in preschool settings. Although not specifically geared towards teacher-student relationships, it does intend to train teachers to increase the number of positive interactions with their students. TCIT is based on parent-child interaction therapy (PCIT) which has been found to be effective at improving parents’ interactions with their children (Schuhmann, Foote, Eyberg, Boggs, & Algina, 1998). McIntosh, Rizza, and Bliss (2000) used a single subject case-study, mixed qualitative design to demonstrate how the procedures of PCIT could be used to conduct TCIT in a preschool classroom setting. They used an adapted observation measure known as the Dyadic Teacher-Child Interaction Coding System to assess the number and types of interactions used by the teacher with the child participant, a 2 year old African American female who had aggressive behaviors such as, biting, hitting, and kicking. The TCIT intervention consisted of two phases: five child-directed interaction therapy sessions and seven teacher-directed interaction therapy sessions. The teacher was given training, direct coaching, and practice opportunities on how to interact with the child. The results of the study showed the teacher used less critical statements and increased her use of praise statements; meanwhile, the child decreased disruptive behaviors and increased.
compliance. One obvious limitation of the study is the small sample size. McIntosh, Rizza, and Bliss (2000) also acknowledged implementing this intervention on a larger scale in a school setting would be logistically difficult.

In summary, the review of literature reveals the following: (a) student behaviors contribute to teacher perceptions of teacher-student relationship quality (Hamre et al., 2008), (b) positive teacher-student relationships can improve student outcomes by decreasing problem behaviors (Silver et al., 2005), (c) positive teacher-student relationships are related to improved academic outcomes for students (Roorda et al., 2011; Valiente et al., 2008), (d) students with behavior problems and close teacher-student relationships had better outcomes than students with behavior problems without close teacher relationships (Baker, 2006), and (e) positive teacher-student relationships contributed more to the academic adjustment of students in secondary school than elementary school (Roorda et al., 2011). These findings indicate the importance of positive teacher-student relationships for adolescent students who exhibit challenging behaviors. Therefore, this study was developed to explore student perceptions of what teachers can do to improve teacher-student relationship quality.

**Theoretical Literature**

To gain a better understanding of current research related to teacher-student relationships, the author began by examining theoretical literature that may help explain the interactions and relationships occurring among students and their teachers. The review of theoretical literature led to the development of the following conceptual framework (Figure 1), which guided the development of the
research questions and methodology (Creswell, 2009). The conceptual framework was used as a theoretical lens to guide the methodology of the study, not to develop or test theory. Instead, the researcher was open to changes or additional themes identified from the data.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

Transactional

Transactional theory proposes that not only do student behaviors influence teacher behaviors, but teacher behaviors also influence student behaviors (Doumen et al., 2008; Loukas, Ripperger-Suhler, & Horton, 2009; Sutherland, Lewis-Palmer, Stichter, & Morgan, 2008; Sutherland & Morgan, 2003; Sutherland & Oswald, 2005).
For example, if students exhibit behaviors that make a teacher react negatively, students may in turn increase their negative behaviors (Doumen et al., 2008). This reciprocal coercive pattern of interactions is difficult to break and the ensuing student behaviors account for a significant proportion of variance in teacher-student relationships (Hamre et al., 2008). Therefore, when seeking to create change in teacher-student relationships, it is vital to consider the reciprocal influence of teacher and student behaviors before a change can occur.

**Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy theory generally deals with peoples’ beliefs about how their capabilities influence their actions which ultimately determine their outcomes (Bandura, 1977, 1997). In other words, if people believe they can change something, they will be more likely to create that change; whereas, if they do not think they have the ability to change something, they will be less likely to even try to make change happen. Because perceived self-efficacy has been shown to be a strong predictor of behaviors (Bandura, 1997), it is important to consider the role that self-efficacy may play in the development of teacher-student relationships.

Self-efficacy theory applies to both student and teacher behaviors, which simultaneously contribute to the quality of teacher-student relationships (Hamre et al., 2008). It is imperative to consider student self-efficacy when examining relationships, because it has been shown to have a significant effect on “academic performance, both directly by affecting quality of thinking and good use of acquired cognitive skills and indirectly by heightening persistence in the search for solutions” (Bandura, 1997, p. 216). Although, self-efficacy alone will not result in attaining
higher academic performance, skill acquisition, along with outcome expectancies and self-efficacy, all contribute to academic learning (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 1991).

Because self-efficacy plays such a vital role in students’ academic performance, teachers must cultivate their students’ sense of self-efficacy, by providing frequent and explicit feedback while monitoring progress and affirming students’ capabilities (Bandura, 1997). Teachers have the power to build students’ self-efficacy by recognizing their academic accomplishments and use of cognitive strategies. Conversely, by degrading student performance, teachers have the ability to stunt academic performance by diminishing students’ self-efficacy, which could result in a lack of effort to succeed. For example, when students doubt their ability to achieve academic success, they are more likely to disengage in school and instead display problem behaviors (Bandura, 1997). Therefore, teachers should recognize when students’ meet specific performance goals as a way to increase students’ motivation for continued success.

Much as student self-efficacy is related to student achievement, teacher self-efficacy is also related to teaching effectiveness (Friedman & Kass, 2002; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). According to Bandura (1997), teachers who believe in their teaching ability create better learning experiences and set higher standards for their students, than those who doubt their ability to effectively educate all students. “Teachers with a high sense of efficacy tend to view difficult students as reachable and teachable and regard their learning problems as surmountable...Teachers of low perceived efficacy are inclined to invoke low student ability as an explanation for why their students cannot be taught” (p. 242).
Bandura (1997) argues, when teachers think they cannot make a difference, students are often considered uneducable, which results in segregating and stigmatizing students.

Because relationships are transactional, self-efficacy theory has important implications for teacher-student relationships at both the teacher and student levels. According to self-efficacy theory, both teachers and students must believe their actions can positively influence relationships before their behaviors will change. If teachers and students alike do not recognize the role that their interactions play in contributing to the quality of teacher-student relationships, they will have little motivation to change their interactions. Likewise, if teachers and students do not associate changing their interactions with changes in students’ academic and behavioral outcomes, the likelihood that those interactions will change is minimized.

**Power and Conflict**

In a classroom setting, power plays a pivotal role in the relationship that develops between teachers and students. The organizational structure of the classroom requires the teacher to possess and maintain a certain level of authority. However, some student behaviors may result from resistance to teacher authority (Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Nation, Vieno, Perkins, & Santinello, 2008; Park, 2008). The use of coercive power by teachers is significantly correlated to students’ dissatisfaction with school (Jamieson & Thomas, 1974). Power-conflict theory suggests student conflict with teachers is attributable to students seeking to minimize the power differential between students and teachers, while teacher behaviors may result from a desire to maintain power. Therefore, it is important to
examine how perceptions of teacher authority contribute to student behaviors and teacher-student interactions, which both contribute to teacher-student relationship quality. Additionally, the organizational structures of classrooms and traditional views of teacher control and authority must undergo research to determine when and how teacher control should be exerted to best support positive relationships between students and teachers.

A meta-analysis by Cornelius-White (2007) found learner-centered teacher practices that included shared decision making between students and teachers had above-average correlations with positive student outcomes, such as IQ, grades, reduction in disruptive behavior, and verbal and math achievement when compared to teacher-centered, authoritarian practices. Learner-centered instruction was also found to improve the language and math achievement of students who were identified as at risk for dropping out of school (Alfassi, 2004) and to increase engagement in activities in second language classrooms (Anton, 1999). Power-conflict theory asserts student and teacher behaviors may be a result of seeking to achieve greater power in the classroom. Research shows learner-centered teaching practices within the classroom improve student outcomes and supports the use of shared authority as a way to minimize conflict and improve teacher-student relationships.

Wheatley (2005) also recognized the value of shared power within the classroom by questioning the use of then current teacher efficacy scales, which valued teachers’ exertion of personal control, even though he argued “letting go” of traditional concepts of control is essential for democratic teaching. He contended
teacher efficacy research should focus more on how teachers increase feelings of efficacy through shared power with students rather than through direct control. Likewise, Burbules (2004) questioned the inherent dilemmas of misusing teacher authority. He raised questions such as: How do we foster student autonomy in the midst of teacher authority? How do we get students to want to do what we want them to do, instead of using authority to force compliance? How do traditional expectations of teachers as managers perpetuate the use of authoritative practices and the segregation or removal of students who question that authority? And how do we foster students to be critical thinkers while simultaneously exercising direct control? These questions highlight the role of power-conflict theory in the development of positive teacher-student relationships. It is logical to assume if teachers seek to force compliance to fulfill existing expectations of themselves as managers, and students seek autonomy to minimize the power differential, conflict will ensue. In order, to maintain positive teacher-student relationships, interventions must seek to minimize the conflict associated with differing levels of power within the classroom.

**Gaps in the Literature**

The review reveals gaps in the literature. Many of the studies reviewed relied solely on teacher reports of teacher-student relationship quality, without considering student perceptions of relationship quality. This may be because most methods for measuring student-teacher relationship quality are developed for younger students, which are more likely to rely on teacher reports (Suldo et al., 2013). Because student perceptions of relationship quality differ from classroom
observations and teacher reports (Babad, 1993; Murray, Murray, & Waas, 2008; Murray, Waas, & Murray, 2008), they should be considered when measuring relationship quality. Also, because students provide unique insights, their perceptions should help guide development of interventions seeking to improve relationship quality. It is imperative that student perceptions of relationships are considered, because their perspectives can help identify the steps needed to improve relationship quality. Therefore, student perspectives will be garnered through the proposed qualitative study. Additionally, as Murray and Malmgren (2005) pointed out, new tools should be developed and validated that measure older students’ perceptions of relationship quality. The proposed study will help contribute to this area by identifying features of teacher-student relationships that can be observed and measured in future studies.

An additional gap in the literature is a lack of consideration of implications for students with disabilities. Most studies that measured correlations between relationship quality and student outcomes did not report whether students with disabilities were included. Furthermore, disability was rarely considered as a variable that could have an impact on teacher-student relationships. Although studies considered learning and behavioral problems and at-risk factors, most did not identify if diagnosed disabilities were present. Specifically, there is little in the literature on teacher-student relationships and students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) (Mihalas et al., 2009). Because the studies reviewed indicated student behaviors contributed to teacher-student relationships, the proposed study will examine the perceptions of students with disabilities who
exhibit challenging behaviors to further uncover how their behaviors impact their relationships with their teachers. More research is needed to uncover how interactions with teachers influence student perceptions of their relationships with their teachers, especially for students with ED (Murray & Greenberg, 2001). This research could have implications for teachers, teacher-educators, and researchers. If student characteristics associated with disabilities contribute to negative teacher-student relationships, teachers should be educated on the role that disability plays in student characteristics and the role that teacher-student relationships play in improving the outcomes of students with disabilities.

Another gap in the literature is a lack of studies measuring interventions aimed at improving teacher-student relationship quality. The review of literature signifies a need for positive teacher-student relationships that contribute to improving student outcomes. However, few studies provide guidance to teachers on how to develop positive relationships with students. Only one intervention sought to change teacher-student relationship quality, and it was implemented at the preschool level with only modest gains. Questions still remain about what components must be in place for positive relationships to exist and how to best support and develop teachers’ abilities to connect and relate to their students in positive ways. Therefore, the current study seeks to better understand the factors that should be considered when developing interventions and professional development programs aimed at improving teacher-student relationships.

The Purpose
The purpose of this study was to research the student perspective of what teachers can do to foster positive teacher-student relationships. Currently, most studies investigating the role and importance of teacher-student relationships rely solely on teacher reports, without considering the student perceptions of relationship quality (Roorda et al., 2011).

This study was designed to add to the student perspective on what defines positive student teacher relationships and how to target and improve the relationships. Specifically, the study also sought to gather perspectives from students who have been identified as having a disability and exhibiting severe challenging behaviors. The goal of this research is to use the insights of students with disabilities to increase teacher awareness of how to develop positive relationships and to help researchers develop interventions that target areas students identify as instrumental in improving teacher-student relationship quality.

The review of literature revealed how imperative positive teacher-student relationships are for adolescent students who exhibit challenging behaviors. The theoretical literature suggests the following: (a) teacher and student behaviors are reciprocal, (b) whether or not teachers or students will change their interactions depends on whether they believe the change will actually influence the relationship, and (c) student behaviors are related to minimizing the power differential between students and teachers, while teacher behaviors are a result of trying to maintain control. Unfortunately, little is known about what adolescents with challenging behaviors believe contributes to teacher-student relationship quality. Therefore, the following research questions were developed to better understand the
perspective of students and to uncover whether students believe these theoretical components are indeed related to the quality of their relationships with their teachers.

**Research Questions**

1. How do students who exhibit challenging behaviors define positive student teacher relationships, for example, what factors do they believe contribute to positive relationships? *How do their perceptions compare with teacher perceptions?*

2. How do students who exhibit challenging behaviors define negative student teacher relationships, for example, what factors do they believe contribute to negative relationships? *How do their perceptions compare with teacher perceptions?*

3. Is there any indication that students believe teacher behaviors; student choices in classrooms; and students’ self-efficacy influence teacher-student relationship quality? *How do their perceptions compare with teacher perceptions?*
CHAPTER 2: Methodology

Research Design

Because the purpose of this study was to explore what students perceive as the integral factors of positive teacher-student relationships to guide real world applications, pragmatism served as the basis for the research design (Creswell, 2009). The conceptual framework guided the research questions and interview protocol. The researcher then inductively organized the data into the themes that emerged across focus groups (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2002).

