

PERCEPTIONS: EXAMINING HOW TEACHERS CONTRIBUTE TO THE
POSITIVE EDUCATION EXPERIENCE OF ACADEMICALLY AT RISK
STUDENTS

By

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STUDENTS

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DEDICATION

To my precious mother, beloved husband and children, siblings, family and dear friends - your steadfast support inspired me throughout my studies. You stood by me and cheered me on to keep the faith. With deep gratitude, I say thank you.

"What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy."

- John Dewey, The School and Society ([1900] 1956), p.3)

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"Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal" (Philippians 3:13-14).

ABSTRACT

This study identified, from the perspective of ethnic minority academically at risk adolescents, teachers who were making a positive difference in their learning. In particular, the study sought to elicit the above students' descriptions of ways in which their named teachers made a contribution to a positive education experience and to explore from the perspectives of the identified teachers their actions and attitudes that contribute to a positive education experience. Narratives were provided by academically at risk students of African American, Hispanic, and American Indian descent, in grades 7 through 9, at a public junior high school in the Midwest. The researcher used a descriptive qualitative research design to elicit and analyze student and teacher narratives.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"We must insist upon this [the freedom to learn] to give our children the fairness of a start which will equip them with such an array of facts and such an attitude toward truth that they can have a real chance to judge what the world is and what its greater minds have thought it might be."

- W.E.B. Du Bois, *"The Freedom to Learn"*

([1949] 1970, p. 231)

Educators are implementing numerous interventions to address the low performance of academically at risk students (Darling-Hammond, 1997; The Education Trust, 2006; Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). Despite these efforts, there continues to be a discrepancy between the achievement of these students and others deemed not to be at risk (Bridgeland et al., 2006, March; The Education Alliance, 2006; The Education Trust, 2006). According to the National At Risk Education Network (NAREN), academically at risk students are those pupils who are in jeopardy of dropping out of school or those who may not be successful because of unfavorable living circumstances (Dallman-Jones, 2006). Likewise, Ingels, Scott, Taylor, Owings, & Quinn (1998), define academically at risk students as those struggling to achieve learning success and who have increased chances of dropping out of high school. Factors identifying the academically at risk include: (a) living in a single-parent family, (b) having older siblings who have not completed high school, (c) attending several different schools, (d) earning grades of C or lower between the sixth and eighth grades, and (e) having to repeat an earlier grade (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Haggerty, Dugoni, Reed,

Cederlund, Taylor, & Carroll, 1996; Ingels et al., 1998). Additionally, according to analyses of various student outcome data (e.g., grades, matriculation rates) from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), there are disproportionate numbers of the academically at risk who are minority students in the low socio-economic range (Nord et al., 2011).

Background

Discussion in the literature provides insight into the multiple factors influencing the learning of academically at risk minority students (Bridgeland et al. 2006; Kaufman, & Bradbury, 1992; Singham, 2003). For example, Kaufman and Bradbury (1992), reported that "Black, Hispanic, and Native American students from low socio-economic backgrounds were more likely than other students to be deficient in basic mathematics and reading skills" (p. v). The authors also indicated these pupils tend to drop out of school between grades 8 and 10, suggesting that a review of their educational experiences is important in understanding the background knowledge that academically at risk minority students bring to the classroom. Although information from the NCES (2003) provides results indicating African American and Hispanic students had improved their academic performance since the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS, 1988), significant progress has not been realized since the mid-1980s.

Low achievement in mathematics and reading are early indicators of academic risk (Dropout Rates in the United States, 1994; Friedlaender & Frenkel, 2002; National Center for Education Statistics, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1988-2000; The Education Trust, 2006). According to data compiled from the NELS (1988) study, academically at risk minority students at the eighth-grade

level appear to demonstrate a lack of basic proficiencies in the areas of mathematics and reading in comparison to their white peers (Kaufman & Bradbury, 1992). Based on the NELS study, follow-up research, conducted bi-annually from 1990-1994 and in 2000, suggests that disproportionate numbers of at risk students tend to exhibit patterns of suspension, expulsion, retention, and dropping out of school when compared to students who are not at risk. However, the literature does not consider that all factors associated with being academically at risk are related only to students. It considers teachers' actions to be influential as well.

Research has indicated an association between the teachers' perception of students as underachievers and those students becoming academically at risk (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Poplin & Weeres, 1992; Stipek, 2006; Thornton, 2006). Multiple studies analyzing the topic have suggested that teacher perceptions of these students seem to influence teacher practice, which subsequently affects student success in the classroom (Bridgeland et al., 2010; Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2006; Poplin & Weeres, 1992). To illustrate this claim, the U.S. Department of Education (NCES 2002-114) reported on an NCES study, which suggested that students have a tendency to become disillusioned with school if they perceive that teachers and administrators do not care about their success. The content of the extant research on factors affecting students' tendencies to exhibit characteristics associated with their being classified as being at risk commonly examines disparities in educational experiences among different student populations. Few studies, however, have studied the at risk phenomenon from the perspective of the academically at risk minority learner (Friedlaender et al., 2007; Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

Once considered the concern primarily of urban school districts, the problem of how to address the academically at risk learner has expanded into suburban areas (Dallman-Jones, 2006). Underscoring the significance of the geographic expansion of academically at risk minority students, the literature indicates that teachers in suburban schools do not feel sufficiently prepared to address the learning needs of these students (Brown, 2007; Dallman-Jones, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 1998; Delpit, 2006). For example, the national census data confirm an increase in the geographical dispersion of academically at risk minority students as well as in the numbers of these students attending public schools. The National At Risk Education Network (NAREN) recognizes the growing number of these learners in classrooms today and the need for adequate instruction (Children's Defense Fund, 2005 Annual Report; Dallman-Jones, 2006). Given the increasing number of these students in urban and suburban school districts and the possible resulting implications for teacher preparation, the problem to be addressed in this study is to describe ways teachers are perceived as contributing positively to students' education experiences.

Purpose

Some specialists in instructional effectiveness are suggesting that students' intelligence and abilities are cultivated most effectively when teachers effectively integrate a variety of pedagogical approaches in their teaching (Miller, 2005; Zeichner, 1992). Although teachers might express similar professional philosophies, there are educators who appear more likely to foster credibility and influence positive outcomes when working with academically at risk minority learners. Thus, the purpose of this study

was to explore and describe ways in which teachers are perceived as contributing to positive education experiences of this identified student population.

More specifically, this study examines the following research questions:

1. According to academically at risk minority students, what are the ways in which particular teachers make a positive contribution to the students' education experience?
2. According to the above-identified teachers, what are the ways in which they make a positive contribution to the students' education experience?

Definition of Terms

Academically At Risk Students: For the purpose of this study, the term “at risk” describes students who are more likely to drop out of school or those who may not be successful due to unfavorable circumstances in life (Dallman-Jones, 2006).

According to the National Educational Longitudinal Study (1988), factors predicting at risk status include: (a) basic demographic characteristics, (b) family and personal background, (c) the amount of parental involvement in the student’s education, (d) the student’s academic history, (e) student behavioral factors, (f) teacher perceptions of the student, and (g) the characteristics of the student’s school (p. iii). In addition, the State Department of Education (SDE) defines the term "at risk student" as a pupil who meets one or more of the following criteria:

- A student who is not meeting the requirements necessary for promotion to the next grade level or graduation from high school,
- A student whose education attainment is below other students of their age or grade level,

- A student who is a potential dropout,
- A student who is failing two or more courses of study,
- A student who has been retained, and
- A student who is not reading at grade level.

Classroom Environment: The classroom environment creates a climate that affects students' affective qualities, such as self-esteem, academic self-concept, achievement motivation, and self-efficacy. For the purposes of this study, the term connotes the teacher's contributions to the social-emotional climate that students experience. Classroom environment includes interactions between students and resources in the environment.

Diverse / Minority Students: The terms diverse and minority students are used interchangeably to indicate children of color: African American, American Indian/Native American, and Hispanic/Latino student populations (The Education Trust, 2006).

Teacher Attributes: For the purpose of the current research, attributes incorporate habitual patterns related to one's thoughts and feelings which, in turn, impact the action one takes in a classroom. Attributes are manifested in the teacher's self-awareness and in the ways in which the teacher thinks about teaching. In addition, teacher attributes include professional behaviors and ethical standards.

Teacher-Student Relationships: The manner in which the teacher and student(s) interact in the classroom, pertinent to the students' development. Relationships are manifested in cognitive and social-emotional contexts.

Summary

Chapter One presents the historical context for the problem and purpose of this research, and provides conceptual support relating to the current study. Chapter Two examines pertinent research about the classroom environment, teacher-student relationships, and teacher attributes. Chapter Three explains the research design of semi-structured small-group interviews that support the empirical basis for this research. Chapter Four provides an analysis of the student and teacher in-depth interviews. Chapter Five discusses recommendations for future inquiry and teacher practice.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

"Listening is the beginning of understanding."

- Costa & Kallick, 2008, p. 20

Mounting evidence indicates enduring challenges to the academic success of academically at risk minority students (Darling-Hammond, 1997; French, 1998; Bridgeland et al. 2006; Taylor & Bullard, 1995; Williams, 2003). Although it is generally accepted that historical and ideological factors influence schooling, the basic unit of learning continues to consist of the teacher and the student (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Delpit, 1995; Dewey, 1938; Williams, 2003). Despite existing research that focuses on the improvement of education, the literature reveals a void in identifying ways in which teachers contribute to these students' positive learning experiences (Cazden, 2001; Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, 2002). For the purposes of the current research, the term "positive learning experience" refers to the emotional and academic support cultivated between teachers and students in the classroom environment (Phelan, 1992; Pianta, 1999). Addressing this void in the literature on academically at risk minority students, this study aims to describe factors that may contribute to at risk students' positive education experiences. The discussion in this chapter examines key variables studied in this research: (1) classroom environment, (2) teacher-student relationships, and (3) teacher attributes.

The Classroom Environment

Historically, over 30 years of research has explored the relationship between the classroom environment and student outcomes (Goh & Fraser, 1998; Walberg, 1976;

Wubbels, 1993). For example, Dorman's (2002) exploration of 39 elementary schools in Singapore suggests classroom environments that cultivate nurturing teacher behaviors are related to greater cognitive outcomes. Similarly, Poplin and Weeres (1992) provide comprehensive data from multiple ethnic and linguistic student populations, teachers, administrators, parents, and staff. Based on their study of "student voice," their research asks: "What does student voice look like in practice? What difference does it make?" (p. 4). Poplin and Weeres indicate that problems related to students' low morale and poor achievement reference their perceptions of the learning environment.

While the study of Poplin and Weeres (1992) serves as a model to enact school change, their point is that "school reform will be more successful if students participate" (p. 9). In reflecting on the voices of the students, Poplin and Weeres note, "Even if we did ask them their opinion, they doubted that it would make any difference . . . the processes we used had to temper the voices of those who held positions of power and were accustomed to speaking and being heard" (p. 43). Findings pertinent to the current study suggest that questions remain concerning the equitable inclusion of students' perspectives.

Early Investigations

Extensive studies in Canada, China, England, and Australia suggest a positive overall association between the classroom environment and academic efficacy (Dorman & Adams, 2002; Song & Hunt, 2002; Stern, 1970). Researchers observe that a student's confidence for learning is more likely to occur if the classroom environment is task oriented, equitable, cohesive, and supported while also developing the general welfare of students (Dorman & Adams, 2002). Similarly, researchers argue that an orderly

classroom environment promotes diligence. While the literature does not specifically address those students who are academically at risk, it does suggest insights into ways the classroom climate influences self-efficacy for students from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds (Dorman & Adams, 2002; Song & Hunt, 2002; Stern, 1970). For example, Dorman and Adams indicate the use of established classroom environment instruments in multiple studies to report scale item results for equity, diversity, teacher support, and teacher interaction.

Equally important, Moos (1987) focused on social climate scales and a framework for human environment. Moos suggested the classroom environment consists primarily of three categories: relationships, personal development, and system maintenance and change. Based on Moos' findings, the literature indicates the classroom environment is a social psychological construct that focuses on human behavior and learning. Relevant findings include the development of scales that measure students' perceptions of the classroom climate and the pioneering of important considerations for future research (Dorman et. al., 2004; Fraser, 1994; Moos, 1987).

Research based on the Harvard Project Physics (HPP) study found relationships between students' perceptions of the classroom environment and student learning in an experimentally based physics course (Walberg & Anderson, 1968). Instrumentation included the Learning Environment Inventory, which was used to elicit students' responses related to their perceptions of the classroom environment and their education experience. Findings from students' pre-test scores, teacher personality measures, and the inventory indicated strong relationships between students' perceptions of the classroom environment and individual learning (Chavez, 1984; Dorman et. al., 2004; Walberg &

Anderson, 1968). While evidence related to the Harvard Project Physics (HPP) indicates the significance of classroom environment research within the past 30 years, research suggests a broader exploration of students' perspectives in determining a deeper understanding of what contributes to positive education experiences.