Sites

The sites included alternative schools in three large school districts in the Midwest. See Table 1 for a description of the sites. Alternative schools are schools that are “designated as a setting for students who are not succeeding in traditional schools” (Lehr, Moreau, L Ange, & Lanners, 2004, p. 3). These alternative schools were selected because the schools specifically serve students with disabilities who exhibit challenging behaviors, including, but not limited to, students with ED. For the purposes of this study, challenging behavior was defined as a problem behavior that interferes with learning. Students are placed in the proposed alternative schools if their Individualized Education Program (IEP) team decides the intensity, frequency, or duration of the student’s behaviors are such that the student’s home school is not an appropriate placement. The principals of each of the following alternative schools specified the goal of the schools is to teach students the skills they need to return to their home school.

Table 1.
Site Description
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District A</th>
<th>District B</th>
<th>District C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Consolidation of Seven Suburban and Rural School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000 students</td>
<td>13,800 Students</td>
<td>Districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800 staff</td>
<td>1,300 Teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grades K-12</td>
<td>Grades 6-12</td>
<td>Grades 3-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 students</td>
<td>102 students</td>
<td>25 Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55.8% qualify for free and reduced lunch</td>
<td>87% considered economically disadvantaged</td>
<td>88% qualify for free and reduced lunch</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

District A is a suburban school that serves more than 10,000 students and employs more than 800 certified staff. The ethnicity of students in district A is approximately 71.7% white, 10.7% African American, 8.7% Hispanic, and 8% other. School A has a slightly less diverse population than the district average. 27% of the students in District A qualify for free and reduced lunch, compared to 55.8% who qualify at School A. The dropout rate at the school was approximately 50% in 2010, but dropped to about 15% in 2011. School A is a specialized school that provides targeted services to students with disabilities in grades K-12. In 2012, 41 students were enrolled in the school. (All demographic information was collected from principal interviews, districts websites, and state department of education report cards.)

District B is an inner city school district that serves more than 13,800 students and employs more than 1,300 teachers. 76% of students in the district are
economically disadvantaged. The ethnicity of students in the district are as follows: 41.64% white, 26.67% Hispanic, 20.55% African American, and 11% other. The school in District B is a special purpose school, serving students in grades 6-12. School B has an enrollment of approximately 100 students, all of whom are identified as having a disability. 87.25% of the students in the school are considered economically disadvantaged. The ethnicity of students in the building is 41.18% White, 27.45% African American, 16.67% Hispanic, and 14.71% other. The dropout rate for the school was 13.6% in 2010, compared to 2.9% for the district and 1.5% in the state during the same year.

School C is an alternative school for students with disabilities who have been long term suspended or expelled from their home school districts. It serves a consortium of seven small school districts that do not have alternative schools within their own school districts. School C serves students in 3rd through 12th grade. The school currently serves 25 students. Some students are at the school for specified amounts of time, due to a zero tolerance policy in their home district for serious offenses, such as bringing a gun to school. In other instances, the school works to transition students back to their home schools, but as the principal said, “sometimes the school districts are just so fed up with them, that they just send them here and we have to work really hard to try to get them back” and “sometimes the parents say I don't want my kid back at that school, so it is a team decision.” The team includes the parents along with representatives from the child’s home school and the alternative school. According to the principal, sometimes parents fight for their child to remain at the alternative school, because they believe the alternative
school is doing a better job of meeting their child’s needs. 88% of the students at School C qualify for free or reduced lunch.

Student focus groups were conducted in Schools A and B. The teacher focus group was conducted in School C.

Sample

Purposive sampling was used to identify focus group representatives who met the desired study characteristics (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Subjects were students in grades 5 through 12 who were attending an alternative school for students with disabilities who exhibit challenging behaviors. Two student focus groups were conducted at each of schools A and B, for a total of four student focus groups. Each student focus group had four or five participants, for a total of 17 student participants. See Table 2 for a description of focus group participants. Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) recommends between six to twelve participants in a focus group to ensure enough people contribute to the discussion but ensuring that the group still remains manageable. However, smaller focus groups were utilized based on recommendations from the schools’ principals to ensure the groups were manageable. The principals felt the students would be more comfortable in smaller groups based on the students’ grade levels. Therefore, focus groups were formed based on the grade level of the participants, in order to keep group members within the same age range. At each school, two focus groups were formed: a middle school focus group (grades 5-8) and a high school group (grades 9-12). Although research shows gender composition affects the interactions within focus groups, with girls being less forthcoming in mixed gender groups (Stewart &
Shamdasani, 1990), the groups were not homogenous by gender because of the disproportionate representation of boys at the schools. Because of the limited number of girls at each school, it was not feasible to create focus groups that consisted solely of girls. Although the researcher feared adolescents might be more intimidated to speak freely in mixed gender focus groups, this did not appear to be a concern during the focus groups, where all participants contributed heavily to the discussions, regardless of gender.

Table 2
*Focus Group Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group 1 (High School) School A (Name; Grade; Disability)</th>
<th>Focus Group 1 (High School) School B</th>
<th>Teacher Focus Group School C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kevin; Grade 12; ID, ED</td>
<td>Collin; Grade 11; AM</td>
<td>Wilma: High School Teacher; 35 Years experience; Social Studies and Language Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth; Grade 10; ED</td>
<td>Andy; Grade 9; OHI</td>
<td>Melissa: High School Teacher; 4 Years Teaching Experience; Math and Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew; Grade 11; ED</td>
<td>Leslie; Grade 10; ID</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levi; Grade 10; ED</td>
<td>Dan; Grade 11; OHI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group 2 (Middle School) School A</th>
<th>Focus Group 2 (Middle School) School B</th>
<th>Jamie; Middle School; 5 Years Teaching Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rick; Grade 6; OHI</td>
<td>David; Grade 7; ED</td>
<td>Steve; Elementary; 17 Years Teaching Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josh; Grade 8; ED</td>
<td>Ivan; Grade 7; OHI</td>
<td>Mandy; Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ally; Grade 7; ED</td>
<td>Katy; Grade 8; ED</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anna; Grade 8; ED</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tim; Grade 8; OHI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Autism (AM); Intellectual Disability (ID); Emotional Disturbance (ED); Other Health Impaired (OHI)

Comparison data was also gathered from one teacher focus group in an alternative school for students with challenging behaviors (School C). To help maintain confidentiality, teacher participants did not work in the same school or district as student participants. The teacher focus group consisted of four teacher participants and the school principal; the group consisted of one male and four females.

Access and Sample Selection

After obtaining approval from the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (Appendix A), the researcher contacted district level representatives from three school districts that included alternative schools for students who exhibit challenging behaviors. The researcher completed all district requirements that were needed to conduct research. After district permission was obtained, initial contact was made with potential participants. The principal of each school contacted parents of students in grades 5-12 providing a general description of the nature of the research (Appendix B) and asking if the parent would be interested in allowing their child to participate in the focus group. Parents who provided initial interest in participating were given consent letters (Appendix C) with more details about the study. When necessary, a follow-up attempt was made by the principals to recruit participants. Prior to conducting the focus group, the researcher obtained signed informed parent consent letters and student assent (Appendix D) to participate in the discussion. All participants in grades 5-12 who expressed interest
were selected from each of the two schools to participate in two separate focus
groups per school. The researcher provided snack foods to student participants
during the focus groups and spent time before the focus group in informal
discussion to make the student participants more comfortable.

The researcher also sent out a brief description of the study to all of the
teachers who teach at the alternative school (School C), which was different from
the schools and districts the student participants attended. All teachers and the
principal at school C indicated an interest in participating and therefore were
selected to participate in a focus group used to compare teacher perceptions to
themes identified during the student focus groups. Prior to participating in the
focus groups, teacher participants were asked to give signed informed consent
(Appendix F). Teacher participants were given a $20 gift card to compensate them
for time spent in the focus group outside of their school contract day.

**Focus Groups**

Because this study was exploratory and sought to gather student and teacher
perceptions in their own words, with minimal research bias, focus groups were an
appropriate method for collecting data (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Focus
groups are commonly used to explore information about a topic and generate
theories prior to developing quantitative research. This study used focus groups to
gather exploratory information and identify hypotheses to develop intervention
studies that can be researched through quantitative methods. Focus groups were
used instead of individual interviews, because this method allows respondents to
“react and build upon the responses of other group members” (Stewart &
Shamdasani, 1990, p. 17). This method was best because the goal of the study was to allow students to describe student teacher relationships from their perspective, and focus groups allow the students to build upon their conversations with each other while describing their own experiences. Furthermore, children in the focus groups may be more apt to participate and share responses when they are in a group setting in which their peers are responding and sharing similar experiences. The focus group method also captures interactions within the group that may not arise in an interview format, such as teasing, arguing, and humor (Kitzinger, 1995). This method was also appropriate because it allowed the researcher to collect data from larger numbers of participants in a more efficient manner than individual interviews.

A semi-structured interview protocol was used for the focus groups (Appendix E). The focus group protocol was designed to address the primary research questions. The focus group questions were open-ended and developed or changed depending on the responses of the group. Probing questions were asked as needed to garner more in-depth responses.

The researcher used an informal concept mapping technique to elicit more student led participation in the focus group. To increase student involvement in generating the themes, rather than relying on res interview questions asked by the researcher, the students were asked to interact to construct a concept map of their ideas. The researcher provided examples of potential factors that contribute to relationships, then the researcher asked the participants to generate additional ideas, label, and sort the ways they think teachers can develop positive relationships
with their students (Trochim, 1989). Using the ideas that they generated, the group continued to further define and label examples of each idea, creating a visual concept map that was used as an additional data source to information gathered from the focus group interview questions. The visual served as a catalyst for organizing the collective thoughts of the group, while allowing the participants to visualize the relationships among the generated ideas in an engaging way (Valentine, 1989). It also increased student participation in the focus group by minimizing the role of the facilitator.

The focus groups were audio recorded. Along with the primary researcher, an additional doctoral student or researcher attended the student focus groups to help audio record the groups and to take field notes. The primary researcher facilitated the focus groups. The recordings were coded and pseudonyms were used so that no identifying information was attached to the recordings. All audio recordings were stored on a password-protected computer and used only for the purpose of this research study. Once the recordings were transcribed and coded, the audio recordings were destroyed. If parents provided signed consent, the researcher reviewed and gathered information about the student’s disability from the school district. The focus groups were conducted at a time and place that was mutually agreed upon by the school principal, teachers, parents, and students. Each focus group session lasted approximately one hour.

**Data Analysis**

After the focus groups were conducted, all audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and notes were typed up. After the initial transcription, the audio
recordings and transcriptions were checked again for accuracy. After the transcriptions were completed, the researcher read and reviewed them to begin making notes of initial broad themes. Then the researcher coded the data, by following the procedures recommended by Creswell (2009). First, the researcher identified the broad themes by carefully reviewing the transcripts, noting the ideas that emerged, and clustering the ideas into topics. Then, the researcher went back through the data and started to write codes next to segments of text. Initial codes were centered around the research questions and the conceptual framework developed from the theoretical review of literature (Coffey & Horner, 2012). The researcher used the constant comparative method to continually compare the codes until each categorical theme emerged across the focus group data (Merriam, 2002). After making a final decision on the codes, and assembling the data into each category, the researcher reviewed the data and recoded as needed (Creswell, 2009). After identifying themes and coding the data, the researcher provided a narrative description of the themes and how they were interconnected (Creswell, 2009). Finally, the researcher interpreted the data. To interpret that data, the researcher referred to the conceptual framework and identified how the findings supported or differed from the anticipated themes identified by the literature.

As suggested by Creswell (2009), to ensure consistency across the study, the following procedures were followed. The transcripts were checked to ensure they matched the audio recordings of the focus group interviews. The codes were constantly compared to the data to ensure the definition of the codes did not change. Only the primary researcher coded the data; however, a secondary researcher, with
a PhD in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, cross-checked the codes to indicate whether she agreed with the coding decisions. The primary researcher also utilized the second researcher to take notes, check themes, and check data analysis procedures to increase the dependability of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2005).

To ensure the findings accurately represent the perspectives of the participants, the researcher used informal member checking (Creswell, 2009). The researcher met with each student focus group for a follow-up session to share with them the general themes that emerged. At that time, the student participants provided feedback on the general findings. The researcher also emailed the initial themes to the members of the teacher focus group to verify the general themes that emerged and to gather their feedback. The teachers that participated in focus groups provided the researcher with their preferred email addresses to be used for the member check emails. The member check was based on general themes, as school was no longer in session when the final analysis was complete.

The students at school one and school two agreed with the general themes that were shared during the member check meeting. Students at both schools confirmed all themes and provided further examples of some themes as they were being discussed. The teachers were sent emails asking them to respond if they had any feedback, concerns, or suggestions to the initial themes that were developed. No teachers responded to the email seeking feedback on the themes that were shared.
Figure 2. Research Plan.

Ethical Concerns

To increase confidentiality of the participants, the student focus groups were conducted at a different school district than the teacher focus groups. This was to help minimize the risk that student responses would be shared with the students’ teachers. However, there was potential for school staff to know who participated in the focus groups. Additionally, there was a possibility members of the focus groups would share comments that were made during the interview. Therefore, consent and assent procedures addressed these concerns.
CHAPTER 3: Results

This study sought to better understand the perceptions of students who exhibit challenging behaviors regarding factors that contribute to positive and negative student teacher relationships. The research questions were developed to garner student perceptions of how they define positive and negative teacher-student relationships, what factors contribute to the quality of teacher-student relationships, and what role do the components of the conceptual framework play in teacher-student relationship quality. Additionally, the study gathered teacher perceptions to the research questions in order to better understand the similarities and differences between student and teacher perceptions of teacher-student relationships. The results were gathered from four student focus groups and 1 teacher focus group across three alternative schools. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants. See Table 3 for the broad themes and organizational categories.

Table 3
Broad Themes and Organizational Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad Themes</th>
<th>Organizational Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factors that contribute to positive teacher-student relationships</td>
<td>How teachers discipline problem behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Help students with problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relate to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Listen to student concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trust and respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors that contribute to negative teacher-student relationships</td>
<td>Inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broken trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of active supervision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposefully embarrass and agitate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removal from classroom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restraint</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student and teacher perceptions of the components of the conceptual framework</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power and conflict (offering student choice)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transactional interactions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unanticipated themes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using rewards and praise to manage student Behaviors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences between traditional and alternative schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question #1**

How do students who exhibit challenging behaviors define positive student teacher relationships, for example, what factors do they believe contribute to positive relationships? *How do their perceptions compare with teacher perceptions?*

The following themes emerged as factors that students believe define and contribute to positive teacher-student relationships: (a) When teachers use a calm tone and positive method to discipline students, (b) When teachers offer support to help students with problems they encounter, (c) When teachers relate to students and their interest, (d) When teachers actively listen to students and their concerns, (e) When teachers demonstrate respect for students by demonstrating trust.

**How Teachers Discipline Problem Behaviors**
One of the themes that emerged from the student focus groups was related to how teachers react to student behaviors. It is probably no surprise that there was general consensus among the students regarding the importance of the tone of voice that teachers use with them. When describing teachers they liked and had good relationships with, students would consistently use words like: laid back, mellow, sense of humor, and calm. More specifically, they described preferred teachers as those that talked softly in a calm voice without yelling. They noted it was frustrating when teachers would yell at students for yelling, saying they should model the behaviors they want to see from the students.

In addition to the tone of voice teachers used, students agreed that how teachers reacted when students made mistakes was related to how they viewed their relationship with their teacher. For example, Andrew said:

I really don’t like it when people point out when I’m wrong. I mean, I can take it to a certain extent, where they say OK this is wrong, and this is why, but if they just say your wrong, I’m right and make it a big deal, I don’t like that. So, like what I like in a teacher is not that they don’t tell me I’m wrong, but when I’m wrong, explain why.

When Rick described a laid-back teacher he had a good relationship with, he talked about how the teacher went with “whatever,” and did not get mad and frustrated when he did something wrong.

Students also talked about the strategies teachers would use when the students got angry and exhibited challenging behaviors. For example, Ally described how her preferred teacher would help her calm down “by taking deep
breaths and counting to ten and using Theraputty as a figit.” Other students agreed that the teachers they had positive relationships with would use strategies other than punishment to prevent and react to problem behavior, such as allowing students to take breaks. But Ivan pointed out it wasn’t that he wanted teachers to go easy on him, instead he described it as “tough love,” when teachers are hard on you and expect a lot from you, but they do it in a nice, encouraging way. He said he appreciates when teachers make him do things he does not want to do by pushing him and saying “you can do it.”

Although the teacher group agreed that it is important for teachers who work with students with challenging behaviors to be laid back, they also argued that some students needed teachers to be more laid back and others needed them to be more authoritarian. For example, Mandy, the principal, pointed out the students they work with “haven’t been successful in the teacher being the authority figure, in telling you what to do.” However, Jamie said it really depends on the individual student, because some students need a more firm, consistent, put the foot down kind of approach. The teachers also talked about the frustration they experience with some students and how that frustration can impact their responses. For example, Jamie described how a particular student’s behavior affects her tone of voice. She recalled a time when she “snapped” at a kid and was not as nice as she “should have been,” because she felt like the more problem behaviors he exhibited, the more she had to be “on his back.” Although this sentiment matches the types of experiences the students relayed, the students perceived this reaction to problem
behavior as being contradictory to developing positive teacher-student relationships.

**Help Students With Problems**

Students identified the help that teachers provided when students encountered problems as an important factor that contributed to positive teacher-student relationships. Students identified a range of problems that their preferred teachers would help with including problems related to home, school, work, and transitioning. It was important to the students in the focus groups for teachers to ask them what was wrong when they were having a problem and then to provide support, without judgment, specifically when it comes to difficulty with schoolwork. For example, Andy said he wished that when teachers saw that he was avoiding work, they would just pull him out and privately ask him what was wrong instead of just saying, “get to work.” Collin agreed, saying, “If a teacher sees you struggling some teachers will come over and ask you is there something wrong? And that’s a good teacher. If they see something wrong, they should come up and ask you.” He described one teacher that he had a particularly good relationship with who seemed to read him “like a book.” He said, “she could tell that I didn’t always have the best time in school, but if I had a problem she asked me after class, or during class, if I had trouble with work she’d always be there.”

One way students perceive teachers can offer support is by arranging peer supports. Students commented that they had better relationships with teachers who recognize who their friends are and provide opportunities for them to work together on activities. Conversely, they reacted negatively to teachers they felt went
out of their way to prevent peers from working together. Ally suggested more teachers should provide peer supports if students are having problems. Another area in which students said teachers provide help and support is when students are transitioning to post-school opportunities. Several focus groups brought up that teachers they had positive relationships with had played a valuable role in helping them prepare for post-school outcomes. For example, some students talked about how they appreciated when teachers wanted to know about their job interests and would relate their learning opportunities to the student career interests. Other students talked about teachers who had provided advice and guidance for life skills outside of the classroom, like where to get “food or clothing.” Additionally, students talked about how teachers they liked were instrumental in guiding their ability to achieve employment. For example, Levi described how a favorite teacher helped him get to an automotive mechanics program where he can get licensing and certification. Clearly, students relate the support teachers provide when preparing students for employment as contributing to the quality of their teacher-student relationships.

The teacher focus group also talked about the importance of helping to prepare students to transition out of school; however, their perceptions about what that looks like differed from the descriptions the students provided. The teachers talked about those services being provided by transition coordinators or vocational-rehab, or as something that was covered during an IEP meeting. They also related it to lessons they covered, such as budgeting worksheets. However, the teachers felt frustrated that the students do not seem to apply the lessons or discussions to their
life after school. The teachers described casual conversations that were not taken seriously by the students; whereas, the student descriptions were examples of specific actions teachers had taken to help them achieve employment or to relate instruction to their vocational interests.

Additionally, the teachers often talked in general terms about how much the students needed their support, help, and guidance. They saw themselves as responsible for helping to prepare students for the “real world.” Sometimes this came across as causing stress and anxiety for the teachers, because they felt as if they were not able to help prepare or motivate students. However, it also emerged as a motivator for teachers. For example, Steve, said:

I think the students they’ve been the reason why I’ve showed up to work for 17 years, especially this population of kids. These are kids that are often they’re from pretty rough environments . . . I just don’t feel like they really have very many positive role models. And they don’t have really anybody in their corner pulling for them and rooting for them, so it’s easy sometimes to get frustrated and say you know I think I’ll go find something else to do, . . . and then you think about these kids and that’s really what keeps me going, because . . . this group of kids, they really need somebody.

Relate to Students

Another defining factor that students attributed to positive teacher student relationships was when teachers were able to relate to their students. Students felt particularly close to teachers that they thought could relate to their problems, because the teacher has had similar experiences or understands what it is like. They
described teachers they liked as being easier to talk to, because they really understood how the student felt, instead of just saying that they did.

Students also wanted teachers ask them about their interests and then to incorporate their interests into learning opportunities. For example, Rick gave an example of a favorite teacher who knew he was interested in inventions, so she provided him with a tub of activities related to that interest and she talked to him about using his inventions to someday become an engineer. Rick said, when teachers ask about your life outside of school, “it shows they’re invested.” But he cautioned, “there are very few teachers who actually still do that.”

Students specifically attributed positive relationships to teachers who understood challenging experiences the students would face, especially when teachers would use their own experiences to help the students solve problems. For example, Andrew described how Mr. W. is able to help Andrew because he is able to relate to Andrew’s problem:

Mr. W. he helps me a lot with problems I have, (...) he uses sometimes his own personal examples with it, or if I have a problem, I can’t fix by myself, he sometimes even does homework or research, off the record, sometimes for me.

Andy talked about a teacher who knows his family and understands the challenges his family goes through, so she is able to talk to him about it and help him get through it. He thinks part of a positive teacher-student relationship is, “If you have somebody there and they’re listening to you, and you don’t feel like you’re going
through it alone. You have somebody there that knows what you’re talking about and knows what you’re going through.”

It should be noted that some students said they do not always want teachers to know about their life and interests outside of school. For example, Andrew said he likes to keep his school and home life separate. And other students felt that when teachers asked too many questions, it would come across as prying into things that were not their business. Although the students agreed that some level of interest in their personal interests was appropriate, there was a limit to what they found acceptable, adding the caveat that they only felt that level of comfort with some teachers.

The teacher focus group concurred that one way they try to develop positive relationships with students is to talk to them about their interests outside of school, including work, families, and hobbies. The teachers argued that when they were discussing things outside of school it was easier to talk to students and have positive interactions; however, they struggled to maintain that relationship because they felt pressured to push students academically, which would then strain the relationship. Melissa explained that students are very willing to talk and relate about things outside of school, as long as “it’s not focused on academics.” When teachers were expecting students to do their schoolwork and students would push back, teachers found it more difficult to have positive interactions. With that said, all of the teachers agreed it is important to talk to students about their students’ lives and interests outside of school in order to foster positive teacher-student relationships.

**Listen to Student Concerns**
Students said it was not just important for teachers to relate to them and talk to them about their interests, it was also important that teachers listen to students. The students said that in general teachers would often spend so much time talking that they did not really listen to what students thought. Furthermore, they wanted it to be meaningful when teachers would listen to them, instead of acting like other teachers who as one student said, “just like pretend to be listening and not be listening to you at all.” When describing a good relationship with a teacher, Levi said:

She’s actually listening, and she doesn’t just talk and talk and talk and don’t let me talk, she just sits there and then she asks me, . . . and then she like tells me ways that I can help with that problem.

Leslie summed it up for the students by saying, “teachers need to listen, and not just listen to their professors that taught them how to be a teacher, but to listen to the students as well as the professors that taught them.”

The teachers agreed that part of developing a positive relationship with students involves listening. But the teacher group said it is not enough to just listen to students, but teachers must also show students that they can listen to their students concerns and problems without passing judgment. Steve said, “Sometimes it’s just lending an ear. And letting them talk to you about whatever’s going on. And they need to know that you’re not going to judge them.”

**Trust and Respect**

Showing respect was the most frequently provided example of what teachers should do to develop positive relationships with their students. Four out of five of
the focus groups, including the teacher focus group, ordered respect, or respect and trust, as the most important feature of positive teacher student relationships during the informal concept mapping activity. When students were asked what they wish teachers would do for their students, respect was frequently the response. For example, Ivan said, “For the teachers to get respect they need to respect their students, because they’re humans. They’re no higher than what students are.” Tim explained that trust and respect are important because:

When you first meet your teacher you’re kinda cautious if you’re going to be able to have a good relationship or bad or if you’re going to like them or not, or if they’re just going to get on your nerves or not, all school year, but once they show you respect and trust you’ll be a little bit more open, then those two will help almost convince you…to think they’re caring.

One way students thought teachers show respect is by trusting students and giving them some responsibility, like having them help with the class or trusting them to be more independent. Another way teachers show students they respect them is by noticing their positive qualities. For example, Andrew said he had teachers who “showed me that I have a lot more potential than I think and I have a lot more good, so to speak, in my heart than I want to believe.”

The teacher focus group also gave examples of the importance of building trust and respect with students. They believed that students have to trust teachers before they can make progress in the classroom. Several teachers talked about “not giving up” on students and that students have to trust that you care about them before they will build a relationship with you. During the concept mapping activity,
they agreed with the students that trust and respect are the most important building blocks to positive teacher-student relationships, but the teachers also argued that some students just will not trust teachers, because of their past experiences.

**Research Question #2**

How do students who exhibit challenging behaviors define negative student teacher relationships, for example, what factors do they believe contribute to negative relationships? *How do their perceptions compare with teacher perceptions?*

The following themes emerged as factors that students believe define and contribute to negative teacher-student relationships: (a) when teachers demonstrate inequality towards disciplining students, (b) when teachers break trust with their students, (c) when teachers do not use active supervision in the classroom, (d) when teachers purposefully agitate or embarrass students as punishment, (e) when teachers remove students from the classroom, (f) when teachers restrain students.

**Inequality**

Across all of the student focus groups, there was one theme that the students consistently brought up when describing the factors that define and contribute to negative teacher-student relationships. The students had strong negative reactions when they felt teachers treated students unfairly. This was evident in more than one way. For example, some students talked about how teachers treated students as less important in general, by saying things like that teacher “thinks he’s higher up, I know he’s a teacher and everything, but like the attitude towards the students.”
Other students agreed saying some teachers act like they are better than the students, even describing some teachers as acting like “a high dollar person.” Students also believed sometimes teachers had different expectations for the students than they did for themselves. The students seemed very aware of when teachers demonstrated behaviors that they disciplined students for, such as “showing attitude.” Like when one student said a teacher disciplined him for cussing, even though the student accused the teacher of cussing back to him in response.

Students also felt teachers had favorite students, which resulted in some students getting falsely accused of things they did not do. Students provided numerous examples of how they thought teachers had blamed them for things that were not their fault. Andy even described how some students would abuse that to purposely get less preferred students in trouble. He said:

Kids will actually try to imitate another kid so if they get in trouble they want the other kid to get in trouble, when you’re the one who’s actually just sitting there doing your work. Next thing I know you’re getting yelled at by a teacher, and you’re like what the fudge did I just do.

Some students felt like teachers treated them unfairly by disciplining them for things they did not do. Students said that when teachers did this it would lead to frustration and anger, which in turn led to more serious behaviors. Beth said:

I had a teacher who I felt didn’t treat me fairly. Like an example is my friends were talking in lunch and I was sitting next to them and she yelled at me for it. And we got in this big fight and I had to go to the safe area because I was
telling her I didn’t talk and she said I was talking back to her. And we got in this big fight.