Self-Efficacy

Although scholars have contributed to inquiry in classroom environment research, many of these investigations fail to address academically at risk minority students (Downey, 2008; Reed et al., 1995; Williams, 2003). The literature suggests a shift from the perspective of focusing primarily on cognitive processes to one that includes fostering self-efficacy (Williams, 2003). Self-efficacy in the classroom environment relates to how students motivate themselves (Borman & Overman, 2004; Condy, 2006; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). Downey's (2008) research synthesis/analysis resulted in 12 recommendations grouped into 4 clusters: (a) teacher-student rapport, (b) classroom climate, (c) instructional strategies, and (d) student skills. Similarly, Bandura (as cited in Friedman, 1994) indicates that self-efficacy is a "sense of human accomplishment and personal well-being" (para. 2). In general, the literature suggests that self-efficacy connotes a caring classroom community and the student's capacity to make positive adjustments to personal challenges while still graduating from high school (Benard, 2004; Downey, 2008; Johnson, 1997; Thomsen, 2002; Lessard et al., 2009).

Moreover, according to Morales (2008), a growing body of literature suggests that, while much has been done to isolate the attributes of self-efficacy, the need remains for "coherent theoretical frameworks" (p. 23). The study of Morales is an exception in

this regard. For example, Morales studied 50 low socioeconomic (SES), academically at risk minority students. The qualitative study focused on students from various ethnic backgrounds who: (a) were recruited over an eight-year period; (b) had taken at least 30 college hours; and (c) whose grade point average was a minimum of 3.0. Morales' findings suggest that self-efficacy consists of different dimensions within a theoretical framework for academically at risk minority students in higher education and the need to further examine varied curriculum orientations.

In a large-scale longitudinal study, research was conducted on approximately 3,000 low-income, academically at risk students (Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, & Ouston, 1979). Although the study was to examine school characteristics in relationship to student success, findings indicate that rigorous expectations, external incentives, and positive dispositions modeled by teachers were among those factors conducive to positive academic experiences (Downey, 2008; Rutter et al., 1979). Specific to academically at risk students and classroom environment research, studies indicate the significance of self-advocacy and instruction as related to project-based learning (Borman & Overman, 2004). Likewise, research suggests that a classroom environment perceived as supportive and orderly fosters a sense of pride and cultivates self-efficacy (Downey, 2008; Waxman et al., 2002). However, while the research indicates a relation between self-efficacy and the classroom environment, there is little evidence that specifically addresses academically at risk minority students.

According to an article published by the University of North Carolina School of Education (LEARN, NC), the literature suggests self-efficacy and the theory of *una buena educación* (good schooling) as described by Hispanic parents (Plastino, n.d.).

Despite the fact that the American standard for a good education traditionally places an emphasis on literacy, *una buena educación* refers to the broader view of educating a child. *Una buena educación* indicates a classroom environment that fosters the general welfare of students. Self-efficacy promotes diligence. While this literature does not emphasize academically at risk minority students, it does provide insight into ways the classroom climate influences self-efficacy for students across diverse racial and ethnic groups (Plastino, n.d.).

Given the implications of self-efficacy, research suggests practice that emphasizes that each child has value and can succeed (Downey, 2008; Rutter et al., 1979; Waxman & Padron, 2003). For example, Rutter et al. (1979) demonstrated that high expectations, positive behavior supports, and appropriate feedback indicate positive education experiences. Important to this current study, the researchers suggested findings that indicated classroom teachers contribute to a student's education experience. Unfortunately, the study does not include in-depth information from the student perspective.

Focusing on Culture

Studies reflective of cultural dimensions illustrate possible mismatches between the background experiences brought to the classroom by majority teachers and minority students (Ford & Moore, 2004). For this study, fostering a positive classroom indicates that the teacher reflects on what motivates the student and how to build on the "students' cultural background" (p. 38). Moreover, while classroom environment research has focused historically on the psychosocial aspects of education, explorations today indicate a more comprehensive approach toward understanding how the environment contributes

to the learning experiences of academically at risk minority students (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Waxman & Pardon, 2003).

In a study examining academically at risk minority students and the classroom environment, Huang and Waxman (1996) compared psychosocial variables between high achieving and low achieving minority students in six urban middle school mathematics classrooms. Stratified sampling was employed to identify 180 adolescent African American, Hispanic, and Asian-American research participants who exhibited high achievement motivation and 180 students from identical ethnic groups who displayed low achievement motivation.

The researchers found that, for minority students who perceived the classroom environment to foster self-efficacy, students displayed: (a) a greater sense of connection to their classmates, teachers, and school, (b) more engagement with instructional activities, (c) increased motivation to excel, and (d) a greater sense of self-efficacy. Among their recommendations for future research, Huang and Waxman (1996) argued that a need exists for broader research that explores influences on students' affective qualities.

Research of the Classroom Environment

The current study aimed examining the literature on academically at risk minority students and factors that impact students' education experiences in the category of the classroom environment. While research overall indicates a link between variables of the classroom environment and students' positive perceptions of their learning experiences, the research of Poplin and Weeres (1992) focused on addressing learning and academically at risk students from the perspectives of students. Although key findings

merit probing student voice, numerous questions remain regarding the equitable representation of student voice in relationship to discussions focusing on academically at risk students. In response, this current study was designed to elicit narratives from academically at risk minority students, as well as those of teachers identified by the students who were perceived to have made a positive contribution to their education experiences. Other studies in classroom environment research indicate exploration related to self-efficacy in addition to the psychosocial variables of students' affective qualities (Downey, 2008; Moos, 1987; Morales, 2008; Rutter et al., 1979).

Teacher-Student Relationships

Over twenty years and across different grade levels, research has been conducted on teacher-student relationships and the learning of academically at risk students. While educators explore how to address the learning of academically at risk minority students, salient literature suggests some relational patterns that influence the outcomes of positive Teacher-Student relationships (Benard, 1991; National Research Council, 2004; Noddings, 1992; Stipek, 2006). Important to the current study is research that indicates that students are more likely to have positive learning experiences when they feel respected and valued by teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Friedlaender & Darling-Hammond, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lewis & Kim, 2008; Noddings, 2005; Pianta, Stuhlman, & Hamre (2002); Williams, 2003).

In addition, a broad body of literature suggests a positive teacher-student relationship is fundamental in effective schooling and to how the teacher is perceived by students when teaching (Benard, 1993; French, 1998; Noddings, 2007). Specifically, if students perceive a positive teacher-student relationship, then the teacher has created a

"classroom climate in which caring, respect, and responsibility are the behavioral norms" (Williams, 2003, p. 125). Moreover, teachers who nurture positive teacher-student relationships are more likely to be perceived as not giving up on their students and providing them with a sense of hope (Benard, 1996; Edmonds, 1986; James, Jurich, & Estes, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Fostering Connections

Research by Lee and Smith (1995) and McLaughlin (1994) document that Teacher-Student relationships that focus on trust, caring, and mutual respect are positively correlated with student achievement. For example, in a five year study conducted by the Center for Research on the Context of Teaching, findings indicated that the manner in which teachers treat students "counted more than any other factor in the school setting in determining their attachment to school, . . . the academic future they imagined for themselves" (McLaughlin, 1994, p. 9). While school policy provides rules that permeate school culture, research focusing on positive teacher-student relationships suggests that motivation, behavior, and learning are improved through teacher practice that is more supportive than authoritarian (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

According to Pianta (1999), at the Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning, positive Teacher-Student relationships are defined by the communication between teachers and students. Likewise, research findings indicate that "students function more effectively when they feel respected and valued and function poorly when they feel disrespected or marginalized" (Stipek, 2006, p. 46). When academically at risk students experience authentic care and support, teacher-student relationships indicate an increase regarding engagement and achievement (Ferguson, 2002; Stipek, 2006). For

example, findings suggest African American students respond well to teachers who demonstrate authentic care for their learning (Davidson & Phelan, 1999; Ferguson, 2002; National Research Council Committee on Increasing High School Students' Engagement and Motivation to Learn, 2004; Pianta, 1999).

Although the literature does not identify any one specific strategy to develop teacher-student relationships, it does indicate that "teacher commitment to students" is a major factor in fostering academic achievement and pro-social behaviors (Shann, 1999). Illustrating this assertion, Strahan and Layell (2006) examined a Strive to Attain Respect (STAR) team in an urban middle school of 645 students where previously unsuccessful academically at risk students were demonstrating improvement.

In conducting this case study, Strahan and Layell (2006) observed that, although academic growth throughout the school was minimal during the 2001-02 academic years, students on the seventh grade STAR team displayed gains that either met or exceeded required expectations. Important linkage to this current study on academically at risk minority students suggests the relevance of pro-social behaviors or responsive teaching in developing positive student teacher relationships. While Strahan and Layell (2006) indicated support for the demonstration of caring and responsive teaching, a shortcoming is suggested in that the research examines academically at risk students at only one grade level rather than the entire building.

Caring in Education

Schussler and Collins (2006) conducted a study examining Teacher-Student relationships and academically at risk students. Atypical to the general description of at risk students, Schussler and Collins described "at risk" as those learners who struggle

academically despite enrollment in a high achieving suburban school district. The study involved 16 academically at risk students identified by the school district and enrolled at the alternative high school identified as Middle College. Teacher recommendations, student recommendations, and academically at risk participants representative of Middle College were included. Racial/ethnic demographics of Middle College indicated 96.8% of the students were White with the remaining percentage consisting of African Americans.

Schussler and Collins (2006) examined, from the perspectives of academically at risk students, how caring relationships influence their perception of schooling. Data collected throughout the study included three in-depth interviews with the students and faculty members as well as classroom observations, field notes, and selected artifacts (e.g., attendance records, school newspaper).

According to the findings of Schussler and Collins (2006), three sets of variables emerged as important: (a) organizational factors, (b) pervasive elements, and (c) caring relationships. Schussler and Collins provide a rich description of the caring relationship, as indicated in Figure 1 below (p. 1470).

The research of Schussler and Collins (2006) provides a conceptual framework of care, and suggests how educators can organize caring communities in schools. Despite important findings that actualize the theoretical framework of caring in education, one limitation of the study is its setting, i.e., an alternative school. The noted tendency of teachers at Middle College as being more likely to support the idea of caring; implies a need to conduct research in general education settings.

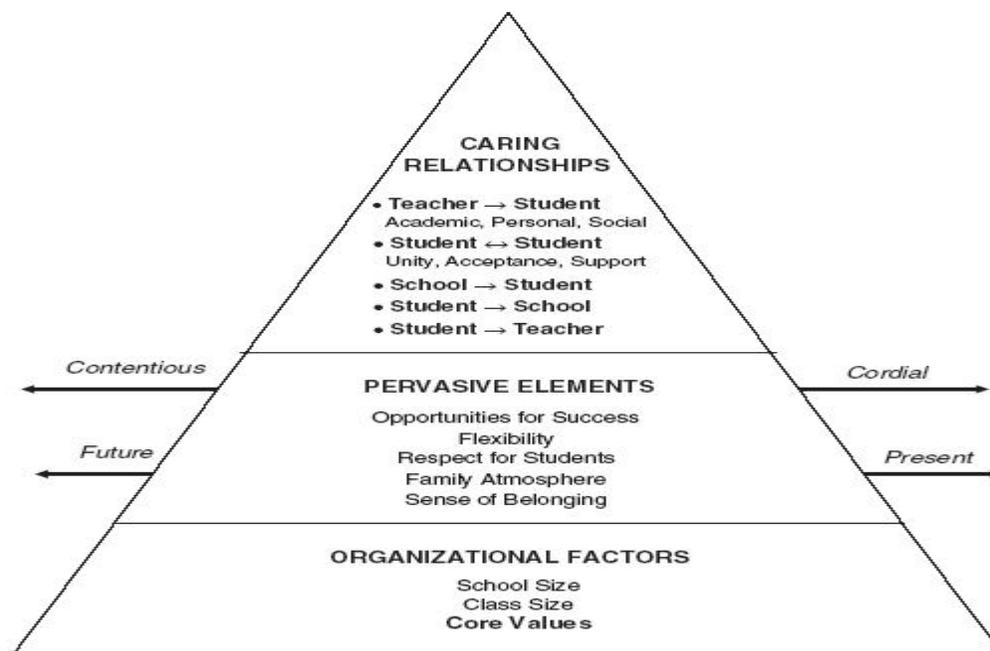


Figure 1. Caring at Middle College

Caring in Teacher-Student relationships is often conceptualized from the perspectives of moral ethics, cultural responsiveness, and expectations for student learning. Proponents of caring contend that it extends to descriptive words that define teachers' actions and guide the curriculum (Gay, 2000; McBee, 2007; Noddings, 2002). While proponents suggest the viewpoint "offers a compelling case for intentionally crafting an ethic of care in schools," critics indicate that caring is elusive and difficult to measure (McBee, 2007, p. 35; Noddings, 2002). Questions emerge as to how to express the ethic of care within an intellectual construct, rather than merely focus on being nice.

McBee (2007) sought to define how caring is described by teacher candidates, classroom teachers, and college faculty at a mid-Atlantic university. The study consisted of a qualitative research design and included open-ended anonymous surveys and an ethnographic approach for data gathering and analysis. The sample pool consisted of 420

teacher candidates in the elementary education program, 80 cooperating teachers, and 16 faculty members from teacher education programs. In analyzing the most frequently identified characteristics of caring and percentages of respondents by group, over 40% of all subgroups expressed the need to show an interest in learners, while more than 40% of college teachers and experienced respondents indicated authentic listening as a characteristic of teacher caring (McBee, 2007).