Rick gave an example of how he felt picked on by a teacher, to the point that it caused him to drop out of summer school. He said:

In fifth grade summer school, ... there was this teacher, she was just so nice to everybody but me. She would point me out. She would literally bully me. It was very sad. I was like at home very emotional because she would single me out and it was all about me not anybody else. So, I ended up just quitting summer school.

Other times students seemed to lack an understanding of why they were being disciplined, which led them to perceive that teachers were only doing it because they did not like the student. For example, Andrew said about one teacher:

He would write me up just for the heck of it and I didn’t know what to do, So, he just kept doing it and doing it and doing it and then that’s when I finally got introduced to an alternative school, which was the worst thing in my life.

Levi concurred saying one teacher just “wrote me up all the time and then like pulled me out of class and made me stay in his office . . . until the end of the day. It just made no sense.”

Interestingly, although this theme emerged across all of the student focus groups, it did not come up as a concern for the teachers. Teachers did not perceive that they treated students unfairly. Instead they attributed their interactions with the students to the students’ behaviors. They considered their own interactions to be individualized to what the students “needed,” such as some students need more
firmness, but they did not equate this practice as relating to a level of fairness or inequality.

**Broken Trust**

Considering trust and respect were viewed as essential building blocks of positive relationship, it is not surprising breaking trust between teachers and students was considered a defining characteristic of conflict within those relationships. The students indicated that when teachers break their trust, it damages their relationship. They attributed broken trust to when they felt teachers were dishonest, or if they thought teachers were talking about them behind their backs. The students gave several examples of when they felt like teachers would talk about them in negative ways to other teachers, which caused the students to have negative feelings towards the teachers. One student considers it “rude” when he overhears teachers talking in the hallways or classrooms about other students. And more than one student gave examples of overhearing teachers talk about other students in negative ways. Furthermore, some teachers would even talk about their personal home life to other teachers, which constituted a breach of trust to the student. He said, “one teacher would talk to another teacher and then they’ll find out your business at your own house.” He considered this an example of the other teacher sticking their “nose in someplace that it’s not wanted.” One student thought that trust was further broken when teachers betrayed their trust to other students, saying teachers will find out what happens and then they will tell other kids.

Teachers also considered broken trust a component of negative relationships with students, but they saw it as related to thinking they had a good relationship
with a student, to then have the student turn on them. The teacher group talked about how disappointing it was to find out that after building up a relationship for so long, something could cause a student to completely sever the relationship. Other teachers talked about how it was hard when they would believe they had a good relationship with a student, but then when the student left the school they would never hear from the student again. In other words, the teachers seemed hesitant to invest too much into relationships they saw as temporary or fragile.

Wilma described it like this:

The first couple times it happened it broke my heart because I thought, you know, we were on a really good keel, but now, I find myself when I’m trying to develop a relationship with a student still trying to take everything with a proverbial grain of salt. Because, I know that something could happen and then all the sudden I’m the bad guy and you know, don’t want to talk to me, don’t want to do anything, after I felt that we had established a very good rapport. But, there’ve been countless students that I have felt that we had a good relationship with, but then sometimes those relationships haven’t fallen apart, but they haven’t been very well cemented either. You know, after they’ve gone on or after they’ve moved to another school, it’s pretty much gone.

**Lack of Active Supervision**

Another factor that one student, Tim, attributed to negative relationships was when he perceived teachers were unaware of what was going on in the classroom. This student attributed the absence of active supervision in the
classroom to causing problems among students. He perceived his teachers did not care about what was going on in the classroom. As Tim said, “they should like stand in the front of the room instead of letting their guard down by looking down at their computer typing. It's basically letting they kids do anything want as long as they don’t make a sound.” As the focus group facilitator, I observed indications of other students treating Tim in an unkind way, for example, calling him “teacher's pet” and groaning when he would talk, so it is understandable that his teachers would need to utilize active supervision to prevent bullying types of behaviors by his peers. It is also not surprising that when a teacher does not supervise this behavior, Tim attributes it to damaging to his relationship with the teacher.  

Tim said:

I get bullied a lot and it’s mostly when no one is looking, so in Mr. B’s class he, one time he was on his phone and he was a little bit out of the room and then everyone else came to the door and I got slapped in the back of the head by another student, and he did not see it because he was looking the other way, and one time he was facing at his computer typing or something like that and something like that happened again.

He also said that when teachers are not watching, the students “cuss me out and call me names.”

**Purposefully Embarrass and Agitate**

Another example of a teacher behavior that students felt contributed to negative student-teacher relationships is when teachers would do things to embarrass students. The students’ perception was that teachers embarrass students purposefully as a way to punish them for negative behaviors. They found
it especially concerning when their teachers would make a public example of their misbehaviors “in front of the whole class.” For example, Ivan reacted angrily when describing how teachers are always saying, “Drama!” every time he has a problem. Andrew told a story about how he thought his English teacher loved to embarrass him in front of the class.

My English teacher, it was grammar . . . and she just loved to make it a public class event when I got something wrong . . . She would love to make it publicly known that I messed up on something. And . . . I don’t like when people put me in the open for a mistake I didn’t mean to make.

Andrew also told a story about how a teacher humiliated him in front of the class, when she told him to teach the class. He said,

I’ve had teachers in the past say that they think that I think that I don’t need to be there and I know all the stuff. And, one teacher of mine actually said that when everyone walked into the room. She closed the door and she was kinda um, I did not like her. She closed the door and said, well, today we have a special guest our star pupil, (Andrew) is going to teach the class and I was like ‘holy cow’ and the, it was really, it was not cool, because she made me stand up in front of the class and she handed me the lesson plans of the day and I was like, are you seriously doing this to me?

Similarly, Katy gave an example of how a teacher mimicked her in front of the class. She said, “I got into an argument with a teacher. Then he said I was acting like a baby and got down on the floor and started kicking his arms and legs going ‘waah’.
At School B, students talked about teachers embarrassing them by making fun of student’s family members. Ivan and Katy both relayed examples of how teachers had embarrassed them by talking negatively about their families. Katy said one of her teachers told her that her parents are uneducated. According to Katy, he said, “your parents aren’t educated. They didn’t even finish school.”

Not only did students remark that teachers would purposefully embarrass them, they also thought teachers would purposefully try to agitate them and push their buttons, which they saw as contributing to students’ problem behaviors. For example, Leslie said:

Like they’ll agitate you and they’ll take and sit there and deliberately continue to agitate you when you are sitting here politely doing your work or something and it’s like what’s your problem you know? If you’ve got a problem with me you’re going to have a problem with another student and another student’s going to take fault with that and then it’s going to start a big ole racket in the classroom. Like one time I saw Mrs. … arguing with another student and another student was arguing with another student and it made it worse. And it the person started fighting the other person and they had to call security, like why bother?

Another student gave an example of how he felt like a teacher would purposefully irritate him by picking on issues related to his disability. For example, Rick explained that it really bothers him when things are not neatly stacked, which he attributes to his “OCD and ADHD.” During the focus group, he even demonstrated this by organizing the researcher’s note cards. Despite this frustration, he explained
how he had a teacher who purposefully puts things “tilted out of shape” so that the
student will have to fix them, just because he “loves to get on my bad side,” and
“whenever I say something he just doesn’t drop the subject at all ever.”

Although students perceived teacher behaviors as being purposeful to
embarrass or irritate students, the teacher group attributed the ways they treated
students to the pressure and sometimes frustration that came with trying to teach
students the academic and social curriculum. When the teachers talked about their
interactions with students, it was related to trying to teach students content that
was often too difficult for the students. The teachers also felt responsible for
teaching students social curriculum to prepare them for the real world. The
pressure to teach these lessons would often result in frustrating both the teachers
and the students. So unlike the students, the teachers did not believe that their
interactions were intended to purposefully bother or embarrass students, but the
teachers did talk about how sometimes they react out of frustration due to the
pressure they feel to teach students about the “real world.” Jamie said:

I have relationship with a student, and he drives me crazy. And, so it really
makes me kinda take a step back and be like am I doing the right thing every
day. Am I having enough patience with him everyday and maybe not, but
then at the same time I still have to teach him that some of the things that he
says, it’s not appropriate for the real world.

**Removal from Classroom**

Another theme students associated with negative relationships is when
teachers would remove students from the classroom as a response to problem
behaviors. The students were clear in their belief that when students were removed from the classroom, through office referrals and in school or out of school suspensions, they got further behind on their work. Andy described the cycle of missing work when being removed from the classroom, which just led to more work, and resulted in more frustration with work, which further caused students to exhibit behaviors that led to them being removed from the classroom.

Yeah because you don’t get to learn and like they don’t give you the chance to explain. They don’t explain it so you don’t know what you’re doing and it gets all confusing. And so we’re like this uhhh? And they expect you to know what to learn. They expect you to do the work like the next chapter or whatever, … if you were suspended or something, if you didn’t get to be in class for learning, you don’t know what you’re doing so you’re just sitting there instead. And then you get in trouble because you can’t, you don’t know how to do the work so you can’t do it, and so you get in trouble for not doing the work.

Students also talked about how removal from the classroom made them feel singled out. When describing the emotions related to being removed from the class the students at School A (middle school focus group) said:

Ally: It makes me feel really sad and emotional.

Rick: Left out. Singled out. Like ...

Josh: Nobody cares about you.

Rick: It kind of makes you blame yourself too like it’s always your fault when sometimes it isn’t even.
Some students also attributed feelings of anger to being removed from class. Ally described what it was like to miss preferred activities when she was removed from being with the rest of her class, by being sent to a special education classroom:

My substitute Ms. (...), well she wasn’t very nice to me because every time I had like some emotional feelings she would make me go to Ms. (...) room and she never let me come back there until I—let me come back to the computer lab. And so, I didn’t have to do the computer lab, which it made me mad because I loved the computer lab so much. And that’s not nice that she had to not let me go there.

Ally was even able to identify what triggers led to the behaviors that got her removed from the class to an out of school suspension (OSS):

Well when I was feeling a little stressed out with my work because I had a lot of work. Well, I get so mad and I tip chairs and I scream and yell and I throw something and my teacher, Mrs. (...) had to call my special ed. teacher Mrs. (...) she had to call the principal down and I always get an OSS for being so naughty.

The high school students at school B were very clear that teachers “regardless of what school you’re at” will “provoke” students and then they will send them out of class. Dan pointed out, “Most of us kids are still learning, so if they send you out of class what are you learning? Just learning how to get out of class.”

Although students perceived removal from class as a punitive measure with little value, the teacher focus group perceived removal from class as something students “need” to help them “cool down.” The teachers at School C sometimes
utilized cool down rooms. Mandy described removal to the cool down room in terms of helping the students avoid or calm down from escalations:

We encourage the kids to try to go there on their own before they blow, or they will be asked if they are disruptive to the class to go there, and you know they are at that level where I think they need it.

**Restraint**

Not only did students identify removal from the classroom as detrimental to student-teacher relationships, they also talked at length about the damage to relationships caused when teachers restrain students. Some students just talked about not liking it when teachers got in their physical space, while others reflected on times when teachers physically restrained them. One student in particular, Kevin, shared this experience, which ultimately led to his removal from school:

I had a principal at (...) middle school that I did not like because he was kinda mean to me and carried me down the hall. And I would just...and came up to his office and he had to restrain me, and I didn’t like that. So, I was really scared how he does that, so, cause I had problems over some issue, because I was getting mad because I was frustrated or something and so I didn’t like it when the principal said don’t get frustrated with us (?) so I got mad and so he took me and carried me down the hall. I was screaming and kicking and I was like, so he had to restrain me, so I had bad behavior and that’s why I got kicked out of school.

When asked what he wished the principal would have done differently, Kevin said, “I wish I could have walked down there with him and I could go to his office instead
of carrying me.” While other students did not comment directly about restraint, several students talked about how when they are feeling angry, teachers should not stand so close, get in their space, or touch students. For example, when asked what teachers can do to help if students are feeling angry, one student responded, “not touch you.”

Much like the practice of removing students from class, the teacher group also considered restraint to sometimes be what the students needed to stay safe. They specified that it should only be used if a student is going to harm himself or others, and they talked about the importance of documenting the use of restraint and following state guidelines. However, they did not reflect on whether they thought utilizing restraint was damaging to the relationships they had with the students. They talked in terms of sometimes needing it for safety reasons, and Jamie talked about how other people don’t understand it, because they don’t understand what it is like “in this kind of setting.” She said she doesn’t think people realize what behaviors occur at the school. Melissa recognized that there seemed to be fewer restraints at the high school level, because students were better able to verbalize how they feel.” She said:

Definitely it seems to be more necessary the younger the kid is, or the less mature the kid is. We don’t do a lot of restraining at the high school end of it. Number one it’s harder to do, but I think it’s because they actually have better vocal skills and they have the words to curse you out and tell you how they feel.

Research Question #3
Is there any indication that students believe teacher behaviors; student choices in classrooms; and students’ self-efficacy influence teacher-student relationship quality? *How do their perceptions compare with teacher perceptions?* Student and teacher perceptions of the following categorical themes related to the conceptual framework were explored: (a) self-efficacy, (b) power and conflict, offering choice in the classroom, and (c) the transactional nature of the relationship.

**Self-efficacy**

Because student self-efficacy has been shown to have a significant effect on student academic performance (Bandura, 1997), it is important to consider whether students believe they have the ability to influence student-teacher relationship quality, or whether they think they have no control over whether or not teachers like them. When it comes to the idea of self-efficacy, students had varied responses. For example, some students thought that they had very little control over their behaviors, and it was in the teachers control whether he or she would just “deal” with it. Other students perceived that there were things they could do to make teachers like them more.

Sometimes students made comments to suggest there was very little, if anything, teachers could do to change student behaviors. This is highly relevant, because student problem behaviors consistently came up across student and teacher focus groups as a contributing factor to student-teacher relationship quality. When asked if there was anything teachers can do to help him calm down when he is angry, Josh responded, “No, there was nothing.” Anna responded similarly saying, “No, honestly, I don’t care. I go about my business.” Collin concurred that there was
nothing he or teachers could do to change him, saying, "One. You can’t change who this guy is. Two. If a teacher can’t deal with me they need to... tough shit, they need to deal with it.” Another student argued the teachers were the ones who had the ability to prevent the behavior, not the students with the identified behavior challenge. He said, “You know I have problems with fighting and you provoke it, if I do it, they make a big deal about it, but they’re the ones that provoked it and started it.” Furthermore some students felt like because teachers have more power, there is nothing students can do to fix things if there is a problem with the relationship. One student described the power differential in this way:

    Yeah, I’ve got a problem with a teacher. “Well, work it out.” Okay, so? If she has a problem with me, she can go higher up to get me in trouble. If she’s sitting in the background laughing, what’s the point of going to the teacher if she can’t do anything and they just switch it on you.

    On the other hand, some students pointed to things they can do to improve relationships with their teachers. Ally said, “Well what I do just to be funny like silly is like telling jokes to them and telling like funny things that happen to me.” Rick said, it helps to show interest in the teachers’ interests; however, he followed up that when he did that it was not necessarily genuine.

    Although there were a few students who thought there were things they could do to improve relationships, the teacher focus group was lacking in self-efficacy. The teachers argued that for some students and some relationships, there was nothing they could do to improve the relationship. Steve attributed this to some students and teachers “just don’t bond as well.” Other teachers talked about
how frustrating it was when they just could not figure out why a student did not like them, and therefore there was nothing they could do to improve things. Wilma said:

It makes you really question yourself like what am I doing wrong, why does this student, what did I do? When I really can’t put a finger on what I’ve done, it really makes me question myself as to why. And what could I do to make it better and I can’t, couldn’t, come up with an answer to this particular student. That’s very frustrating.

Wilma also described another scenario:

I had a student a couple of years ago that I thought that we had gotten off to a good start, and I thought everything was going well, but he was one that just basically would sit in front of the computer and just refuse to do anything. (... I would try to talk and visit with him, but he would just basically shut down. And I felt that there just wasn’t much that he, for some reason, he just made up his mind, and I never could figure out why he decided he didn’t like me. But, that was pretty disheartening. And then eventually that student ended up leaving anyway, but it was, he was here for several weeks. And it was pretty tough. You know, you get to where you dread coming to work in the morning, because you know first thing you have to face a student that hates your guts for some reason, and you don’t know why. And not knowing why, it leaves you to where you can’t do things to change it. Because it’s like he didn’t even want to talk to me.

Power and Conflict (Offering Student’s Choice)
Students and teachers also had mixed perceptions of the power differentials in the classroom and whether offering choices to students minimized this power differential. One student, in particular, spoke with bravado about how she controlled the teachers. Anna said about a teacher, “He knows not to zero me out cause he got cussed out.” About a different teacher she said, “She let’s me do what I want to, cause she knows I don’t play with her.” She let's me be in charge of the classroom “even if I threaten her, I’ll smack her and everything.”

However, other students perceived that they had less control in the classroom and they appreciated when teachers gave them opportunities for choice in the classroom as a way to have more responsibility. One student described how good it felt when a teacher gave him the choice to help with a literature lesson: “so, I would read out loud and it would help. It makes me feel like I’m important. Makes me feel welcome, like I could be there so that you can show your skills, what you can do, and then what you can’t do.” Other students agreed that having the choice to help teachers in the classroom made them feel more empowered and in control. Other kids gave examples of how teachers would give them choices they could utilize to help them calm down or to prevent problem behaviors. By far the most often stated example of this is when teachers would let students listen to music of their choice on their Ipods or phones. For example, Andy said,

At a particular time if the kids are having a bad day and they recognize it (...) and so if they go up to the teacher and say, man I’m having a bad day, can I turn my phone on so I can listen to music a little bit? Like, can I have like maybe 10-20 minutes just to sit down, I’ll do my work, just listen to music?
(...) If I do my work and listen to Pandora all hour, that means I get my work done and he gets what he wants and I get what I want.

Other students talked about being able to choose where they sit and whether they worked on a computer, paper, or on the Ipad as ways that teachers gave them choice and more control in the classroom. Whereas, Levi cautioned that sometimes teachers say they give students choices, but when students ask to use those choices teachers won't let them.

Teachers shared different perspectives regarding choice and control in the classroom. On the one hand, they provided examples of how they try to give their students opportunities to have control by making choices about their assignments. They knew giving students control was important, because it was a motivation for some student behaviors. On the other hand, they shared examples of how some students had control over the teachers because they were able to intimidate the teacher.

When it came to work refusal, teachers talked about how they gave students choices to increase their academic productivity. Jamie said she gave her students “academic options” during independent work time. Melissa described how she gave one student choices about his assignments so that she increased the likelihood he would complete it:

Because sometimes he wants to be on the computer and sometimes he comes in and he’s not doing that ‘stupid computer’. Within the last month, I’ll give him the back up assignment and he doesn’t want to do that and I will turn around and go find something else and offer it, so I’m trying to give him
choices so that he doesn’t just come in refuse to do his expected work and get a 0.

She clarified, “my alternate assignment goes from the one I prepared to the one that I’ll pull together and then I’m done. It’s not like I’m going to spend the whole class trying to appease you.”

Wilma emphasized that throughout her teaching career she has learned that teachers cannot control students. She said you can give students options and you can point out the consequences to their decisions, but ultimately students have to choose. She said:

They’ll say things like ‘you can’t make me’. And I’ll say you’re right I can’t make you. I don’t want to make you. It has to be your decision. And almost 9 times out of ten they will turn around and do their work. It’s almost like they just want to try to set me up to get into a confrontation with them or to say you’re going to have to do this, and I don’t do that. Not in this point in time, and maybe I did back 20 years ago, but I’ve learned a few things too. But, I just leave it up to them, and if they don’t do it then. But, it doesn’t go away either. It will be there the next day.

Jamie suggested some students are able to control teachers through intimidation. She described how one student intimidated her because the student was “physically unpredictable.” She added, it as a “constant intimidation. And it’s really strange to feel that from a child.” Other teachers shared how this kind of intimidation influenced the types of relationships and interactions they had with these students. Comments like this from teachers indicate students are sometimes
able to control teacher actions through intimidation. Jamie admitted that some students’ behaviors were motivated by them trying to get control. Therefore, she thought it was important to give students some control and choice-making opportunities to help build up their relationship. She cautioned that this had to be done in moderation. She said:

I think control has a lot to do with these kids, because they are just like scratching for it. Well, they’ve never had it before, you know a lot of them were abused, that’s a lack of control. They don’t get to choose what they wear, what they eat. They don’t have those little tiny decisions that developmentally they needed and so they come here because they weren’t in control in their general ed. population and then they try to control this environment, and so it’s a give and take relationship that you have to build with them. You have to get to the point where they can trust you, by giving them some control, but it can’t be too much, because if you give them too much, these kids tend to run away with it.

**Transactional Interactions**

Students and teachers both associated specific interactions as contributing to teacher student relationship dynamics. This was related to feelings of control in the classroom: teachers who felt controlled by intimidating students and students who felt controlled by teachers with more authority. It was clear from the conversations during the focus groups that those interactions had a reciprocal effect. Students would use their behaviors to try to garner more control in the classroom. Then
teachers would react out of frustration to student behaviors, which would in turn escalate the situation.

Students acknowledged that their behaviors were related to the feelings they had towards particular teachers. Rick said, “Whenever I dislike a teacher I’m edgy. I’m just, don’t want to be there. Whenever I like a teacher, I’m like, ‘Oh! How’s your day today?’ ‘Oh wonderful Rick.’ ‘Yeah, it’s been an awesome day.’” Other students agreed saying some school years they did not have any behavior problems, because they really liked their teachers. Whereas the students also agreed that the less they liked a teacher and the pushier the teacher was, the worse their behaviors were.

Students consistently associated the level and amount of work teachers gave as a trigger for the behaviors they exhibited. In turn, teachers commented that students’ refusal to work was often a cause of negative teacher student relationships. Melissa said:

Well, I’ve had what I would say a negative relationship with some students and part of it is built around my frustration that I want them to learn and they’re refusing to learn. On a personal level, I felt like we could talk, but on an instructional level, I’ve had a few students that just refuse to make the effort to learn. Which causes me to become frustrated and feel like I’m not doing my job.

Jamie agreed, saying, “one student he would just refuse to work. And so, like that’s one of my pet peeves though, so I know part of its personal, because I can’t stand when people don’t put effort into it. And he was the only one who didn’t put effort into it.
Teachers also said student behaviors influenced the types of interactions teachers had with the students. Melissa said, “I interact much less with the students that I feel like aren’t interested in a relationship. I don’t ignore them, but I don’t engage them as much as I do the other students.” Wilma attributed distancing herself from particular students as fear related to student behaviors. She said:

I found myself avoiding him because I knew he didn’t like me and I was afraid well, if I talk to him, am I going to set him off, am I going to make him angry?
You know, I just didn’t know. I felt like I was walking on eggshells all the time that I was around him.

Unanticipated Emergent Themes

The researcher identified the following unanticipated themes from the student and teacher focus groups: (a) The range of perceptions regarding the use of rewards and praise to manage student behaviors, and (b) The perceptions of student and teachers about the differences between traditional schools and alternative schools for students with disabilities who exhibit challenging behaviors.

Perceptions of the Use of Rewards and Praise for Managing Behaviors

Although some students and groups considered offering students rewards as a factor that contributes to positive student-teacher relationships, the perceptions about rewards differed across students and groups. Therefore, it was included in a separate category of unanticipated themes. Although some students and groups felt strongly that recognizing and rewarding positive student behaviors was related to better relationships with teachers, others cautioned against how rewards can be misused. During the concept mapping activity, the middle school focus group at
School A was the only group that identified giving students rewards as the number one way teachers can form better relationships with their students (tied with making learning fun and interesting). Students in that group identified numerous ways teachers had made them feel special by rewarding their good behaviors. Examples of rewards included tangible items, awards, homework prizes, although Rick suggested he was starting to get too old for “trinkets.” Other students said they liked earning free time for finishing their work and showing good behavior. Tim talked about how one of his favorite teachers let him earn badges and medals because he had said how much he liked them. The teacher even went around to garage sales all summer before Tim’s seventh grade year, buying the badges so that Tim could earn them in seventh grade. Tim reported it made a huge difference in his behavior. He reported that in 6th grade he was missing classes, getting restrained, and “acting up”, but now in 7th grade he “earns quite a lot of badges!”

Some students, though, perceived rewards and praise as embarrassing. Andrew said he found it confusing when teachers would compliment him:

Well, embarrassing meaning, cause I mean, my family we, we give each other compliments but when we do, it’s sorta joking, so to speak I mean it’s not really like a real compliment it’s like, way to go (with sarcastic tone), but like they’re just kinda messing with you.

He said when teachers give compliments, “It’s kinda difficult to know if they’re serious or not, since usually the people I’m around, when they say nice job, it’s like sarcastically.”
Other students cautioned that rewards were only effective if the students found them valuable. School B used a wage system, where students could earn (and lose) credit to be used at the school store. Some of the students at the school viewed the wage system negatively. They commented on how many wages they had gotten taken away, so that their accounts were “zeroed” out, and one student talked about getting banned from the school store. Some students believed the wage system was unfair, because teachers would “cheat” students out of their wages. Furthermore, some students said the items in the school store held little value for them. For example, Katy said, “Well you can buy pizza but that’s freaking $5.50 for one hot pocket. I can go to quik trip and get one for 25 cents.” Students even compared the wages to nothing more than a “piece of paper with numbers on it,” confirming the lack of value they associated with the schoolwide rewards system. A high school student agreed that the school store used to hold value for him, but after four years of the same stuff, it lost its appeal.

The teacher focus group also talked about utilizing a rewards system. At School C some teachers had individual reward systems for their classroom, and the whole school could earn points towards rewards and privileges on a level system. The teacher group mimicked some of the concerns echoed by the student groups. For example, Mandy talked about the dangers of giving rewards that can then be taken away. Like the students, she agreed this takes away some of the motivation to earn the rewards. She explained:

They get fines, which is a new thing to us this year. So for the most egregious offenses, they can get a fine for provocation, for verbal aggression, for
physical altercations, for bullying, for gang and weapon references. And, I’m not sure how I feel about the fines yet. Well, it’s different. It’s different and what happens here is they have a big thing at the end of the month where if they’ve been on gold, which is our top level for four weeks, that last Friday of the month, they get to go out to eat. Well, one big fine can keep them off that whole reward system, so once they’ve gotten a big fine, they don’t have a big, they’ve lost their big thing.

Along with the school-wide level system, Jamie uses a classroom store as a reward system for her students. She also talked about how students could miss opportunities to use the store because of incurring fines. She described how students could also earn things other than tangible items with their points. She said students can buy “things” with their points, but they can also buy “privileges” like visiting other teacher’s classrooms.

Interestingly, some teachers talked about how items that are typically used as rewards can also be helpful at developing positive relationships between teachers and students when they are given to students “just because” rather than having to be earned. Melissa said not to underestimate the value of providing students snacks. She claimed, by providing snacks or schools supplies for students, teachers can help make relationships with particularly challenging students better. She elaborated:

I buy theme pencils, throughout the year. You know, a pencil to me doesn’t mean that much, but to them, it’s like somebody gave me something.
Somebody gave me something I didn’t ask for even. So, usually it’s the little things that they respond to.

Steve agreed saying, “They’re called, ‘just because’. Really, it works.”