Further analysis of the data provided 78 characteristics of caring teachers. The top 20 characteristics included offers to help students; compassion shown toward students; showing an interest in students; caring about the individual; and giving their time. In contrast, the least mentioned characteristics included supports, encouraging/encourages, shows respect, meeting basic needs, and selfishness (McBee, 2007). McBee's study provides general guidance for educators in designing teacher-student relationships.

Examining Cultural Differences

Similar to the studies of student-teacher relationships and academically at risk students, scholars have examined the disparity in achievement related to schooling and academically at risk minority students (Brown, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lewis & Kim, 2008; Lockwood, 1996; Saenger & Charp, 2003). In particular, for academically at risk minority students of African American, Hispanic, and American Indian descent, a variety of ideas have emerged indicating why these students struggle. While some theories have focused on the need for a greater understanding of cultural differences, others suggest a gap in teacher training so that misunderstandings may arise because of significant background and social experiences brought to the classroom by teachers and

students (Brown, 2007; Szabo & Anderson, 2009). For example, Szabo and Anderson (2009) cite constructivist theories in relationship to the "ethnic and cultural attributes of students" and teacher candidates' multicultural attitudes (p. 190). With particular reference to social learning and cognitive dissonance, the researchers suggest that a deeper understanding of teachers' behaviors in the classroom environment may "play important parts" in student learning (p.190). In addition, Szabo and Anderson indicate cognitive dissonance and the importance of teachers examining their personal beliefs in order for change to occur.

Despite the significance of these varied perspectives, current literature indicates further examination is needed of academically at risk minority students in correlation to teacher-student relationships that are manifested in cognitive and social-emotional contexts (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Saenger & Lewis-Charp, 2003; Szabo & Anderson, 2009; Williams, 2003). Some critics argue that student achievement does not include a non-cognitive capacity, while this researcher aimed to better understand teacher understanding of factors that positively contribute to the education experiences of academically at risk minority students.

Research of Teacher-Student Relationships

Previous studies on teacher-student relationships indicate caring in education and culturally responsive teaching in providing descriptions of Teacher-Student relationships that are perceived as making contributions to these students' education experiences.

Teacher Attributes

It is widely held that teacher attributes influence student learning (Ayers & Ford, 1996; Danielson, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 1997). Ayers and Ford (1966) state, "Teachers must believe their students can experience a future that is full of hope, promise, and potential, or they should, quite simply, not teach our children" (p. 326). While discussion is largely theoretical, for the purpose of this study, teacher attributes are conceptualized as patterns of one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that one's practice reflects in classrooms. Attributes are manifested in the teachers' self-awareness and in the ways in which the teacher thinks about teaching.

Examining Perspectives

The professional literature suggests teacher behaviors that are student-centered foster students' beliefs in their capacity to learn as well as convey instruction in a manner that makes a difference to students (Dolan & McCaslin, 2008; Downey, 2008; Friedlaender & Darling-Hammond, 2007; The Education Trust, 2006; Poplin & Weeres, 1992; Williams, 2003). Studies have shown that positive changes can occur when drawing on the strengths of teachers as well as those of students (Delpit, 1996; Friedlaender & Darling-Hammond, 2007; Poplin & Weeres, 1992). According to Delpit (1996), "When teachers are committed to teaching all students, and when they understand that through their teaching change can occur, then the chance for transformation is great" (p. 208). According to the literature, these criteria work together to form the long-term influence of a teacher (Delpit, 1996).

According to the literature, teachers who demonstrate an appreciation for all students and stimulate intellectual growth exhibit the attributes of "turnaround teachers."

Described as providing "supports and opportunities . . . critical to school success," "turnaround" teachers suggest the attributes of flexibility, active listening, humor, a positive demeanor, and an authentic interest in students (Williams, 2003, p. 118). Teachers indicate a clear sense of professional beliefs through self-reflection and the continuous evaluation of their role as practitioners (INTASC, 1992). In addition, the literature suggests "turnaround" teachers foster a sense of hope and actively engage students in their learning (Benard, 1996; Gay, 2000; INTASC, 1992; Poplin & Weeres, 1992; Williams, 2003).

Equally as important, research suggests "turnaround" teachers build on students' strengths and emphasize meaningful and experiential instruction. In studies on teachers in urban settings, as well as research on multiple intelligences, empirical evidence from the research of Gardner, (2000) and Poplin and Weeres (1992) indicate "turnaround" teachers. Given the review of literature, research indicates that considerable debate exists related to inquiry and the attributes of teachers (Benard, 1996; Williams, 2003). The current research aims to better understand the attributes of teachers perceived as making positive contributions to students' education experiences.

Relevant literature indicates that a student's perception of a teacher is influenced by the ways in which the teachers reflect their teaching philosophy (Harme & Pianta 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lareau, 2003). Pertinent to this study, Helm (2007) found that, while teacher competence in content knowledge is an important attribute, a deeper understanding of teacher competence lies beyond one's subject matter and cognitive ability (Eisner, 2002; Helm, 2007; Harme & Pianta, 2001). For example, according to the longitudinal research of Harme and Pianta (2001), who studied 179 students enrolled

in the same school district from kindergarten through the eighth grade, findings suggest teachers' attributes are important to a student's education experience regardless of the variables of race, ethnicity, and cognitive ability. Findings suggest attributes that reflect dedication to the profession, compassion, and the communication of high expectations through frequent, consistent, and positive feedback.

Similarly, in examining the ethnographic research of Ladson-Billings (2009), findings suggest that cultural competence or respect for students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds is important in working effectively with African American students. While the work of Ladson-Billings (2009) raises important questions related to academic success and African American students, it also contributes to the field of culturally responsive teaching.

The Education Alliance (2004) conducted an investigation involving 2,931 students, teachers, and staff at the secondary level. The purpose of the research was to examine participants' perceptions of the school climate. Based on cluster random sampling chosen from pre-existing groups, participants completed surveys that suggested eight emergent themes related to schooling and the perspectives of low-income White and African American students. The students' responses were elicited through focus groups and consisted of:

- Teacher favoritism and its negative impact on student achievement
- The need for school personnel to respect students
- The need for teachers to use a variety of teaching strategies and more explicit classroom instruction, particularly in mathematics

- The desire to establish better interpersonal relationships between students and teachers
- The need to stop discouraging students from taking more challenging classes needed for success in college and the workplace
- The need for more assistance with course selection and scheduling, especially with African American and low-income White students
- The need for counselors to provide academic counseling, encouragement, and support to all students, including African American and low-income White students
- The importance of parent involvement and support in helping students achieve (pp. 4-5)

The Education Alliance study (2004) suggests a disparity between the perceptions of students and teachers/staff members. The majority of the teachers/staff members' responses were more positive in comparison to those of the low-income White and African American students. Key findings suggest that a student's perspective of the school environment is heavily influenced by the attributes of the teachers and staff.

While results indicate that examining schooling from the students' perspective is important, we know little about students' descriptions of teachers who have made a positive contribution to their education experience. While the Education Alliance focuses on the responses of low-income students as a tool in relationship to the school improvement process, the current study aims to explore student voice in relationship to academically at risk minority students and descriptions of teachers perceived to make positive contributions to their education experience.

Summary

Based on the review of literature and the current study, evidence indicates the need to conduct research on the education experiences of academically at risk minority students (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Poplin & Weeres, 1992; The Education Alliance, 2004; and Williams, 2003). First, a review of classroom environment research shows linkages to social psychology and a needs-press perspective in the conceptualization of many of these studies. Described as a psychosocial construct that exists between one's psychological needs and the press of the environment, research suggests the classroom environment is instrumental in either promoting or hindering student outcomes (Dorman, 2002; Genn, 1984). Studies suggest the classroom environment is a social psychological construct that undergirds human behavior and learning (Dorman et. al., 2004; Fraser, 1994; Moos, 1987).

Relevant findings from the Harvard Project Physics (Walberg & Anderson, 1968), the studies of Rutter et al. (1979) and Borman & Overman, (2004) indicate the role of self-efficacy and culture in relationship to academically at risk minority students and factors that create a climate that influences students' affective qualities and their subsequent achievement motivation.

Building on the research of Delpit (1996), Education Alliance (2004), Ladson-Billings (2009), and Lareau (2003) suggests particular teacher attributes appear to contribute positively to a student's perception of an education experience. In these studies, findings indicate that positive changes can occur when drawing on the strengths of teachers as well as those of students (Delpit, 1996; Education Alliance, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2009; and Lareau, 2003). More specifically, the literature suggests teacher

behaviors that are student-centered (e.g., caring and creative dispositions) foster belief in their capacity to learn (Benard, 1996; Dolan & McCaslin, 2008; Williams, 2003). While limitations of the research are noted, the need for additional inquiry to explore this perspective is the aim of this current study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

"It is this process of selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order , and thereby making sense of them that makes telling stories a meaning-making experience."

- Seidman, 2006, p. 7

This study examined positive school experiences of ethnic minority, academically at risk adolescents and the teachers they believe made a positive difference in their learning. Specifically, the study sought to elicit students' descriptions of the ways in which some of their teachers contributed to their positive education experience. The study also explored, from the perspectives of the identified teachers, their actions and attitudes that contributed to this positive education experience. Narratives were provided by academically at risk students of African American, Hispanic, and American Indian descent, in grades 7 through 9, at a public junior high school in the midwest. The researcher used a descriptive research design to elicit and analyze student and teacher narratives. This chapter consists of the: (a) research questions, (b) research design, (c) methods, (d) instrumentation, (e) procedures, (f) data management, (g) data analysis, and (h) summary.

Research Questions

This study aimed to address a void in the literature by conducting research from the perspectives of academically at risk minority students. Specifically, two research questions guided the study:

1. According to academically at risk minority students, what are the ways in which particular teachers contribute to the students' positive education experience?
2. According to the above-identified teachers, what are the ways in which they contribute to particular academically at risk minority students' positive education experience?

Research Design

For this study, a descriptive research design was considered an appropriate method of inquiry because the data can be used to describe select factors that contribute to the learning of academically at risk minority students. This researcher took a stance: (a) on participants as persons rather than as subjects; (b) that the researcher knew no more about the topic than the participants; and (c) that the researcher favored a holistic approach toward participants' experiences, as well as their beliefs, values, and attitudes (Willis, 2001; Van Manen, 1999; Caelli, 2000). Data were collected through stimulated recall and semi-structured interviews. All meetings were conducted face-to-face by the researcher in the school setting (Groenewald, 2004; Seidman, 2006). Field notes documented the interviews.

Setting

The site selected for this study was a multi-racial, accredited junior high school (grades 7-9) in a small university city in the midwest. The school is comparable to other area junior high schools with similar demographic profiles. The reported ethnicity for this public school of 555 pupils included 8.83% African American students, 4.3% Hispanic, 18.56% "Other," and 68.29% white. According to the school's profile, economically disadvantaged students represented 38.20% of the student population,

while 61.80% were representative of the non-economically disadvantaged. English Language Learners (ELL) represented 2.9% of the total building enrollment.

Participants

Participants in the study consisted of two sample groups. The first group included ethnic and racial minority students who met the criteria for academically at risk, as defined by the State Department of Education (SDE). The second sample group consisted of educators, identified by the academically at risk students, who the students believed made positive contributions to their education experience.

Students

The sample consisted of African American, Hispanic, and American Indian adolescent students who fit the criteria for academically at risk as defined by the State Department of Education (SDE). For this study, participants met one or more of the following criteria: (a) a student who is not meeting the requirements necessary for promotion to the next grade level or graduation from high school, (b) a student whose education attainment is below other students of his/her age or grade level, (c) a student who is a potential dropout, (d) a student who is failing two or more courses of study, (e) a student who has been retained, or (f) a student who is not reading at grade level.

The final sample (N=12) consisted of seven African American, three Hispanic, and two American Indian students who were academically at risk. Seven of the students were in the ninth grade, one was in the eighth grade, and four were in the seventh grade. The sample consisted equally of six males and six females (Appendix A). According to the qualitative research principles of Seidman (2006), the data were transcribed in a manner that could be traced to its original source throughout the interview process. For

example, coding of the student data consisted of the letter "S" for student, the numerical order in which the written consent was received, the student's grade level, gender, and the identity of their racial/ethnic group. In this instance, "Ted-S/1/7/M/AA" indicated an African American male student in the seventh grade who returned his consent form first. In addition, all students' coded information was followed by a pseudonym randomly determined by the researcher (Appendix H).

Teachers

Educator participants were the student participants' current or previous teachers employed by the school district selected for this study. These individuals were nominated by any member of the student sample as making a positive difference in that student's education experience. Therefore, sampling involved inviting about every fourth individual from the 25 educators nominated. The researcher contacted educators through e-mail or in person to inform them of their nomination and then followed up with consent letters, as approved by the university's Human Subjects Committee. Initially 10 educators were contacted and the selection continued until a sample group of educators (N=7) was obtained based on the signed consent forms received. The resulting sample consisted of seven educators, three at the elementary level and four at the secondary level (Appendix B). Similar to the students, the teacher data was coded for tracking to its original source. For example, in reference to the sample participant "4/M/W/Elementary/30 years," the code indicated a White male elementary school educator who had been in the profession for 30 years (Appendix I).

Participants overall included four female and three male educators. Two of the educators were African American and five were White. All were veterans in the field, with 104 collective years of experience in education. Written consent forms for all individuals are on file.

Instrumentation

Video Scenes for Stimulated Recall

For the purpose of this study, scenes from the documentary *Accidental Hero: Room 408* (Mac & Ava Productions, 2002) were used to prompt students' recall of positive educational experiences. This documentary was chosen to stimulate student recall because it featured diverse academically at risk students and their forensics coach, Tommie Lindsey. Mr. Lindsey was named a MacArthur Foundation Fellow in 2004.

The documentary reveals perspectives of academically at risk students. It "speaks to many of the daunting issues facing children and teachers today, yet gives hope to the American education system" (DeBono & Rosen, n.d., p. 7). As the documentary celebrates the triumphs of students "beating the odds," it provided a symbolic model for academically at risk students in this study as they completed the stimulated recall task and subsequent interviews.

The segments selected for stimulated recall (SR) were exemplars of the broad categories addressed in the literature review: classroom environment, teacher and student relationships, and teacher attributes. Eleven segments from the documentary were shown to the content validity judges. To identify the segments, each was given a number and title, as evaluated by the researcher. Regarding the scenes identified by the researcher for SR, scene 1 described setting academic standards and scenes 2 and 8 discussed

student choices related to education. Scenes 3, 5, 6, and 10 focused on racial perspectives; scene 4 focused on challenging classroom experiences; scenes 7 and 9 focused on the educational perceptions of students and teachers; and scene 11 focused on the accomplishment of academic achievement (Appendix C).

Content Validity

Establishing content validity judges for the study's protocols was managed in four steps. First, a sample pool of 24 staff members currently working at a junior high school in the participating district was contacted. These individuals had all participated in district-sponsored training in culturally responsive teaching (CRT) or were currently participating in a related book study. Second, invitations were extended to potential content validity judges via documents indicating the approval for research through the Human Subjects Committee and through the school district's email and mailings. These mailings included the study's purpose and tasks for the judges as well as an estimate of the time commitment involved. Third, those potential content validity judges indicating an interest were invited to attend an information session with the researcher where questions were answered and written consent forms were distributed. Fourth, nine individuals agreed to serve as content validity judges.

The content validity judges were five teachers, one administrator, one learning coach, a librarian and a school nurse. Seven of the content validity judges were female and two were male. Six were Caucasian, two were African American, and one was Hispanic (Appendix D).

The purpose of establishing content validity for the video scenes was three-fold: (a) to assure the segments had a high likelihood of triggering students' memories of

teachers who provided positive education experiences; (b) to assure that the video scenes chosen represented clear examples of classroom environment, teacher-student relationships, or teacher attributes, and (c) to confirm that the selected scenes represented the domain of items the study attempted to cover (Carmines & Zeller, 1991). Each judge viewed and rated all eleven video scenes (60–90 minutes to complete the task). Based on a scale of one to five (e.g., 1= strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree), the content validity judges rated the scenes and the researcher then summed the ratings to produce rankings. As a result, each scene received an adequate number of "Strongly Agree" tallies and counted within the top five. No scene was eliminated.

After the scenes were rated, five written questions related to the video scenes provided additional information from the content validity judges. The five questions included: (a) What scenes clearly illustrate what takes place in the classroom? (b) What scene stands out to you? Why is this scene memorable? (c) What scene is beyond what you expected? (d) How well do you think this scene will “spark” a student’s memory? (e) Are these scenes comprehensive, has something been left out?

The purpose of these questions was to assess the video scenes for clarity and relevance to the research questions. The content validity judges' written responses included, "Thought provoking" and "The students feel connected to the teacher." When asked, "What scene stands out to you?" and "Why is this scene memorable?" responses included, "Hearing the teacher speak about pushing the students to their full potential" and "Students achieving what no one expected them to do."

All content validity judges had an opportunity to write responses to the five questions. For the first question, the scenes of students actively engaged in class, the

focus on students' similarities rather than differences, the viewing of a despondent student, and the celebration of success following a debate competition, were among the scenes discussed. Based on the second question, the triumph of students beating the odds, and the teacher's high expectations and fatherly image were noted. For question three, "creating unity in a diverse classroom and mentoring students" were focal points, while the desire to succeed was a recurring theme for question four. Several of the content validity judges indicated that the film segments were comprehensive and one suggested it would be helpful to hear more information about the teacher's dispositions from the student perspective rather than from the teacher (Appendix D).

Semi-structured Interview Questions

The semi-structured interview questions were developed by the researcher to elicit in-depth and descriptive responses from academically at risk minority students and those teachers identified by the students as making a positive contribution to the students' education experience. The protocols consisted of ten questions for the students (Appendix E) and nine questions for the teachers (Appendix F). For the students, while questions one through seven and question ten elicited multiple responses, the primary information consisted of responses from questions eight and nine. For the teachers, responses were distributed over the nine questions.

Open-ended questions for both the student and educator protocols were examined for clarity, comprehension, and relevance, in order to shape the pool of questions and the validity of the study (Appendices E, F). The content validity judges who examined the video scenes also assessed the interview protocols for the students and for the educators nominated by students. Some of the primary questions on the students' protocol

(Appendix E) probed for descriptions of the teacher by asking, "How does he help students to learn?" and "What might we learn about students and learning from watching these scenes?" Students' responses referenced the teacher's caring manner and his willingness to help students. Comments also included, "He doesn't care about your background" and "Kids look up to him." Other comments indicated the teacher "did not give up" on students and that he "wants all of his students to succeed."

Questions provided for the educators (Appendix F) included "How do you describe your philosophy to help all students do their best in school?" "Your actions?" "Your beliefs?" "Your values?" One long-time educator summarized his philosophy by stating, "All children can learn. All are wonderful if they can find a place for their anger - allow their cognitive skills to develop."

Procedures

The qualitative principles described by Groenwald (2004) and Seidman (2006) to build trust and rapport were used during the interview sessions with the student and teacher samples. Specific documents provided at the start of the study (Appendix G) included the purpose of the research, research procedures, risks and benefits, confidentiality, and the right of participants to stop the research at any time. There were three interviews for students and two for teachers over several weeks.

The first interviews for both the students and teachers were conducted individually to establish rapport and answer questions. Next, the second and third interviews for the students were conducted in small groups, and each ranged from 45 to 55 minutes in length. The second interviews for the teachers were individual and were approximately 60 minutes in length. An exception to this procedure was educator

#4/M/W/Elementary/30 (Appendix B) who asked to meet a third time for an hour to continue the semi-structured interview questions.

For both sample groups, the interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of the participants and were conducted face-to-face with the researcher. Subsequently, by restating the respondents' comments to validate information, the researcher was able to ask for clarification and determine accuracy while conducting member checks during the interview process. Audio-recorded responses were transcribed verbatim and field notes for participants were maintained in a locked file.

Students

Data were collected through three interview sessions. All interviews were conducted at the junior high school site. To assure that students felt at ease, copies of the interview questions were provided and collected during the sessions (Appendix E). Although the questions were listed in order, if students' responses answered more than one question at a time, the researcher would combine items. As students responded, additional probes included, "Can you give me an example?" or "Tell me more."

To minimize any disruption to classes, the small group interviews were conducted during the last hour of the day called Extended Learning Time (ELT). The daily schedule consisted of block scheduling. Designated for tutorial assistance, assemblies, and extra-curricular activities, the researcher used three of the ELT periods to conduct semi-structured interviews to probe for descriptions of the students' learning experiences.

The first meeting consisted of "Grand Tour" questions or dialogical openness while establishing "the context of the participants' experiences" (Seidman, 2006, p. 17). The second meeting consisted of small group interviews allowing participants to

reconstruct their classroom experiences by centering on stimulated recall (SR).

According to Edward-Leis (n.d.), stimulated recall is the recollection of conscious thoughts encouraged by "the video of that activity and research question as linked to observable events" (p. 4). Stimulated recall in this study was used to trigger students' memories of previous positive classroom experiences in the classrooms of the teacher sample.

Following the video scenes of the documentary, *Accidental Hero: Room 408*, students responded to ten open-ended interview questions (Appendices E, F) that were determined by the content validity judges. While the "Grand Tour" questions were prevalent during the first interview, questions asked during the second interview focused on teacher attributes (see Appendix E). During the second interview, the students viewed all 11 of the video scenes. The amount of time for viewing did not exceed 25 minutes. Finally, the third interview consisted of students summarizing events from the previous meeting and reflecting on their schooling by identifying and discussing teachers whom they perceived as positively contributing to their education experience.

Throughout the interview sessions, the researcher used probing to frame new questions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1996). Each interview session was conducted in the library classroom. Students were not identified by name during the interviews and their identities remained confidential outside of the sessions by using pseudonyms. All interviews were coded, transcribed, and summarized into text by the researcher. The codes for each of the racial and ethnic groups were African American (AA), Hispanic (H), and American Indian (AI).

Teachers

Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with teacher participants nominated by the students. Each interview was transcribed (Appendix I). As mentioned previously, confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms and coding the participants' identities and responses. In addition, educators were interviewed in their classrooms except on three occasions. Two instances included teachers (Sandra - #1/F/AA/Grade 9/22 years and Thelma - #6/F/W/Grades 7-9) who expressed the preference to be interviewed in the researcher's office and the other (Orin-#5/M/W/Grade 6) participated in a brief conversation by telephone.

Data Management

Transcripts and field notes were compiled and divided into categories as described by Groenewald (2004). Observational notes (ON) included the observations by the researcher; theoretical notes (TN) were used to summarize the researcher's efforts to derive meaning from the context of the participants' experiences; methodological notes (MN) were used for reminders and instructions; and analytical memos (AM) provided a synopsis and progress of data collected in the study.

The researcher transcribed the audiotape from the small group and individual interviews. The length of the transcriptions ranged from two to four hours for each interview. Final data management procedures included summarizing the analyzed information into Microsoft Office Word 2007 documents by the researcher. The pertinent data were categorized into the three broad categories of classroom environment, Teacher-Student relationships, and teacher attributes (Appendices H and I) as related to the definitions described for the purpose of this study.

Data Analysis

Organizing and labeling data for each participant was based on the following procedures for qualitative analysis, as discussed by Miles and Huberman (1984, 1994) and Seidman (2006). According to the procedures for analyzing qualitative data, the researcher carefully read the transcripts of the student and teacher interviews multiple times. Similarly, the transcripts were transcribed and coded manually, followed by sorting data into the pre-existing categories of the classroom environment, Teacher-Student relationships, and teacher attributes. Units of analysis using the participants' "individual statements" consisted of one or more verbal statements that were subsequently placed in one of the three definition categories and subcategories.

By using the aforementioned procedures to guide the analysis, emergent themes and patterns were coded as related to the research questions for this study. For example, in one excerpt on page 1 of Appendix I (educators' responses), labeled TA for teacher attributes, #1/F/AA/Grade 9/22 years said, "As a teacher, I encourage students to use their differences to make a difference, to take advantage of opportunities." Additional educators familiar with the study scrutinized selected data to provide clarity relative to the pre-existing definitions for each category.

Ethics

Neither the students nor the educators received payment for their involvement in this research. Whether individuals chose to participate in the study or not did not affect students' grades nor did it affect educators' employment. Confidentiality was maintained with pseudonyms randomly chosen by the researcher. Full disclosure was utilized

throughout the study and participants had the right to refuse to answer questions or withdraw from the study at any time.

Summary

Two research questions guided this study. First, according to academically at risk minority students, what are the ways in which particular teachers contribute to the students' positive education experience? Second, according to these identified teachers, what are the ways in which they perceived themselves as contributing to particular academically at risk minority students' positive education experience? In this qualitative inquiry, academically at risk African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students in grades 7 through 9 at a junior high school in the midwest were interviewed to elicit the students' descriptions of ways in which their named teachers demonstrate particular characteristics that contributed to their students' positive education experience. Stimulated recall, through viewing pertinent video segments, was used to trigger students' memories of teachers who provided positive education experiences. A sample of these identified teachers were interviewed to elicit, illustrate, and elaborate the actions and attitudes they believed contributed to their student's positive education experience. As mentioned earlier, data collected from both the students' and teachers' narratives were analyzed, providing emergent categories and key themes. Results are reported in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

"Understand that change is a people process."

- Benard, 1992, p. 19

Chapter Four provides results of data analysis collected from 19 hours of semi-structured interviews. The research participants included two sample groups. The first group included 12 academically at risk adolescent minority students across the racial/ethnic groups of African American, Hispanic, and American Indian populations (Appendix A). The second group included seven educators identified by the students as contributing positively to their education experience (Appendix B). The student participants (N= 12) consisted of six male and six female students in grades 7-9. The teacher participants (N= 7) consisted of four female and three male educators employed in the students' current school district.