**Perceptions of Traditional Versus Alternative Schools**

An unexpected theme that continually emerged during the focus group discussions was the influence of both traditional and alternative school settings on student and teacher perceptions of factors that contribute to teacher-student relationship quality. Students and teachers both talked about some of the challenges and advantages they experienced in different types of school settings (alternative “special” schools and traditional public schools) that contributed to student and teacher interactions, barriers to forming positive relationships, and factors that helped students and teachers develop positive relationships.

Students and teachers had mixed views about alternative school settings. In some ways they thought the smaller alternative school setting made it easier for teachers to form relationships and individualize instruction to student needs. However, they also admitted there were challenges associated with putting all of the students with similar behavioral challenges into one setting.

Some of the students at School A identified some advantages to alternative school settings. For example, Rick said the alternative school he attends is more likely to let students “take breaks” instead of punishing them. Kevin agreed saying at alternative School A students get to make choices about their assignments, but he and Levi did not think that was the case at other schools. The students at school A perceived the alternative school as being more lenient, and the teachers there as
being more helpful. Whereas, they described the traditional school as being more
sink or swim. Andrew compared his experiences at the alternative school to the
traditional high school he was in the process of transitioning back to:

I’m transitioning to [traditional high school] right now. My teacher up there
is very strict. She doesn’t take crap. If you say something, or if you do
something out of line or don’t turn in your work on time, she’s on top of you
for that. But, um, here it, there, it’s not like their getting onto you if you don’t
do your work, but they’re a little more lenient on helping you do the work,
where up at [traditional high school] you’re kinda supposed to be
individually working and responsible for your own work. Where here you
can get help and the teachers aren’t pushy, but they can, they’ll help you
instead of giving you free reign to go up or down.

Andrew said another advantage to the alternative school was that if you get your
work done at school, you don’t have homework; whereas, he perceived that at other
schools you get homework whether you do your work at school or not.

Levi talked about the fear he had when he was moved from the traditional
school to an alternative school he attended prior to going to School A. He referred to
that transition as “the worst thing in my life.” He said the problem with that
alternative school was that the students had more serious problems with “the law”
than the behavioral problems he had, and that the students there treated him badly,
and made him feel like the odd one out, making fun of him every time he “went off.”

Connor talked about another problem with the alternative school he attends,
School B. He said not enough was done to prevent the prevalence of fights that
occurred there. He wanted the teachers to have more meaningful conversations and listen to students to help stop them from fighting, but he said instead there was this attitude with teachers of “If the kids want to kill each other then just get the officer.” He said, they would act like “Well, we tried” and then the “Next thing you know, eat some popcorn and watch the fight go on.” The focus group facilitator saw evidence of this when at the school to conduct the member check focus group. At this time, several police officers and an ambulance were at the school, because, according to the students, a fight had broken out.

The teacher focus group also talked about the advantages and challenges associated with alternative schools. The teachers said some students come back after they graduate and report that the alternative school was the best school for them because it helped them out. However, the teachers also identified aspects of the alternative school that made it more problematic than traditional schools.

According to the teachers, one advantage to the alternative school was that the alternative school made the students feel like less of an outcast, because the other students at the school had the same problems as them. Wilma said:

I think too that there are more kids that are in the same boat they are so they may not feel like they stick out as much although that has its own problems too, but I think they still feel like they are part of the community of the school so to speak more so than they do in the general population.

The teachers considered this a double-edged sword though, because they recognized that although being surrounded by other students like them may help them feel more comfortable, it also results in students not having appropriate peer
models. Wilma said, the problem with all of the students at the school having behavior problems was that “just being around other behaviors like yours then that becomes the norm instead of trying to strive higher for better behaviors that you don’t see.”

Like the students, the teachers also said that the best thing about the alternative school was that the teachers were better able to individualize content, instead of expecting students to “sink or swim” such as they do at the general school. Steve said, “I think . . . one of the differences we are able to take that student and really cater to their individual needs, where I think at the general school” according to Wilma, “there’s just too many.” Jamie believed traditional schools did not have the resources to individualize as well as they can at the alternative school. She said:

Even if they are individualizing, at regular schools there’s too many to individualize. To even be able to do it very effectively, because you only have so many paras and so many sped teachers, it comes just funding, it’s all funding.

Melissa agreed that traditional schools are more constrained and unable to give students what they need. She said if a student needed to work on division, a teacher in a traditional school would not be able to “Stop algebra to teach division,” instead the student would be sent to a resource room where he would just “miss out on Algebra anyway.”

Although the teacher group considered the smaller setting better than traditional schools for individualizing content, they also pointed out disadvantages to the setting. For example, they noted their students do not have the same access
to electives that students at the traditional school have. They also talked about the stigma associated with the alternative school, saying the students did not consider it a “real school” and did not think of them as “real teachers.” The teachers know there is stigma associated with going to a school where kids have “to ride the short bus.”
CHAPTER 4: Discussion and Summary

In summary, the results of this study show that although students and teachers share some common perceptions of the factors that contribute to positive and negative relationships, they often differ in their assessment of why those positive relationships are sometimes challenging to develop, specifically with students who exhibit challenging behaviors. For example, student and teacher participants both identify trust and respect as essential for forming positive relationships; however, both groups blame the other when there is a lack of trust and respect in the relationship. The students accused the teachers of not showing them respect by being dishonest with them and not trusting them with any freedom or responsibilities, while teachers blamed students for breaking their trust and refusing to trust teachers in return. Similarly, teachers felt many of the factors students thought contributed to negative relationships occurred because of the pressure they felt to give students what they need. For example, students felt strongly that it was negative when teachers treated students differently, whereas teachers argued they individualized their practices to what each student needed. Students also said when teachers removed them from class or used restraint it was damaging to the relationship, while teachers argued sometimes students needed this to help them calm down or keep from hurting themselves or others. Although teachers and students both agreed it was important to relate to each other and talk about interests unrelated to school, the teachers felt pressure to push students to work on academic content, which is when teachers felt the breakdown in the relationship tended to occur. It was evident from both the teacher and student
groups that frustration with work was a catalyst for negative transactional interactions. Students said their problem behaviors often were a result of frustration and stress from work they did not understand, and teachers felt student behaviors related to work avoidance resulted in teachers becoming frustrated and exhibiting some of the behaviors that students perceived as negative. Although both teacher and student groups talked about things they did to try to improve relationships, there was an overall opinion that there was very little they could do change things. Students felt like there were some teachers that picked on them for no reason, and teachers felt that sometimes students just did not like them and they did not know why, so there was nothing they could do to fix it. One has to wonder how change can occur when both students and teachers believe it is inevitable that some teacher-student relationships are destined to fail.

As a former educator, I know the value of building relationships with students who often struggle to form and maintain positive relationships with anyone, let alone their teachers. My personal experience of teaching students with significant behavioral challenges is what led me to want to further explore this topic. As a teacher, I remember witnessing how building a genuine relationship with a student could influence the student’s outcomes. I also remember thinking that with some students it felt like there was nothing I could do that would make a difference. I now wonder if my students would have thought differently. Therefore, I set out to conduct a study to find out what students think about teacher-student relationships. I wanted to know what insights they could provide on what teachers could do differently to better form and maintain positive relationships. I also wanted to
know how their perceptions compared to what teachers thought about those same relationships. Were their perceptions so different, or were there commonalities on which to initiate change?

In the end, the insight I gathered from both students and teachers led me to recognize that although teacher-student relationships are important, the change that needs to occur is far bigger than the change that occurs at the individual interaction level. Instead, changes must happen at the system’s level to provide both students and teachers the level of support they need to prevent negative interactions that contribute to conflict in relationships between students and teachers.

**Findings Addressed to the Research Questions**

A review of the literature established the importance of intervening to improve teacher-student relationships (Roorda et al., 2011). The review of literature also revealed the need to specifically examine the perceptions of students with behavior concerns to learn how to form and maintain positive teacher-student relationships for this marginalized population of students. The theoretical literature revealed the reciprocal nature of relationships and the role power differentials might play in the control-seeking behaviors of student and teachers. Literature on self-efficacy suggests that before teachers or students would be willing to change their interactions, they would need to believe that doing so would improve the relationship.

A qualitative study was conducted to gather data from students to better understand their perceptions of the factors that contribute to teacher-student
relationship quality. Focus groups were used to gather data, because the focus
group format allows the participants to build off of the other members’ responses.
The purpose of this study was to research the student perspective of what teachers
can do to foster positive teacher-student relationships. Comparison data was also
collected from a teacher focus group in order to better understand the similarities
and differences between student and teacher perceptions of the factors that
contribute to teacher-student relationship quality.

Table 4
Summary of Findings Addressed to Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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<tr>
<td>Research Question 1: How do students who exhibit challenging behaviors define positive student teacher relationships, for example, what factors do they believe contribute to positive relationships? How do their perceptions compare with teacher perceptions?</td>
<td>Student Perspective: Teachers help students, teachers relate to student interests, teachers listen to student concerns, teachers trust and respect students</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Teacher Perspective: Teachers largely agreed with student perspective, student behaviors guided teacher behaviors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Question 2: How do students who exhibit challenging behaviors define negative student teacher relationships, for example, what factors do they believe contribute to negative relationships? How do their perceptions compare with teacher perceptions?</td>
<td>Student Perspective: Inequality, lack of active supervision, purposeful embarrassment and agitation, removing students from the classroom, restraining students</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Teacher Perspective: Students sometimes broke teacher trust, removal from the classroom and restraint were done as a response to potentially dangerous behaviors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Question 3: Is there any indication that students believe teacher behaviors; student choices in classrooms; and students’ self-efficacy influence teacher-student relationship quality? How do their perceptions compare with teacher perceptions?</td>
<td>Student Perspective: Students could not change relationship problems that were caused by teacher behaviors</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher perspective: Teacher behaviors were motivated by a desire to focus on teaching the curriculum, teachers did not know how to fix some negative relationships</td>
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Research Question 1: How do students who exhibit challenging behaviors define positive student teacher relationships, for example, what factors do they believe contribute to positive relationships? *How do their perceptions compare with teacher perceptions?*

Students defined positive teacher-student relationships according to how teachers discipline problem behaviors, whether teachers help students with their problems, whether teachers relate to student interests, whether teachers listen to student concerns, and whether teachers trust and respect students. Teachers confirmed these factors were essential components of positive teacher-student relationships; however, teachers argued student behaviors largely guided teacher behaviors. In other words, some teachers would claim to discipline students according to what they thought each student needed. For example, teachers thought some students needed teachers to be more lenient, while other students needed teachers to be more structured and firm. Some teachers also argued that their interactions with students were driven by a desire to help prepare their students for the real world, even though the students often did not want to accept their help. Teachers also felt some students were unable to trust teachers, no matter what the teachers did.

Research Question 2: How do students who exhibit challenging behaviors define negative student teacher relationships, for example, what factors do they believe contribute to negative relationships? *How do their perceptions compare with teacher perceptions?*
Students defined negative teacher-student relationships according to the following factors: inequality, lack of active supervision, purposeful embarrassment and agitation, removing students from the classroom, restraining students. In the same way students blamed their teachers for breaking their trust, teachers contended students would break their trust by severing relationships with teachers for reasons the teachers did not know or understand. Although removal from the classroom and restraint were two big issues for students, teachers justified these behaviors as trying to protect students or help them calm down.

Research Question 3: Is there any indication that students believe teacher behaviors; student choices in classrooms; and students’ self-efficacy influence teacher-student relationship quality? How do their perceptions compare with teacher perceptions?

Overall, most students and teachers agreed there was little they could do to change problematic teacher-student relationships. Both sides understood that the interactions were transactional, but because each largely blamed the other, there was little indication that either side knew how to break the conflict in the transactional cycles. Furthermore, both student and teacher behaviors seemed to be motivated by a desire to get or keep control in the classroom.

One barrier to change is that neither students nor teachers fully understand or admit how they contribute to problematic student relationships. For many of the themes that emerged, students and teachers both agreed about the factors that are important in the relationship; however, they both blamed each other when those factors were not present. If change in the interactions is going to occur, it needs to
start with teaching teachers about the effects of their interactions on students and how they can initiate alternative interactions as a way to improve relationships and outcomes.

Brophy & Good (1974) found most inappropriate interactions from teachers “can be eliminated simply by making the teacher aware of what he is doing.” In order for teachers to change their behaviors, they first need to be made aware of how students perceive their interactions. Then, teachers need to be given specific feedback on interactions that contribute to developing and maintaining positive teacher-student relationships. Teachers also need feedback on how some interactions, such as removal from classroom, are maintaining problem behaviors. Like Dan said, when students are kicked out of class, they just learn how to get out of class. Furthermore, teachers need to receive feedback on how relating with students and teaching academic content can go hand in hand. Some teachers seemed to think that maintaining positive relationships with some students could not be done within the confines of having to “teach them.” Therefore, teachers need preservice training and professional development on how to incorporate student interests and student choice into the teaching and learning process.

**Unanticipated Finding**

When I began conducting this study, I anticipated learning about what students thought teachers could do to improve teacher-student relationships. I was hoping to use the study to as an exploratory study to help develop an intervention to give teachers feedback on how to improve their interactions with students, in the hopes of improving teacher-student relationships. Although I did gain insight from
the students on the interactions that contribute to both positive and negative relationships, I walked away with a very different perspective than when I began the study. I did not anticipate some of the systems level decisions that were heavily effecting the interactions between students and teachers.

I chose to select participants from alternative settings as a way to access students with identified behavioral challenges (and their teachers), but the setting ended up having considerable implications for the findings. I was surprised to learn that the teachers and students had such mixed reactions about the advantages and disadvantages of providing special education services in alternative school buildings. After analyzing the data, I concluded neither the traditional school nor the alternative school are really meeting the needs of these students; therefore, it is not surprising that students are failing in traditional schools and being removed to these alternative settings. It is also not surprising that teachers are frustrated with the demands that are placed on them in the alternative school. Nor is it surprising that the students struggle to transition back to traditional school placements. I began this study thinking change needed to occur at the level of the interactions between students and teachers. I concluded this study thinking the real problem is much bigger than that.