The analysis found three key categories, elaborated into eight subthemes. The process used for data sorting and analysis consisted of three phases. The initial phase involved transcribing and compiling data based on each research question. According to common principles of qualitative research, coding the data involved the process of systematically condensing and managing the data into smaller units "through the creation of categories and concepts derived from the data" (Lockyer, 2004, pp. 137-138). The second phase emphasized the inductive analysis of data. Based on guidelines for interpreting qualitative data, the researcher sought to examine the transcripts in a non-biased manner while studying what emerged "as important and of interest from the text" (Seidman, 2006, p. 117). Likewise, as mentioned earlier, the researcher compiled

responses from the data elicited from the ten semi-structured interview questions for students (Appendix E) and from the nine semi-structured interview questions for the teachers (Appendix F). Finally, the third phase identified the themes. This step served to connect the data by identifying the consistencies and differences within each category (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For example, if responses appeared similar, the process for sorting involved examining data by its contextual use as well as by how the responses matched the criteria of the definitions.

For the purpose of this study, the classroom environment was defined as a climate that affects students' affective qualities such as self-esteem, academic self-concept, achievement motivation, and self-efficacy. The term connotes the teacher's contributions to the social-emotional climate that students experience. Classroom environment includes interactions between students and resources in the environment. The category of teacher-student relationships describes the manner in which the teacher and student(s) interact in the classroom, pertinent to the student's development. Relationships are manifested in cognitive and social-emotional contexts. Last, the category of teacher attributes incorporates habitual patterns related to teachers' thoughts and feelings, which in turn impact the action taken in a classroom. Attributes are manifested in the teacher's self-awareness and in the ways in which the teacher thinks about teaching. In addition, teacher attributes include professional behaviors and ethical standards.

Two research questions guided this study:

1. According to academically at risk minority students, what are the ways in which particular teachers contribute positively to students' education experience?

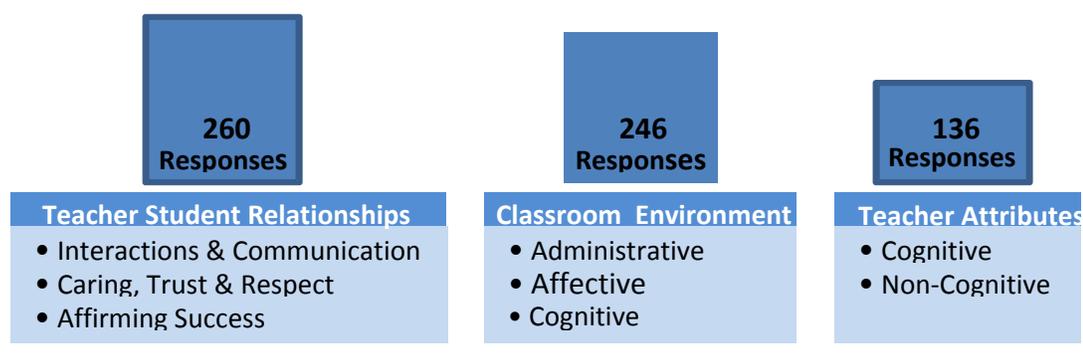
2. According to the above-identified teachers, what are the ways in which they contribute positively to particular academically at risk minority students' education experience?

Overview

Participants' answers to the research questions produced 642 responses that the researcher sorted into three categories: Classroom Environment, Teacher-Student Relationships, and Teacher Attributes. Information contained in brackets consists of clarifying words from the researcher. For example, inserting "the teacher" in brackets for the statement, "She [the teacher] lets students come after school" indicates material was added by the researcher for clarification (Appendix H, questions 8-9).

Most of the statements fell into the category of Teacher-Student Relationships (260), followed by Classroom Environment (246), and by Teacher Attributes (136). Each broad category has subthemes that further delineate responses. Teacher-Student Relationships consisted of Interactions and Communication; Caring, Trust, and Respect; and Affirming Success subthemes. Classroom Environment consisted of Administrative, Affective, and Cognitive subthemes. Teacher Attributes consisted of Cognitive and Non-Cognitive subthemes. Last, 62 responses unrelated to the current study were categorized as "Other Findings." Figure 2 summarizes the broad categories, related subthemes, and the frequency distribution of responses.

Figure 2. Identifying Responses, Subthemes, and Distributions



In reflecting on the participants' responses, the results are introduced through the profiles of 12 academically at risk minority students and of teachers who the students perceived to have contributed positively to their education experience. Anecdotal information provided in the profiles consists of comments shared by the participants during the qualitative interviewing research process (Groenewald, 2004; Seidman, 2006). The teachers' profiles are organized according to three key interview questions (see Appendix I). As mentioned earlier, the researcher randomly selected pseudonyms for the participants to maintain confidentiality. In addition, specific to this study of academically at risk minority students and of teachers selected by the students, coding included the racial/ethnic identities of the participants: African American (AA), Hispanic (H), American Indian (AI), and White (W).

Participant Analysis

Twelve Academically At Risk Minority Students

Ted (#S/1/7/M/AA). Identified by the pseudonym of Ted (Appendix A), this African American seventh grade student was friendly and respectful toward the researcher, although he indicated that oftentimes he received disciplinary referrals from teachers. Anecdotal information for Ted varied as he indicated that several teachers described him as having a bad "attitude" while others experienced little difficulty if any with his behavior.

Ted appeared eager to share comments about his education experience. In referencing the DVD video scenes of Tommie Lindsey, Ted described the teacher as "funny and happy, yet motivating" (Appendix H, questions 1-3). Other characteristics included the teacher's willingness to help students and his "easy going" manner. Similar thoughts of ways in which a teacher has helped Ted consisted of an educator who "didn't yell" and "who took the time to explain things" (Appendix H, questions 8-9).

According to Ted, teachers who demonstrated respect and civility toward students were those who helped him to do his best in school. Ted also referenced teachers who seemed "too hard or mean." In his opinion, teachers fitting this description contributed to his learning experience because the teachers wanted him to "get a good education" and to "do good in life." In some instances, Ted stressed that teachers perceived to be the "meanest are those who care. They make sure you get the point" (Appendix H, questions 8-9). On a different note, in association with teacher-student interactions and communication, Ted added, "One teacher who really helped me didn't yell and took the

time to explain things." In summary, Ted mentioned, "I don't like it when teachers have issues and are always yelling"(Appendix H, question 10).

Roberto (#S/2/7/M/H). Roberto was a Hispanic student who displayed a pleasant personality with peers and the researcher. He expressed few academic struggles other than difficulties with reading.

During the interview sessions, Roberto was attentive and appeared comfortable in responding to questions. In reflecting on teachers who made a positive contribution to his education experience, he indicated teachers who encouraged him to do well. Roberto commented,

In some classes, you feel like just doing it - at least trying. You feel like the teacher is pushing you as far as you can go. It's give and take between you and the teacher. The teacher pushes [wants you to do your best], but you have to try [put forth the effort]. You have more confidence." Roberto continued, "You have fun in class, the teacher wants all of his students to succeed" and if he is struggling, the teacher provides one-on-one assistance (Appendix H, questions 8-9).

Roberto suggested the classroom of one teacher who made the environment comfortable by allowing students to read using beanbags and pillows. He emphasized, "I can relax. I get tired sitting in chairs all day." Roberto added that, although assignments may be difficult, the teacher made the work seem easy. Beyond the classroom, Roberto stated, "A good teacher is a nice person who helps me with job interviews" and who is flexible with homework assignments (Appendix H, questions 8-9).

Maria (#S/3/7/F/H). Maria was a seventh grade student of Hispanic descent. She expressed the desire to succeed academically despite having a learning disability. Whether Maria was involved with friends or staff, she had a reputation for working hard. She reiterated this point as she stated, "We have to try to do the work; we can't always say, it's the teacher's fault" (Appendix H, questions 6-7).

In referencing teacher-student interactions, Maria noted that teachers who contributed positively to her education experience took the time to apologize if they unintentionally said something offensive. For example, Maria specifically mentioned situations involving religion or race. She indicated teachers did not need to apologize in front of the entire class; however, it was important to apologize to the student who was offended (Appendix H, questions 8-9).

Similarly, Maria noted that teachers who contributed positively to her education experience showed her different ways to do assignments if she did not understand or was discouraged. She indicated that such teachers are "full of heart and inspiration." Particularly, she spoke of a teacher who had "cool games" to help students learn (Appendix H, questions 8-9). Moreover, Maria described another teacher as "so nice" because "she tells us, there's no way we will fail her class if we do all of her work and try." From Maria's perspective, this motivated her to get things done. The perception of the teacher was that she was "awesome." Maria described her as "bright," "friendly," and who spoke to her in the hall. She reflected, "Some teachers make you want to succeed" (Appendix H, questions 8-9).

Veronica (#S/4/7/F/AA). Veronica, a seventh grade African American student did not hesitate to voice her thoughts. In describing Mr. Lindsey, Veronica stated, "It's

obvious that he loves teaching, makes things fun while still orderly." In relating this observation to her education experience, she mentioned a teacher who helped her with organizational skills. "Without this teacher," Veronica stated, "I'd be the most unorganized student ever" (Appendix H, questions 6-7).

In continuing to speak of teachers who contributed positively to her education experience, Veronica commented, "The way a teacher explains things makes a difference. If a teacher says, 'everything is going to be alright' or 'you have a good head on your shoulders,' it makes me want to try harder." She continued, "Things aren't always easy. I know that when teachers are on your back, they're pushing you to do your best" (Appendix H, questions 8-9).

Concerning a specific teacher, Veronica indicated she liked the instructor because "he treats all students equally. He wants to make sure we understand why we're doing the work. He's not disrespectful. He's friendly, outgoing, and strict - but not too strict." She added, "When a teacher speaks positively, it helps me - pushes me to get my work done. It helps if teachers don't point people out in class if they're doing something wrong." She explained, "Instead be general. It's better to say 'everyone,' it's more respectful" (Appendix H, questions 8-9). While reflecting on the learning environment, Veronica indicated teachers who contributed positively were those who implemented classroom procedures and routines. In particular, they did not allow students to talk about classmates (Appendix H, question 10).

James (#S/5/8/M/AA). Upon meeting James, he was a friendly, yet shy, young man. According to James, he earned passing grades in his classes although a major area of difficulty was reading comprehension. As a participant in this study, James appeared

to enjoy sharing his thoughts and often asked, "When's the next time we're going to meet?"

Regarding descriptions of teachers who made positive contributions to his education experience, James referenced teachers who "make learning fun!" (Appendix H, questions 6-7). James recalled, "some teachers definitely have a way of pushing you, you know they care, they give you hope, you want to learn, to try" (Appendix H, questions 8-9). He perceived that these teachers help you, are generous, and do not care about your background. "They don't judge you."

He indicated that teachers who contribute positively take time to recognize student work by indicating when students do a good job. When discussing one of his previous teachers, he stated, "She takes a lot of time for kids . . . her class was fun." He shared that the teacher assessed student comprehension by allowing pupils to engage in lessons to "see if we understand." He also indicated that teachers prompted discussion and thought by asking; "Did you know . . . ?" rather than simply having students read text aloud (Appendix H, questions 8-9).

James recalled teachers who chose to correct students without using an angry voice. He suggested that teachers who encourage students to do their work, rather than talking about them not working, were more effective. James stated, "When a teacher tells you to do your best throughout the year, to never give up - you feel like you have faith in yourself."

If students are struggling, James indicated that the teacher works with them individually. He or she will "make students answer questions rather than just letting them say they don't have any questions." James said, "It helps when teachers sit down

and explain things. In addition, it helps when teachers are less demanding and, instead, say things like, 'I'd appreciate it if,' or 'please' and 'thank you'" (Appendix H, question 10).

Glenn (#S/6/9/M/AA). Glenn indicated he enjoyed school and exhibited effort in the classroom (Appendix H, questions 8-9). He participated in athletics and looked forward to a positive high school experience. Likewise, upon describing teachers who helped him do his best, his responses included teachers who did not speak angrily and who "explain work in a different way" (Appendix H, question 10). He indicated that these teachers make learning fun and build a relationship with students. Similarly, he perceived teachers who were patient and understanding, thus helping students to feel "more comfortable" overall (Appendix H, questions 8-9).

In line with descriptions of teachers who contribute to a student's education experience, Glenn noted, "Teachers who don't give up on you." He stated, "They relate to you, give you extra time with them, and are very caring." Perceptions of these teachers included those with high expectations. As Glenn expressed it, "they want you to go to college." Glenn added, "you try your best and feel like you have faith in yourself. You say, 'I know I can do better'" (Appendix H, questions 8-9).

Concerning instruction, the results suggested teachers who provide meaningful and engaged learning are perceived as making positive contributions to the student's education experience. Glenn commented, "The best things I like are the projects! They're fun and help you learn. I put more effort into my work." In addition, Glenn commented positively on teachers who allowed students to work individually on assignments for approximately 15 minutes before checking to see what assistance was

needed. He suggested the importance of students first trying to do as much of the work themselves as they can before asking for assistance. Likewise, he stated, “It helps me having study notes; that way I don't have all this stuff I don't need. I like it when I know exactly what I have to do” (Appendix H, questions 8-9).

Glenn indicated he perceived teachers who presented instruction in meaningful chunks to contribute positively to his education experience. Through his examples, project-based learning, along with teacher support and guided notes were referenced. In addition to responses related to instruction, Glenn reported, “I like it when teachers have a sense of humor. They seem more open-minded” (Appendix H, questions 8-9).

Traci (#S/7/9/F/AA). From the pool of potential student participants, Traci was one of the first to return her consent form for the study. While she had a reputation for being outspoken, she usually was respectful toward adults. Traci largely earned passing grades and was intent on staying out of trouble. Traci appeared to relate better to teachers who kept their promises. She stated, “They seem to put more effort into their teaching” (Appendix H, questions 8-9). Acknowledging that the behavior of students can be a challenge, she indicated that teachers who contributed positively to her education experience were those perceived not to give up on her. She stated, “Don't give up! Talk to students about their behavior. Don't be afraid to ask questions, but be fragile.”

In recalling a particular teacher, Traci said, “She is a good teacher with many years of experience. She is attentive, helpful, never gives up on a student.” She added, “Some teachers have a way of connecting, pushing you to your limits and you feel like you're trying hard.” Traci indicated that teachers who contribute positively to her

education experience “don't put smart kids on different levels” and they do not have presuppositions about students' backgrounds. Traci stated, “Don't judge black, white kids experiences - you can't do that in this day and age” (Appendix H, questions 8-9). In reflecting on ways teachers and students can work together to improve communication in the classroom, Traci mentioned, “Students should actually show the teacher they can do it [the work]!” She indicated that teachers who contribute positively to her education experience structure classes that encourage learning (Appendix H, question 10).

Dakota (#S/8/9/M/AI). Dakota was one of two students of American Indian descent to participate in the study. Overall, in speaking of positive ways in which particular teachers contributed to his education experience, Dakota indicated teachers who did not yell (Appendix H, question 10). He reported, these teachers “correct us but don't punish us.” They “help us do things we don't want to do, like speaking in front of the class.” In addition, he spoke of teachers who contribute positively by incorporating technology into lessons and who express different methods to help students understand.

According to Dakota, one teacher in particular fit these descriptors. He emphasized, “She has a great personality, is caring, loves her students. She's a great person.” He stated it was easy to work in her class because “she keeps the room quiet to help students concentrate.” He indicated her class was “fun,” that students were allowed to come after school for assistance, and that she prompted student engagement. As Dakota stated, “We don't just sit there and hear her talk” (Appendix H, questions 8-9). In reflecting on this teacher, he said, “You can tell some teachers are trying to give back,

you learn from that. They inspire you not to give up. They've had a hard life and now they're helping you. It's nice.” Dakota indicated that while these teachers are like leaders and “kids look up to them, they also model "good teaching techniques.” Beyond the classroom, Dakota included, “It's nice when a teacher says hi to you outside of class. Even if they don't remember your name, at least they're taking time to recognize you” (Appendix H, questions 8-9).

Jerry (#S/9/9/M/AA). Jerry was a ninth grade African American student who indicated that he looked forward to high school. Often assigned to In-School-Suspension (ISS) due to classroom misbehaviors, he indicated that he wanted to avoid trouble with teachers in the future. While Jerry indicated his efforts varied in different classes, he was clear in relating descriptions of teachers who made positive contributions to his education experience. His comments during the interview sessions were frank. Jerry indicated that teachers making positive contributions to his education experience “don't give up” on him. He mentioned these teachers “help everyone to do their best, to succeed” (Appendix H, questions 8-9).

Jerry shared that these teachers “don't give up,” but are not “too aggressive either.” He claimed the teachers who contribute positively to his education experience “don't try to force us.” He perceives teachers who strive to help students succeed do so because they want “kids to get a good education, to do good in life.” Jerry added, “When you work with some teachers, you just feel like trying your best. You don't want to give up. You learn, it doesn't matter where you come from, you can do better with your grades.” He stated, “The teacher says, "You're improving, you're doing better” (Appendix H, questions 8-9).

Similar to comments voiced by other students, Jerry described teachers who are helpful and relaxed, not quick to anger. Indicating instruction that actively engages students, Jerry was another student who mentioned playing games. He stated, "It's fun playing games in class! The games help me want to learn, to remember." According to Jerry, a game did not have to include technology; it just needed to provide a way for students to work on challenging information in an interesting way.

In reflecting on ways in which teachers and students can work together to improve communication in the classroom, Jerry responded, teachers can ask, "What is it that's making it [the assignment] hard?" He also indicated the practice of constructive feedback as evidenced by the teacher saying, "You're improving, you're doing better" (Appendix H, question 10). Concerning the consistency of class rules, Jerry mentioned that teachers who contribute positively to his education experience do not have one set of expectations for boys and another for girls. He stated, "Don't cave into the girls. If you set rules, follow them. If I come in late, the same rules should apply to the girls. Don't be easier on the girls." In addition, Jerry indicated that teachers who contribute positively know the content they teach. He stated, "Know 100% before you say something." Further examples of ways in which teachers contributed positively included teachers who did not over react if students chewed gum in class. Jerry said, "If I'm chewing gum and a teacher doesn't like it, it's better that they just say 'spit it out' and that's it. Don't carry things on and exaggerate. Don't make a big deal out of it" (Appendix H, question 10).

Christiana (#S/10/9/F/H). Similar to other students, Christiana was friendly and expressed the desire to do well in school. In general, she indicated that she was a hard worker who took school seriously. In referencing educators like Tommie Lindsey,

Christina **said** Mr. Lindsey kept students on track without them realizing it. For instance, she said, “He’s laid back and cool” (Appendix H, questions 1-3).

In considering the DVD scenes, Christiana indicated teachers who maintain “a sense of humor.” Christiana said, “We know teachers get frustrated, but don’t give up” (Appendix H, questions 6-7). She suggested, “Teachers give students hope by talking sense into them. If they ‘mess up’ the teacher explains. They’re nice, they don’t yell about what you did wrong.” In denoting ways in which teachers helped her do her best, Christiana stated:

I would say these kinds of teachers care about students. They like to joke around. It’s not like they’re coming in and telling jokes, it’s just that they seem more human, more calm . . . They don’t give up. They stand in front of the door and say, “Hey, I like . . .,” or “Don’t forget . . .,” I can relate to these kind of teachers. (Appendix H, questions 8-9).

While relating information about ways in which particular teachers contributed positively to Christiana’s education experience, she identified one teacher’s class in particular. She described the tendency of the teacher to interact with students without getting angry easily. In addition, Christiana mentioned that the teacher “makes us think! It shows he feels we’re smart, he challenges us” (Appendix H, questions 8-9). While Christiana spoke of feeling comfortable asking questions, she also mentioned, “With some teachers, I can say, “Don’t give me the easy problems - give me the harder stuff.” She concluded, “They push and I know they care” (Appendix H, question 10).

Yuki (#S/11/9/F/AI). During the interview, Yuki expressed concerns about homelessness following graduation from the ninth grade. These thoughts were in addition to her apprehension about high school in general.

While Yuki had earned adequate credits for her grade level, the prospect of homelessness was unsettling to her. Despite this concern, in referencing teachers who helped her to do her best in school, Yuki indicated teachers who “challenge” her. In addition, she discussed teachers who made it comfortable for her to ask questions. She said these teachers do not give up, thus encouraging her to put more effort into her work (Appendix H, questions 6-7).

Yuki stated, “Teachers who take their time with me make me feel special, like when teachers keep their word [promise] or recognize your birthday.” Yuki perceived these teachers to understand her situation. She added, “Some teachers inspired kids to do well, get a good education, do well in life. This is helpful to students. They say things like, ‘Let's see if you can succeed,’ ‘Try your best,’ and ‘Don't give up’” (Appendix H, questions 8-9).

Yuki described a specific teacher. She stated, “She is loving, caring, understanding, and patient.” Yuki indicated enthusiasm by stating, “It's a good motivator to do better. If you get along with the teacher, they'll help you to understand. They encourage you to work hard by teaching you new things and then letting you try.” Concerning how teachers and students can work together to improve communication in the classroom, Yuki spoke of the way that teachers handle stress. It was Yuki's belief that teachers who contributed positively to her education experience “don't take stress out

on kids” if they are not having a good day. In contrast, she noted, “Yelling makes the kid's day worse.” She concluded that teachers who contribute positively “talk to kids in a calm voice” (Appendix H, question 10).

Sharon (#S/12/9/F/AA). Sharon was a ninth grader who reported to the researcher that one of her family members was in prison. Sharon liked to visit this individual when possible and carried a photograph of the family member in her purse. Similar to Yuki, Sharon was worried about her future in high school. While there was excitement in progressing to the next level, she was concerned about possible conflicts with other female students. She expressed a strong desire to stay out of trouble. She was not looking for a fight with anyone.

In addition to Sharon's desire to avoid trouble, she displayed a talent in the area of vocal music. Well liked by peers and staff, teachers remarked on Sharon's ability to focus on school. In referencing ways in which particular teachers contributed positively to her education experience, Sharon spoke of those teachers who provided a quiet classroom environment. She said, “If a teacher sees people not doing their work, it's good to spread them around so no one gets into trouble” (Appendix H, questions 8-9). For Sharon, common courtesy and friendly greetings were important. She stated:

When a teacher says “thank you for doing a good job in my class today,” it makes me feel good. Instead of just working hard today, I feel like doing my best to show her that I can do good every day. (Appendix H, questions 8-9)

In addition, Sharon added, “It's nice when a teacher remembers you, welcomes you, gives you hugs - even when you're not in their class anymore.” Similarly, Sharon reflected, “I really like it when teachers take the time for me, especially . . . when she

stood with me when I sang in front of . . . She kept her word” (Appendix H, questions 8-9).

Concerning how teachers and students can work together to improve communication, Sharon remarked, “It's important to talk with students and know what's going on in their lives.” She continued, “If students trust you, they will talk. . . . Listen when I have a problem, but you don't have to solve it. I don't want people all up in my business” (Appendix H, question 10). In addition, Sharon spoke of teachers who make learning fun and of Mr. Lindsey who “pushes all students to achieve something!” (Appendix H, questions 6-7). In summary, the general analysis of student responses indicated patterns of interaction and communication.

Analysis of Teacher Participants

Sandra (#1/F/AA/Grade 9/22 yrs). Sandra, a veteran educator of 22 years, stated:

I like to make sure students feel as comfortable as possible. My philosophy is to nurture; I have a naturally nurturing spirit. I want students to feel at ease and realize they're not going to be overly criticized by myself or by their classmates. I want to tap into their different learning styles and compliment them on even their smallest accomplishment. Most importantly, I don't want them to think they can get by doing the least work possible.

With my students, I like to have a positive attitude. We learn from each other, I learn from them. I try not to bring my own negative experiences or prejudices into the classroom. I share my background in a positive way to establish common ground. It's a comfortable learning atmosphere where both the

students and teacher can respectfully share their backgrounds - there are no put-downs. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion. (Appendix I, question 1).

Characterize your thoughts to help all students. Sandra sets the tone by telling students, “We are all here to learn.” By recognizing student success, she realizes pupils are more likely to exhibit an effort. Sandra fosters a positive learning environment by encouraging students and helping them to “feel a sense of worth.” She said it is not uncommon to hear students say, “Good job man!” She added, “I say, ‘Look at what you've accomplished.’ This behavior is modeled for students overall as Sandra strives to encourage students to “use their differences, to make a difference.” She wants them to take advantage of opportunities (Appendix I, question 2).

Instructional practice. Concerning Sandra's instructional practice, she presents information in small chunks. She stated, “It fosters confidence and dispels self-doubt. Yes, students may feel they still struggle, but they better understand the importance of putting forth their best efforts” (Appendix I, question 2). Sandra reflected that once students are successful, they are motivated to learn. She stated that, “even junior high school students like stickers.” Sandra focused on helping students realize they can be successful and said, “If someone is willing to take the time, they feel valued” (Appendix I, question 4). Sandra reported that she is fair to all students, giving them the best she can as a teacher. She found it was necessary to “adopt a variety of instructional strategies: hands-on, visual learning to understand what works best for them.” Throughout her practice, Sandra embedded positive self-talk for student use: “I know I can” and “I will reach my goals!” (Appendix I, question 5). From these experiences, Sandra realized that self-talk can have a positive ripple effect:

Learning expectations are very important. Teachers must be prepared to determine how to help students realize successful outcomes. How do we motivate? Equality means having opportunities, promoting self-value. If students encounter being negatively stereotyped, it's a challenge they must be able to deal with. It's important for them to understand "I will and I can do better." Change is attitude. (Appendix I, question 6)

Sandra identified the need to recognize that students should feel "valued," with the understanding we are helping them to prepare for "real life experiences." Sandra stated, "We must be more sensitive to the needs of kids, learn how to stretch our patience. As educators, we learn to monitor and adjust. Students need support in all of their endeavors" (Appendix I, question 9).

Deborah (#2/F/W/Grade 7/03 years). Deborah shared that she enjoyed helping struggling learners to increase their academic skills. While one student described her as "amazing," she indicated that her philosophy included being enthusiastic about her job. She stated:

I often ask, "What am I not doing, that he's not responding?" Is it trust? Sincerity? I am a high-energy teacher. I am very expressive. Enthusiasm translates well. I am flamboyant. I believe in the sincerity factor; I don't use canned phrases. I want students to see that I am physically excited about the lesson, about my job. I often tell my classes, "You are part of my perfect equation." They realize that I don't give up on them.