Consistently, I heard students say that they did not get the kind of support they needed to be successful. The “sink or swim” attitude of ‘you take responsibility for yourself, and either you make it or you go somewhere’ else was evident. Teachers recognized that in the traditional school students were not getting the level of individualization and support that they needed. Both students and teachers
agreed that at the alternative school, students got more attention and more
individualization. Students also felt like they got more opportunities for breaks.
However, the problems with the alternative school were evident even during the
facilitation of the focus groups. I gained a new appreciation for the teachers
working in these schools, as I often struggled to facilitate groups of students with
significant behavioral challenges, all together at once. This was especially apparent
at School B, where the students would often appear to try to one up each other with
their responses and behaviors. Teachers also admitted that there are things they
cannot provide for their students in the alternative setting, such as access to certain
electives. At School C, students were sometimes bussed over an hour to the school,
because there were not any appropriate programs for them closer to their home
schools. This seems inherently flawed to me.

Even though there are admitted problems related to alternative school
settings, the system creates these special schools and ships students there so they
can get “special support” and individualization. It seems to reason it would make
more sense to provide that support and individualization in the traditional school. I
wonder if any of the students I interviewed would have been at that school if they
had gotten intensive, individualized supports at their home school. The problem is,
we will never know, because the students admitted they did not get the level of
support and individualization in the traditional school that they were receiving in
the alternative school. The teachers at the alternative school admitted there were
problems associated with putting all of the students with significant behavior
problems together and removing their opportunities to learn from peer models.
However, they believed there was no other solution. As Jamie said, “it’s all funding.” I would argue that if the funds being diverted to these “special” schools were instead invested in providing tiered levels of support for academics and behaviors in traditional schools (Sailor, 2009), these alternative schools would not be necessary. The principal at School C admits that when students leave the alternative school, they go back to a traditional school that continues to fail them:

We have had students go back (to their home school) and end up back here because it just didn’t work out, and sometimes I think that was part of the school districts fault because they didn’t provide the support that that student needed when they went back, but there are other times when kids have just flat out told us I like it better here and we see lots of times when students are getting ready to leave this program they’ll start to do things to try, well what we view as sabotaging what they’ve worked so long and hard for, and we’re like why are you doing this and then we’ll talk and we’ll say well they’re probably trying ... nervous they’re scared to go back.

Who can blame the students for being scared to go back, when they know going back means sinking, without a life raft in sight? However, we also know we have not served these students well by isolating them into special classrooms or schools (Lane et al., 2008). Unfortunately, the number of students being served in alternative schools continues to rise, and most students attending these schools are students with behavior problems (Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009). To truly help students with behavior problems, we must insist on giving these kids what they
need in their home schools, instead of moving them back and forth between two environments, neither of which is fully meeting their needs.

**Implications**

The results of this study have implications for both practitioners and teacher preparation programs. The study establishes the importance of seeking input from students. The students in this study had a deep understanding of their relationships with their teachers and how interactions with their teachers contributed to their behaviors. Furthermore, students identified listening as one of the key things teachers could do to improve relationships with their students. By seeking input from students about how to improve teacher-student interactions, teachers may be able to prevent problem behaviors that are related to those interactions.

Another implication for teachers is to gain insight from students about how to effectively use rewards to reinforce positive behaviors. Some students responded positively to rewards that were individualized to the student’s interests. However, other students spoke negatively about rewards that held little value. They also talked about how there was little incentive to earn rewards that could easily be taken away if the student exhibited problem behavior. The study demonstrates the importance of getting student input on what rewards are actually reinforcing.

The study revealed another important implication for teachers. The students identified significant concerns with removing students from the classroom as a reaction to problem behaviors. The students acknowledged that this reaction had the undesired effect of reinforcing the problem behavior. Because escaping work was a motivation for their behaviors, they recognized that they were able to
use their behavior to avoid work. Although the students thought removal from class was embarrassing, it did not deter them from exhibiting disruptive behaviors when they would become frustrated with work. Furthermore, they knew that being removed from class was a catalyst for more problem behaviors because they would get further behind in their work, which would lead to more frustration. These insights have significant implications for teachers. Many teachers use removal from class as a punishment to deter problem behaviors, when in reality the punishment may be reinforcing the behavior. Therefore, teachers should teach students more appropriate ways to communicate their frustration with schoolwork, so that the teacher can provide additional supports that help prevent the problem behaviors from occurring.

Another implication for teachers is the need for active supervision in the classroom. One student gave examples of mistreatment by his peers when teachers were not supervising the classroom, for example when teachers were on their phone or working on the computer. Other students identified a lack of supervision as contributing to unfair treatment in the classroom. For example, students claimed teachers would discipline the wrong student because they were not aware of what was going on in the classroom. This made students feel like they were being singled out and treated unfairly. For example, Rick told a story about how his teacher blamed him when another student burped in class. These examples indicate the need for teachers to practice active supervision in the classroom.

This study also has implications for teacher preparation programs. One concern that the teachers brought up was that they sometimes felt like there was
nothing they could do to fix the negative relationships they had with students, even
though the student focus groups were able to identify things teachers could do to
improve relationships and things teachers did to contribute to negative
relationships. Teacher preparation programs should help pre-service teachers
better understand how their interactions contribute to student-teacher relationship
quality. Pre-service teachers should also be taught frameworks that focus on
prevention of problem behaviors, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and
Supports (PBIS). By using positive strategies to prevent problem behaviors,
teachers can be taught to avoid using the reactionary practices that often contribute
to and reinforce negative student-teacher relationships.

**Limitations**

Because this study explored preliminary findings, there are limitations to the
interpretation of the results. One limitation was conducting the focus groups across
three different alternative schools. Although this helped to establish some
similarities in findings across settings, the differences between the school sites may
explain some of the differences in student and teacher perceptions. It is unclear
whether the teacher perceptions are relevant to the student experiences at different
schools, or whether it is related to the geographic location and the types of
behaviors that were prevalent at the schools. While conducting the student and
teacher focus groups at different schools was a limitation, it was done to avoid
potentially breaching confidentiality by interviewing teachers about the responses
of their own students. Another limitation was conducting the member check before
the analysis was fully completed. An informal member check was done during the
initial focus group by asking follow-up questions for clarification as needed. Although, researcher notes and early analysis of the results were used to develop general themes for the member check focus groups, it would have been valuable to review the final results with the focus group participants. However, this was not feasible as the student and teacher participants were out of school when the final analysis was completed. Another limitation of the study was the number and size of the focus groups. The groups were small and were drawn from a specific population of students and teachers at alternative schools; therefore, the results cannot be generalized to the larger population of students (Merriam, 2002; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). The purpose of this study was to establish features of positive teacher-student relationships as perceived by students with challenging behaviors; however, future research is needed to further establish the findings.

**Future Research**

The literature review supports some of the findings from this study. For example, Baker (2006) found positive teacher student relationships could have a positive effect on behaviors for students with behavior problems. Student perceptions gathered during this study support this finding, with many students saying their behaviors were largely influenced by the relationships they had with their teachers. Garrett et al. (2009) identified teacher personalities and academic support as important factors in caring teacher relationships, which is consistent with the results of this study. The more interesting and surprising themes that emerged were the student perceptions of the barriers to positive teacher student relationships. The students were able to identify the challenges that existed due to
transitioning between general and alternative school settings. They also were able to identify how some teacher behaviors were reinforcing negative student behaviors. The student perceptions that were gathered provided valuable insight into problems that need to be addressed before teacher-student relationships can be improved on a large scale. Therefore, future research should continue to elicit student perceptions as a valuable source of data.

Future research should also explore whether the identified features of positive and negative relationships generalize to other populations. Furthermore, the factors students’ identified should be further studied to see whether any of these specific teacher-student interactions contribute to student outcomes. Future research should also explore whether specific teacher interactions that were identified by the students in this study can be changed through professional development or feedback provided through coaching. Additionally, researchers should further investigate how system level challenges affect the formation of positive teacher-student relationships.

Conducting focus groups across different alternative schools provided valuable insight into the distinctive challenges faced by alternative schools based on location. However, because the participants from the different alternative schools in this study ended up having very different experiences, their perspectives varied. There would be value in doing an in depth case study at one alternative school to gather perceptions of students and staff with similar experiences. This would allow researchers to further delve into the themes that emerged from this study, while pinpointing the specific system level challenges that exist within one school which
contribute to teacher-student interactions and relationships. This would also allow researchers to gather input on the topic from other key stakeholders, such as family members and administrators.

Finally, it would be interesting to compare student perceptions of their relationships with their teachers in inclusive settings versus the perceptions of students in segregated alternative settings. One of the noteworthy findings from this study was how students compared their experiences with teachers across the different schools they attended. For example, some students felt they got less support from teachers at traditional schools. Although the students in the focus groups from this study were able to reflect on their experiences at traditional schools, it seems based on their descriptions, that none of the students in this study had received special education services in inclusive settings. Future research should compare student perceptions of teacher-student relationships across different types of settings: a traditional school with resource support, a fully inclusive setting, and a segregated alternative setting.

The relationships we have with the people in our environment help shape our experiences. These relationships can influence our lives in both positive and negative ways. During a student’s academic career, the relationships students have with their teachers can play a fundamental role in how they perceive school, which, in turn, can influence their experiences and outcomes. As educators, we should never underestimate the power of connection. As researchers, we should strive to better understand and remove the barriers that prevent those connections between teachers and students.
“Every child deserves a champion — an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection, and insists that they become the best that they can possibly be” (Pierson, 2013, May).
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Pierson, R. (2013, May). Every kid needs a champion, from 

[http://www.ted.com/talks/rita_pierson_every_kid_needs_a_champion.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/rita_pierson_every_kid_needs_a_champion.html)


Appendix A

HSCL Approval

12/17/2012
HSCL #20443

Allyson Satter
3509 NE 77th Terrace
Kansas City, MO 64119

The Human Subjects Committee Lawrence has received your response to its full IRB review of your research project,

20443 Sutter/Sailor (SPED) Student Teacher Relationships: Exploring the Perceptions of Students Who Exhibit Challenging Behaviors

and found that it complied with policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. The subjects will be at minimal risk. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

The Office for Human Research Protections requires that your consent form must include the note of HSCL approval and expiration date, which has been entered on the consent form sent back to you with this approval.

1. At designated intervals until the project is completed, a Project Status Report must be returned to the HSCL office.
2. Any significant change in the experimental procedure as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
3. Notify HSCL about any new investigators not named in original application. Note that new investigators must take the online tutorial at http://www.rcr.ku.edu/hsc/hsp_tutorial/000.shtml.
4. Any injury to a subject because of the research procedure must be reported to the Committee immediately.
5. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity. If you use a signed consent form, provide a copy of the consent form to subjects at the time of consent.
6. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.

Please inform HSCL when this project is terminated. You must also provide HSCL with an annual status report to maintain HSCL approval. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date. If your project receives funding which requests an annual update approval, you must request this from HSCL one month prior to the annual update. Thanks for your cooperation. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Christopher Griffith, J.D.
Assistant Coordinator
Human Subjects Committee - Lawrence

cc: Wayne Sailor

Human Subjects Committee Lawrence
Youngberg Hall | 2385 Irving Hill Road | Lawrence, KS 66045 | (785) 864-7429 | HSCL@ku.edu | www.rcr.ku.edu/hsc
Appendix B
Introductory Letter

Dear parent or guardian,

I am a student in the Department of Special Education at the University of Kansas. I am conducting research at your child’s school in the hopes of learning from students about what teachers can do to form positive relationships with their students.

I would like to have a discussion with a small group of students from your child’s school to learn from them about this topic. This group discussion would occur up to two times for approximately one hour each, during school hours, at a time that is deemed convenient by your child, the teacher, and the principal.

If you are interested in learning more about this study and what you can do to allow your child to be a part of the study, please provide your contact information below and return it to your child’s teacher.

If you indicate a desire to learn more about the study, you will be contacted with further details and you will be given a consent and authorization form. Please know your child will not be asked to participate unless you provide signed consent and authorization.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Allyson Satter

Name of Parent/Guardian:  

__________Yes, I am interested in learning more about this study and how my child could participate in it. You may contact me to provide me with more information.
The best way to contact me is:  

__________ No, I am not interested learning more about how my child can participate in this study. Please do not contact me regarding this study.

Please contact me if you have any questions regarding this study.

Allyson Satter
Doctoral Candidate
University of Kansas
alpfd3@ku.edu
816-560-6281
Appendix C
Letter of Informed Consent

Approved by the Human Subjects Committee University of Kansas, Lawrence Campus (HSCL). Approval expires one year from 12/17/2012 HSCL # 20443

Teacher-student Relationships: Exploring the Perceptions of Students Who Exhibit Challenging Behaviors

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Special Education at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish your child to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not allow your child to participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to allow your child to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw your child from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University of Kansas.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to better understand what students think about what teachers can do to foster positive relationships with their students. Because research shows positive teacher-student relationships are related to positive student outcomes, the researcher is hoping to learn more about what teachers can do to help contribute to positive teacher-student relationships. This researcher wants to learn what students think about this topic to help guide the development of interventions seeking to improve teacher-student relationship quality.

PROCEDURES

To gather student perceptions, the researcher will be conducting focus groups with groups of 4-8 students. Each student may be asked to participate in up to two focus groups (one to gather initial data and one to gather follow-up information). The focus groups will be conducted at school during the school day, at a time that is identified as convenient by the teacher, principal, and student. Each focus group discussion should take approximately one hour. The researcher will ask students questions about what they think teachers can do to form positive relationships with their students.