My actions are pretty nurturing, like a grandma. I try to give students individual attention. If they look bothered, I give them a pat on the shoulder.

School may be the only setting where students experience adult respect. It's important that I treat everyone the best I can. I try to treat people well and do the right thing. If I become irritated, I try to still be respectful. I aim to model positive behavior if I observe disrespect by students. I say, "I would not treat you like that." (Appendix I, question 1)

Deborah indicated hope and "it takes a whole village" perspective: "Hopefully students realize it's a group effort to help them be more independent" (Appendix I, question 2). Deborah stressed that she did not want students to sit waiting for others to provide answers; she wanted them to be active learners, thinking and working together. Lessons, in her opinion, were to be interactive and relevant.

Deborah indicated the significance of classroom structure, as well as opportunities for students to provide input. "With mutual respect," she stated, "I want students to feel that my classroom is their world . . . their place to treat it well." In suggesting particular ways in which she contributed positively to a student's education experience, Deborah said, "Our learning environment is comfortable and inviting with reading areas and large colorful pillows" (Appendix I, question 2).

Deborah reported ways in which she tried to engage students: "I am very positive and encouraging. I give long wait times and use concept webs to prompt understanding" (Appendix I, question 4). She indicated that allowing students structured time to work together is beneficial. She described using reflection-on-action and said, "I am reflective, I learned a lot from last year." For Deborah, it was important that students come to class with a "positive" attitude. She wanted them to feel "comfortable and secure."

Deborah provided examples of ways she was positive and encouraging: “Instead of punishing a student who comes to class late, I might say, ‘If everyone can get here on time six times in a row,’ we will do a fun activity.” Deborah commented that students like this and think it is enjoyable because they have the opportunity to talk, relax, and eat food (Appendix I, question 5). She continued, “While students may not always think they are learning in a fun atmosphere, they are. She also said that, “as teachers, we understand that school is work and it can be considered hard and drudgery. When steps are taken to make learning enjoyable, you will hear students say, ‘I love this class, time goes by so fast!’” (Appendix I, question 5).

The integration of technology with coursework provided a frequent tool for engaging students in Deborah's lessons. She stated, “I try to link my curriculum to technology as much as possible.” As evidence of this practice, she noted the available equipment in her classroom, which included an Aver Vision, VCR/DVD player, classroom performance systems (CPS) or “clickers,” and an Airliner wireless slate. She indicated that embedding technology within instruction contributed to positive educational experiences.

Gwen (#3/F/AA/Grade 6/10 years). Gwen was an educator of 10 years and she described herself as a caring, yet rigorous, teacher. She said that she believed in providing opportunities for hands-on learning and in giving appropriate praise. She described her approach to instruction as student-centered and differentiated. She commented:

I use encouragement to get my kids motivated and give lots of praise for their efforts. I help them to understand that not everything they do will they do well.

It's important for students to try and do their best. I give pats on the back and use positive words. With pats on the back however, you have to be careful. You have to know your students. (Appendix I, question 1)

Gwen described learning for students as being “hands-on.” She stated, “I use the direct instructional approach and am subtle about differentiated instruction.” Gwen commented, “I teach in small groups and work one-on-one with students. My technique is structured, direct, diverse, and serious.” While Gwen indicated the belief that all students can learn, she also indicated that a reciprocal effort is needed from students in order for them to succeed. She explained, “I believe students can conquer whatever they set themselves up to do if they put forth the effort” (Appendix I, question 2).

Instructional practice. Gwen suggested that teaching self-worth and respect were integral parts of the curriculum. In referencing the obstacles that academically at risk students may face, she stated that, “Teachers are asked to be good listeners” (Appendix I, question 5). In emphasizing this perspective, Gwen noted, “We must realize that students don't necessarily want our feedback when listening to their problems, they just want us to listen.” In reflecting on students and her teaching practice, Gwen inferred:

A lot of students are looking for a friend. You may think, “I'm not here to be their friend;” however, you certainly don't want to be perceived as the enemy! It's important to build trust. The students' perception may be, “Is this a person I can trust or do I need to stand guard?” (Appendix I, question 6).

The big picture. The analysis of Gwen's responses indicated self-reflection as she spoke of this data and possible consideration within the profession. She stated:

Curriculum is more demanding now than several years ago. Due to the economic times and situations in society, students' needs are great. We have to consider that we may not have access to a variety of resources like we used to. We need to put our heads together and learn from each other. New teachers are in the forefront. We should allow them to share ideas and concepts. We can learn from each other and be more creative in working together. As veteran teachers, we may feel we know it all, but is this to the benefit of the child? (Appendix I, question 9)

Gwen described her self-awareness as she asked, "As teachers, how do we present ourselves?" She added, "What is the big picture?" and suggested tapping into the strengths and enthusiasm of new teachers while forming mentoring partnerships with veteran educators. Gwen indicated the importance of teachers sharing "fresh ideas," "new information," resourcefulness in working together" (Appendix I, question 9).

Ausbra (#4/M/W/Elementary/30 years). Ausbra reported that he enjoyed working with students throughout the various grade levels. His room was filled with artifacts that reflected his interest in history and his belief in positive teacher-student relationships. His philosophy to help all students do their best is articulated by his actions, beliefs, and values as follows:

I have been influenced by my wife who has years of experience in special education. I am glad to emotionally embrace students. I give pats on the back, feed them, buy them clothes, and wash their glasses. For kids who are self-conscious about wearing glasses, I tell them "only smart kids wear glasses."

If you identify the problems kids are having, the teacher/student relationship never ends. Students' voices go on. I give unconditional professional

love and support. A student can make a mistake and I'll still like them as a person. I give lots of emotional hugs and trust develops. (Appendix I, question 1)

Ausbra added that learning is continuous for educators and students, namely in the areas of academics, interpersonal skills, and cultural responsiveness.

Characterize your thoughts to help all students. Aside from making work “palpable,” Ausbra described giving positive greetings to students as they entered the classroom. Gestures might include such comments as “Great hair” or verbal greetings with “high fives.” Ausbra included these techniques in conjunction with a framework he cited as similar to Bloom's Taxonomy. He stated, “Students realize that I can treat them with dignity and still remain cordial. Along with academics, I focus on fun, friendship, and character education. I use this foundation to help students identify their holes in achievement” (Appendix I, question 2).

Instructional practice. Ausbra described his instructional practice as guided by the principles of collaboration, trust, and work. He focused on reading and reading strategies in connecting the subject to real world issues (Appendix I, question 3). Ausbra integrated cognitive and affective elements in his teaching practice: teaching students how to manage their anger. For example, Ausbra stated, “We can agree to disagree,” and then take time to point out to students, “this is how we differ.” He indicated, “On my part, this takes a lot of organization and building of trust regardless of students' race, ethnicity, and background” (Appendix I, question 4).

Aside from suggesting ways to communicate with students and help them manage anger, Ausbra mentioned helping students to “feel a sense of respect, fairness, and self-worth.” He stated, “Students realize I am consistent” and “A rule, although I don't have

many, is a rule.” He described differentiating between valuing the learner as an individual and simultaneously providing feedback relative to undesirable behavior.

“If a student is being disruptive or not doing his or her work, I simply state that I care for them, but their behavior is not working for me” (Appendix I, questions 7-8). His comment also illustrated externalizing, objectifying, and reducing values associated with a particular behavior.

The big picture. In reflection, Ausbra focused on the components of: “1) fairness, 2) being nice, 3) kindness, 4) honesty, 5) sharing, 6) respect, and 7) trust.” He stated, “All characteristics suggest a palpable tool and are indigenous to relationship building” (Appendix I, question 9).

Orin (#5/M/W/Grade 6/years of service not reported). Although this teacher indicated an interest in the study by returning his signed consent document, scheduling was not conducive for an interview (Appendix I).

Thelma (#6/F/W/Grades 7-9/years of service not reported). Thelma spoke as an educator in the field of special education. In supporting students to succeed, she considered her primary role as an advocate for students who had Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Similarly, Thelma referenced matters related to cultural diversity. For example, her beliefs are reflected in her professional philosophy. She stated:

I've been doing this for a long time. Every kid is unique. Every student has a way they learn and respond best. Our job is unique because we tap into students' individual strengths and needs. I want students to be productive and contributing members of society. It bothers me when everyone is expected to learn the same

way. Students have varying abilities that need to be taken into consideration. I am an advocate for my kids. As a special education teacher, I often have to talk about the IEP and “sell” my kids. I try to convince teachers that it's in the students' best interest to have accommodations.

Especially when it comes to at risk students, you have to get to know them. Little things like “eye contact” can make a big difference with some students, especially some American Indian tribes. Another item that it is bothersome is when African American male students choose to use the “N” word in school. I call them on it. I treat students the same way that I treat my own kids. (Appendix I, question 1).

Characterize your thoughts to help all students. Thelma stated, “I hope students realize I'm fair and I respect them. Teaching tolerance, respect, and patience are important to me.” She added, “When I visualize respect, it looks like listening and giving students the opportunity to appropriately vent” (Appendix I, question 2). For Thelma, ways in which she contributed positively to students' education experience included working with them “to develop a plan of resources for how to disagree appropriately” rather than using profanity (Appendix I, question 2). Thelma explained, “I help students to develop tools for problem-solving. Helping them realize they can talk with an administrator instead of getting into trouble makes a big difference” (Appendix I, question 2).

Instructional practice. In describing her instructional practice, Thelma asserted that it was not effective to yell. Thelma said, “I try to get to really take the time to know my students. I give specific directions and talk with students one-on-one. When

appropriate, I tell students they're doing a great job or at least they are doing something better” (Appendix I, question 4). Recognizing the multiple struggles of at risk students, Thelma reflected:

For some of my students, they appear so lost by the time they get to me. There is a sense of hopelessness and for some it seems they are destined for jail. For these types of students, there appears to be a perpetual cycle. They try out for teams [e.g., football, basketball, track] as motivation to keep their grades up, and then they make the team and don't work to maintain their grades. It's always somebody else's fault. (Appendix I, question 6)

This is an important observation regarding students' lack of agency and self-determination. Thelma indicated practicing mutual respect modeled in the classroom. She stressed, “I try to teach my students that you can get a lot further if you show respect rather than demanding it.” Thelma claimed:

Mutual communication is important. What is the perception of my students about me? How do I validate their feelings? Remember the saying, “. . . walk a mile in my moccasins?” By telling students, “I understand why you are frustrated” and then following-up by treating them respectfully can make a difference.

(Appendix I, question 6).

In helping students have beneficial education experiences, Thelma indicated that she included character education within her curriculum. She hoped students realized “that regardless of their capabilities, there is a place for them in the community” (Appendix I, question 7). In addition, despite an on-going focus on character in Thelma's program, she suggested students sometimes described her as being too demanding. In contrast, she

considered this a compliment and stated, “I am fair and I try to treat everyone the same. I respect them as individuals and validate who they are” (Appendix I, question 8).

She indicated that staff development should be used as an opportunity to “signal the importance of taking time to understand kids' backgrounds” and of prompting differentiated instruction. She stated, “All students are not at the same level nor do they have the same learning styles” (Appendix I, question 9).

For new teachers, Thelma suggested a deeper understanding of the “many complexities” brought to the classroom by academically at risk students. She suggested that educators “get to know the kids' stories” (Appendix I, question 9). In addition, she suggested resources to guide teacher practice. She stated:

. . . If kids are misbehaving, use proximity to address the problem, use preferential seating, talk with them one-on-one. Let them [students] know what is expected for them to be successful in your classroom - re-direct their behaviors. Don't leave kids in the back [of the classroom] if they don't understand.

Teachers need to address situations rather than just putting students out of class. Sometimes teachers need to take the initiative to go over and quietly talk with a student rather than yelling across the room, “Be quiet” or calling the office to say “Come and get him” or “I'm sending him down.”

Patrick (#7/M/W/Grade 9/39 years). Patrick considered himself a rigorous teacher. Students indicated they respected his no-nonsense demeanor while also perceiving that he cared for them. He took pride in preparing students for high school and often related his lessons in class to real-life situations. Patrick stated, “I am always

there to help students.. .I make them laugh and try to make the class fun and interesting” (Appendix I, questions 1-3).

Patrick indicated using best teaching practices, especially relative to making learning personally relevant: “students learn to develop a life plan and determine what to do” (Appendix I, question 7).

While encouraging students to apply themselves, he was also able to take the opportunity to recommend them for help if a need was indicated (Appendix I, questions 4,7). Patrick described effective teaching in general terms:

Good teachers make a tough job look easy. Many of us work behind the scenes. We work together for one purpose - to give our best to our students. Our success is not a happy accident. Students are talented, smart, and mature. They know a lot of stuff! (Appendix I, question 9).

Patrick suggested collegiality and teaming among educators as important in supporting students to overcome obstacles. Teacher involvement was indicated across disciplines as teaming was referenced as a strategy to foster support for academically at risk students. Patrick appeared to have the belief that student success was attributed to the hard work of multiple educators.

Results in this section focused on the stories of academically at risk students and of teachers identified by the students as contributing positively to their education experience. Descriptions were provided of teachers using best teaching practices specifically tailored to the perceived needs of these learners. Findings analyzed through the three broad categories of Teacher-Student Relationships, Classroom Environment, and Teacher Attributes are discussed in the next sections.