If consent is provided by each of the participants, the focus group discussions will be audio recorded. The audiotapes will be transcribed and stored on a secure computer. Pseudonyms will be used in written transcripts of the recordings to
disguise any identifiable information. The audiotapes will be stored in a locked cabinet and will be destroyed at the completion of the study. The researcher will only use the recordings and transcripts for the purposes of this study.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

A possible benefit is that the information gathered from the study may help contribute to the development of interventions aimed at improving teacher-student relationship quality.
A possible risk to participants is that confidentiality is limited by the researcher’s responsibility to report any information about suspected abuse. The researcher will contact child protective services to report any information about suspected abuse. There is the potential risk that students or teachers may hear confidential or sensitive information in the focus group and share that information outside of the focus group.

PAYMENT TO PARTICIPANTS

Participants will not be paid; however, light snacks will be provided during the focus group session.

PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY

Your child’s name will not be associated in any publication or presentation with the information collected about your child or with the research findings from this study. Identifiable information will not be shared unless it is required by law or university policy.

REFUSAL TO SIGN CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You are not required to sign this Consent and Authorization form and you may refuse to do so without affecting your right to any services you are receiving or may receive from the University of Kansas or to participate in any programs or events of the University of Kansas.

QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION

Questions about procedures should be directed:

**Researcher Contact Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allyson Satter</th>
<th>Wayne Sailor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal Investigator</td>
<td>Faculty Supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Dept.</td>
<td>Special Education Dept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1200 Sunnyside Ave. 3150 Haworth Hall</td>
<td>1200 Sunnyside Ave. 3142 Haworth Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Kansas</td>
<td>University of Kansas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lawrence, KS 66045                    Lawrence, KS  66045
816-560-6281                    785-864-4950

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant you may contact the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL) office at (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385, write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568, or email irb@ku.edu.

KEEP THIS SECTION FOR YOUR RECORDS. IF YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE TEAR OFF THE FOLLOWING SECTION AND RETURN IT TO THE RESEARCHER(S).
Letter of Informed Consent
Student-Teacher Relationships: Exploring the Perceptions of Students Who Exhibit Challenging Behaviors

HSCL # ________________

PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION:

If you agree to participate in this study please sign where indicated, then tear off this section and return it to the investigator(s). Keep the consent information for your records.

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study and the use and disclosure of information about me for the study.

I agree to allow my child to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form. With my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years of age.

_________________________________  ____________________________
Type/Print Participant's Name       Date

__________________________________
Parent/Guardian Signature

_____ I do grant permission for my child’s focus group interview to be audio recorded.

_____ I do NOT grant permission for my child’s focus group interview to be audio recorded.

If permission is granted, the researcher will review the following components of the student’s IEP: disability classification, present level related to behaviors, behavioral goals, and behavior support plan. This information will be reviewed to further contribute to the understanding of whether disability classification and behaviors relate to information gathered during focus groups regarding behavior and relationship quality.

_____ I do grant permission for the researcher to review my child’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

_____ I do NOT grant permission for the researcher to review my child’s IEP.
Appendix D

Student Assent Script

My name is Allyson Satter. I go to school at the University of Kansas, and I want to learn more about what teachers can do to help their students. I asked you to come talk to me, because I want to learn from you what you think teachers do, or can do, to have good relationships with their students. I would like to ask you some questions about your experiences and feelings about what teachers do to relate with their students. The discussion group that will meet for about one hour one time this week. Then, if you would like, we will meet one more time for about one hour so I can check my results with you.

There are no wrong answers, and it is OK if you each have different thoughts or responses. Please feel free to share your ideas, even if they are different from what others say. If you don't feel like answering any questions, you don't have to, and it is all right if you want to stop speaking with me at anytime.

I want to reassure you, your name will not be associated with anything I write about what I learn from you. I will use fake names when writing about what you say. Also, your answers will not be shared with any of the teachers or people who work at your school.

Your answers will not be shared unless there is concern for your safety or I hear something I have to report.

There is the potential risk for students/teachers to hear confidential and/or sensitive information in the focus group that could be shared by fellow participants.

Your participation is totally voluntary. Would you like to talk with me about what you think teachers can do to form good relationships with their students?

Is it OK with each of you if I tape record our talk? I will be the only one who listens to the tape, and I will destroy it, after I listen to it and write down what it says.

As primary investigator, I affirm assent of the following student participants.

Identify student participants that provide verbal assent:

Primary Investigator’s Signature  Date
### Appendix E

Semi-structured Focus Group Protocol (Student Focus Group)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>General Topics</th>
<th>Additional Questions if Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| How do students who exhibit challenging behaviors define positive teacher-student relationships? How do their perceptions compare with teacher perceptions and definitions found in the literature? | 1) Think about the best relationship you have ever had with a teacher. Think about what made it good. Describe what that teacher did to make you like them.  
   Now, think about the worst relationship you ever had with a teacher. What made it bad? Describe what that teacher did to make him/her your least favorite teacher. Follow up: Tell me what you think the teacher could have done differently to make it better, if anything. Tell me what you think you could have done to make it better, if anything.  
   2) Describe your ideal teacher-student relationship. What would it look like? What would the teacher do? | 3) Think about the teacher you would be most likely to talk to if you had a problem. What does s/he do that makes you feel like you could talk to him/her? Now, think about the teacher you would be least likely to talk to about a problem. What does that teacher do that makes you less likely to talk to him/her.  
   4) In general, I want you to think about what teachers do to show they care about you. Describe one thing a teacher has done to show s/he cared about you. Describe one thing a teacher has done to make you think s/he didn’t care about you.  
   5) In general, I want you to think about whether your teachers care about what your life is like outside of school? Tell me about a teacher who cares about what your life is like outside of school. What does s/he do to show s/he cares about your life outside of school. Probing: how does that make you feel? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>quality?</strong></th>
<th>6) Think about the classes you have taken. Which of these classes is your favorite? What does that teacher do that helps make his/her class your favorite? Which is your least favorite class?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is there any indication that students believe teacher behaviors; student choices in classrooms; and students' self-efficacy influence teacher-student relationship quality? <em>How do their perceptions compare with teacher perceptions?</em></td>
<td>7) I want you to think about a time when you were on your best behavior at school (listening to the teacher, following directions). Describe what made your behavior so good---what the teacher was doing. What about your worst behavior?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Think about a time when a teacher let you make a choice in your classroom (choose what to study, choose how to do an assignment). Describe what that looked like. Describe your relationship with that teacher.</td>
<td>9) When you like your teacher, describe how you act at school compared to when you don’t like a teacher. Probing questions: Does it influence your behavior at school? Does it influence how hard you work at school? If so, share examples. (Transactional)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) What do you do to make your teachers like/dislike you? What do your teachers do to make you like/dislike them? (Transactional)</td>
<td>11) Who do you think is most “in charge” in your classroom(s), students (as a group) or teachers? And what makes you think that? (Power and conflict) (Probing questions about opportunities for choice and control in the classroom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12) Think about a time you did something in class that surprised you because your teacher really liked</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13) For the following question, participants will be asked to identify, label, and rank what they consider to be the best ways for teachers to have good relationships with their students. If students do not generate suggestions, they will be asked to put the following options in order, and add any other ideas they think are pertinent.

a) Help students with their school work  
b) Give students more choices in the classroom (what to study, how to learn it)  
c) Show interest in their student’s interests (what you like to do outside and inside of school)  
d) Make learning fun and interesting  
e) Make time to get to know their students one-on-one  
f) Other: please describe

Conclusion

14) Is there anything else you would like to tell me about teacher-student relationships?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>General Topic Questions</th>
<th>Additional Questions if Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do students who exhibit challenging behaviors define positive teacher-student relationships? <em>How do their perceptions compare with teacher perceptions and definitions found in the literature?</em></td>
<td>1) Describe the best (worst) relationship you ever had with a student. What made it good (bad)? If bad, what do you wish the student had done differently? What efforts did you make to improve (or maintain) the relationship?</td>
<td>2) Describe your ideal teacher-student relationship. What would it look like? What would the teacher do? What would the student do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do students who exhibit challenging behaviors define negative teacher-student relationships? <em>How do their perceptions compare with teacher perceptions of the factors that contribute to student-teacher relationship quality?</em></td>
<td>3) When you want to show a student you care about them, what do you do?</td>
<td>4) Do you think your students want you to know about what their life is like outside of school? Why or why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there any indication that students believe teacher behaviors; student choices in classrooms; and students’ self-efficacy influence teacher-student relationship quality? <em>How do their perceptions compare with teacher</em></td>
<td>5) What do you do to contribute to particularly good relationships you have with specific students? What do your students do to contribute to the kind of relationships they have with you? (Transactional)</td>
<td>7) Think about a time when you behaved in a certain way that ended up surprising you because it had such a positive (negative) effect on a student. Describe what happened.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8) Who do you think has the most power in your</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6) Do you think there is any thing teachers can do to make particularly challenging relationships with students better? If so, what? If not, why not? Do you think there is any thing students can do to make their particularly challenging relationships with their teachers better? If so, what? If not, why not? (Self-efficacy)

9) Does your relationship with your students influence how you feel about your job? Explain. Probing questions: Does it influence your interactions with particular students?

10) For the following question, participants will be asked to identify, label, and rank what they consider to be the best ways for teachers to have good relationships with their students. If teachers do not generate suggestions, they will be asked to put the following options in order, and add any other ideas they think are pertinent.

   a. Help students with their school work
   b. Give students more choices in the classroom (what to study, how to learn it)
   c. Show interest in their student’s interests (what you like to do outside and inside of school)
   d. Use humor to build students up, not to tease or embarrass them
   e. Make time to get to know students one-on-one

   classroom(s), students as a group or teachers? And what makes you think that? (Power and conflict) (Probing questions about opportunities for choice and control in the classroom)
| Conclusion | 11) Ask teacher participants to respond to any additional themes that emerge from student group protocols.  
| | a. Giving students responsibility  
| | b. Responsibility of teachers to help with transitioning  
| | c. Restraint  
| | d. Rewards  
| | 12) Is there anything else you would like to tell me about teacher-student relationships? |
Appendix F
Letter of Informed Consent

Approved by the Human Subjects Committee University of Kansas, Lawrence Campus (HSCL). Approval expires one year from 12/17/2012 HSCL # 20443

Student Teacher Relationships: Exploring the Perceptions of Students Who Exhibit Challenging Behaviors

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Special Education at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University of Kansas.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to better understand what students and teachers think about what teachers can do to foster positive relationships with their students. Because research shows positive teacher-student relationships are related to positive student outcomes, the researcher is hoping to learn more about what teachers can do to help contribute to positive teacher-student relationships with their students. This researcher wants to learn what students and teachers think about this topic to help guide the development of interventions seeking to improve teacher-student relationship quality.

PROCEDURES

The researcher will conduct a focus group of 4 to 8 teachers to gather teacher perceptions of how teachers contribute to teacher-student relationship quality. These results will be compared to similar questions asked of students participating in separate focus groups conducted in different school districts. The focus group will only meet one time. The focus group will be no longer than two hours in duration. The researcher will meet with teachers at the school, at a time that is mutually agreed upon by the teachers and principal. If consent is provided by each of the participants, the focus group discussions will be audio recorded. The audiotapes will be transcribed and stored on a secure computer. The audiotapes will be stored in a locked cabinet and will be destroyed at the completion of the study. Any identifying information will be disguised as pseudonyms in the written transcripts of the recordings. The researcher will only use the recordings and transcripts for the purposes of this study.
RISKS and BENEFITS

A potential benefit is that the information gathered from this study may help contribute to the development of interventions aimed at improving teacher-student relationship quality.
A possible risk to participants is that confidentiality is limited by the researcher's responsibility to report suspected abuse. The researcher will contact child protective services to report suspected abuse. There is the potential risk that students or teachers may hear confidential or sensitive information in the focus group and share that information outside of the focus group.

PAYMENT TO PARTICIPANTS

Teacher participants will be given a $20 gift card to compensate them for the time they devote to the focus group. Investigators may ask for your social security number in order to comply with federal and state tax and accounting regulations.

PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY

Your name will not be associated in any publication or presentation with the information collected about you or with the research findings from this study. Identifiable information will not be shared unless it is required by law or university policy.

REFUSAL TO SIGN CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You are not required to sign this Consent and Authorization form and you may refuse to do so without affecting your right to any services you are receiving or may receive from the University of Kansas or to participate in any programs or events of the University of Kansas. However, if you refuse to sign, you cannot participate in this study.

QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION should be directed to:

Researcher Contact Information

Allyson Satter
Principal Investigator
Special Education Dept.
1200 Sunnyside Ave. 3150
Haworth Hall
Wayne Sailor
Faculty Supervisor
Special Education Dept.
1200 Sunnyside Ave. 3142 Haworth Hall
Haworth Hall
University of Kansas
Lawrence, KS 66045
816-560-6281

University of Kansas
Lawrence, KS 66045
785-864-4950

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant you may contact the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL) office at (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385, write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568, or email irb@ku.edu.

KEEP THIS SECTION FOR YOUR RECORDS. IF YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE TEAR OFF THE FOLLOWING SECTION AND RETURN IT TO THE RESEARCHER(S).
Letter of Informed Consent

Student Teacher Relationships: Exploring the Perceptions of Students Who Exhibit Challenging Behaviors

HSCL # __________________

PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION:

If you agree to participate in this study please sign where indicated, then tear off this section and return it to the investigator(s). Keep the consent information for your records.

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study and the use and disclosure of information about me for the study.

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. With my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years of age. By my signature I affirm that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

________________________________________________________  ________________   
Type/Print Participant’s Name                                         Date

________________________________________________________
Participant’s Signature

_____ I do grant permission for my focus group interview to be audio recorded.

_____ I do NOT grant permission for my focus group interview to be audio recorded.