Teacher-Student Relationships

In the context of the current research, Teacher-Student Relationships are described as the manner in which the teacher and student(s) interact in the classroom, especially those interactions focused on the student's development. Based on the researcher's analysis of the data, relationships were manifested in cognitive and social-emotional contexts. Two-hundred and sixty responses were categorized as pertaining to Teacher-Student Relationships. Of those responses, 137 (53%) relate to interactions/communications, 80 (31%) relate to caring, trust, and respect, and 43 (16%) relate to affirming success. The student group consisted of 117 responses descriptive of Teacher-Student Relationships and the teacher group consisted of 143 responses (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Responses Related to Teacher-Student Relationships

Themes	Students	Teachers	Total
Interactions/Communication	78 (67%)	59 (41%)	137 (53%)
Caring, Trust, and Respect	20 (17%)	60 (42%)	80 (31%)
Affirming Success	19 (16%)	24 (17%)	43 (16%)
Total Responses	117 (100%)	143 (100%)	260 (100%)

Interactions and Communication

The majority of responses focused on this subtheme. Fifty-three percent of the responses related to this concept in contrast to the concepts of: caring, trust, and respect (31%); and affirming success (16%). Descriptors included ways teachers were perceived

to approach students, namely teachers who appeared friendly and displayed a genuine interest in students. For example, one student stated, “It's nice when a teacher remembers you, welcomes you, smiles, and gives you hugs - even when you're not in their class anymore” (Appendix H, Sharon - # S/12/9/F/AA, questions 8, 9). Similarly, another student spoke of a teacher who took the time to interact outside of class, indicating the teacher's friendliness with students across settings (Appendix H, James - #S/5/8/M/AA, question 10). In addition, noting those teachers who stand at the doors of their classrooms, positive teacher-student interactions and communication were perceived as one female student commented, “I can relate to these kinds of teachers” (Appendix H, Christina - #S/10/9/F/H, questions 8, 9).

Comments from teachers demonstrated flexibility and listening. Educators appeared to value reciprocal relationships as a key aspect of connecting with students: “I share my background in a positive way to establish common ground” and “We learn from each other, I learn from them” (Appendix I, Sandra - # 1/F/AA/Grade 9/22 years, question 1). Other comments that expressed this concept referenced “fun, friendship, and character education” along with academics and the importance of treating everyone, “the best that I can” (Appendix I). In contrast, examples of positive teacher-student interactions and communication were expressed more often by participants in the student group (66%) than by participants in the teacher group (41%).

Specific to the focus of this subtheme, responses were identified if they related to communication in the classroom relevant to the student's development. Teachers stated, “Mutual communication is important” and “I give specific directions and talk with students one-on-one” (Appendix I, Thelma - #6/F/W/Grades 7-9/NR, questions 4, 6).

Effective teacher-student communication helped to clarify instruction as one teacher added, “I help students develop tools to process problem-solving” (Appendix I, Thelma - #6/F/W/Grades 7-9/NR, question 2). Likewise, comments described teachers who sought a deeper understanding of the experiences students brought to the classroom. This perspective is supported by Sharon who stated, “It's important to talk with students and know what's going on in their lives”(Appendix H, Sharon - #S-12-9-F-AA, question 10).

Students spoke of the importance of teacher-student communication as they referenced mistakes they made and their willingness to undertake assignments. For example, one student stated, “If you [the teacher] make a mistake, say, ‘I apologize’” (Appendix H, Glenn - #S/6/9/M/AA, question 10). Similarly, Glenn stated, “When they [teachers] use a persuasive voice and are interactive, I'm more willing to do the work” (Appendix H, Glenn - #S/6/9/M/AA, question 10). Statements also referenced the teachers' use of words to foster a student's cooperation. For example, one another student explained, “. . . it helps when teachers are less demanding and instead say things like; ‘I'd appreciate it if . . .’ or ‘please’ and ‘thank you’” (Appendix H, James - #S/5/8/M/AA, question 10).

In addition, it was found that participants' responses indicated teacher-student communication in relationship to instruction, as one student commented: “Maybe ask, what do I need to teach this? Explain, tell me” (Appendix H, Roberto-#S/2/7/M/H, question 10). As evidence of the teacher's importance to the learner, comments included the teacher's willingness to listen if there was a concern, the desire to “actually show the teacher” that you are capable of doing the work (Appendix H).

Results showed that teacher-student communication also focused on the desired manner in which students are expected to express themselves. Several comments, which provided support, included, “I work with students to develop a plan of resources of how to disagree appropriately instead of just ‘cussing’ teachers out” (Appendix I, Thelma - #6/F/W/Grades 7-9/NR, question 2). Thelma emphasized, “If kids are misbehaving, use proximity to address the problem, use preferential seating, and talk with them one-on-one” (Appendix I, question 9). In summary, the patterns suggested, when appropriate, teachers expressed when improvement was noted (Appendix I).

Caring, Trust, and Respect

In 20 (17%) of the responses in the student group and 60 (42%) of the responses in the teacher group, participants referenced demonstrations of teachers' caring about their students as a key component of Teacher-Student Relationships. Of the 80 comments, participants in the teacher group referenced the theme of caring, trust, and respect more frequently (N= 42%) than those in the student group (N=17%). In some instances, the concept of caring was described as extra time taken with students. Other responses mentioned teachers' unconditional acceptance as an aspect of caring. One student referenced the subtheme of caring, trust, and respect by stating his “teacher is easy to get along with and really cares about his students” (Appendix H, Glenn - #S/6/9/M/AA, questions 1-3). Another commented that her “teacher has a great personality, is caring, and loves her students” (Appendix H, Dakota - #S/8/9/M/AI, questions 8-9).

Caring was described in several ways. For example, one educator referenced the decoupling of students' undesirable behaviors overall by stating, “If a student is being

disruptive or not doing his/her work, I simply state that I care for them but their behavior is not working for me” (Appendix I, Ausbra - #4/M/W/Elementary/30 years, question 8). While the educator acknowledged caring for students, he also referenced the importance of addressing students' misbehaviors. Similarly, students' comments included, “They push and I know they care” (Appendix H, Christiana - #S/10/9/F/H, question 10).

Throughout the interviews, the importance of caring, trust, and respect emerged in student and teacher responses comprising 31% of the total responses for this category. As expressed by one long-time educator: “I give them pats on the back, feed them, buy them clothes, and wash their glasses” (Appendix I, Ausbra - #4/M/W/Elementary/30 years, question 1). For both sample groups, the concept of the caring relationship was reciprocal. There appeared to be a mutual understanding of motivational displacement.

Responses manifested in social-emotional contexts also revealed trust and respect. The participants in both samples reported the importance of cultural respect and tolerance. Multiple comments referenced respect for multiculturalism. One student noted, “If teachers say something offensive, not knowing it bothers you, it's important to apologize (e.g., religion, race). It doesn't have to be in front of the class, but it's important” (Appendix H, Maria - #S/3/7/F/H, questions 8-9). Similarly, one of the teachers stated, “Little things like eye contact can make a big difference with some students (e.g., some American Indian tribes)” (Appendix I, Thelma - #6/F/W/Grades 7-9/NR, question 1). The teacher added, “Teaching tolerance, patience, and respect are important to me” (Appendix I, question 2).

Comments reported by the student group categorized as pertaining to caring, trust, and respect generated 20 of all student statements, while for teachers the total responses

were 60. In addition to the features of culture and race, participants referenced respect as a relationship attribute as evidenced by comments provided by a teacher:

I have these kids for three years and you get to a level of attachment. Education is so different now than when I grew up. You respected your teachers and you didn't question them. Now, kids feel you have to earn their respect. I try to teach my students that you can get a lot further if you show respect rather than demanding it. (Appendix I, Thelma #6/F/W/Grades 7-9/NR, question 6).

The demonstration of respect is further operationalized. For example, one teacher, Thelma, referenced respect as the manner in which students verbally expressed disagreement. She stated, “When I visualize respect, it looks like listening and giving students the opportunities to appropriately vent” (Appendix I, question 2).

Other comments elaborated on contexts (emotional states) in which it was important to display respect for students. “If I become irritated, I try to still be respectful. I aim to model positive behavior if I observe disrespect by students. I say, ‘I would not treat you like that’” (Appendix I, Deborah - #2/F/W/Grade 7/03 years, question 1). Similarly, another teacher stated, “Remember the saying, walk a mile in my moccasins? By telling students, that you understand their frustration and then addressing their concerns respectfully [you] can make a difference” (Appendix I, Thelma - #6/F/W/Grades 7-9/NR, question 6).

Affirming Success

Relationships manifested in cognitive and social-emotional contexts defined the concept of affirming success. Nineteen (16%) relevant responses were reported for the student group and 24 (17%) responses for the teacher group. The concept of affirming

success was indicated by 43 (16%) of the total responses. One student indicated the importance of the concept as she noted, “Teachers are great people to take the time, especially with these kids” (Appendix H, Traci - #S/7/9/F/AA, questions 1-3). In further referencing the concept, another student noted teachers whom students could depend upon to keep their word (Appendix H, Sharon - #S/12/9/F/AA, questions 8-9). Teachers' thoughts were supported in the following responses: “As educators, we learn to monitor and adjust. Students need support in all of their endeavors” (Appendix I, Sandra - #1/F/AA/Grade 9/22 years, question 9). Likewise, support in this context was observed as one teacher stated, “A student can make a mistake and I'll still like them as a person” (Appendix I, Ausbra - #4/M/W/Elementary/30 years, question 1). Overall results for this concept indicated students' responses referenced fewer statements related to teacher support in comparison to teachers' responses.

Affirmations of student success were indicated by both the student and teacher sample groups. Statements by students included, “Recognize students' work” (Appendix H, James - #S/5/8/M/AA, questions 8-9) and “More one-on-one would help” (Appendix H, question 10). Similar to the responses of students, teachers' statements included, “Students realize they, too, can be successful. If someone is willing to take the time, they feel valued” (Appendix I, Sandra - #1/F/AA/Grade 9/22 years, question 4). In conclusion, the relevance of this theme is noted in the category of Teacher-Student Relationships as it expressed interactions pertinent to the students' development manifested in cognitive and social-emotional contexts.

Summary

The broad category of Teacher-Student Relationships was subdivided into three themes. They included: (1) interactions and communication, (2) caring, trust, and respect and (3) affirming success. Two hundred and sixty responses referenced positive contributions teachers made to the education experiences of academically at risk minority students. The student data consisted of 117 relevant responses and the teacher data consisted of 143. For the major findings, teacher interactions and communication provided 137 (53%) of the total responses. In contrast, the analysis of caring, trust, and respect 80 (31%), and affirming success 43 (16%) contained fewer responses.

Overall, similar responses were made across the student participants. Likewise, participants in the teacher group shared common perspectives regardless of gender or years of professional experience. Especially noteworthy were responses referencing the concept of teacher-student interactions and communication as supported by the comments: “Some teachers have a way of connecting” (Appendix H, Traci - #S/7/9/F/AA, questions 8-9) and “I give lots of emotional hugs and trust develops” (Appendix I, Ausbra - #4/M/W/Elementary/30 years, question 1).

On a different note, in respect to professional growth, one educator with 30 years of experience pointed out:

I've spoken about Bloom's Taxonomy and believe there is a similar framework when it comes to . . . relationship building in the classroom [e.g., Bloom and the cognitive, affective, and psychological domains] I would consider the Bloom format for teacher training and staff development through the school of education. It takes a minimum of 21 days to problem-solve and I would focus on

communication and the professional characteristics I perceive of relationship building. (Appendix I, Ausbra - #4/M/W/Elementary/30 years, question 9).

Findings represent the subthemes of interactions and communication; caring, trust, and respect; and affirming success in the broad category of Teacher-Student Relationships.

Classroom Environment

The aggregate of both samples consisted of 246 responses pertaining to the ways teachers were perceived as providing administrative, affective, and cognitive positive contributions to students' education experiences. The student sample yielded 115 responses and the teacher sample yielded 131 responses that were judged as fitting this category. Analysis of these data showed that there were three principal subthemes within this category. Affective qualities (144; 59%) and cognitive qualities (82; 33%) occurred more often than did administrative qualities (20; 8%). As shown in Table 2, the subtheme of affective contributions occurred most frequently with 75 (57%) teacher responses and (60%) student responses. The second-ranked subtheme for both groups was cognitive contributions with 34 (30%) student responses and 48 (37%) teacher responses. Data for the administrative subtheme revealed it was the least referenced category, with 12 (10%) responses from students and 8 (6%) from teachers.

Table 2.

Responses Related to the Classroom Environment

Themes	Students	Teachers	Total
Administrative	12 (10%)	8 (6%)	20 (8%)
Affective	69 (60%)	75 (57%)	144 (59%)
Cognitive	34 (30%)	48 (37%)	82 (33%)
Total Responses	115 (100%)	131 (100%)	246 (100%)

Administrative

Twenty (8%) of the 246 responses were descriptions of teachers' contributions of administrative actions in the classroom environment. For students in this study, a positive classroom environment reflected an atmosphere that was seen as orderly and built on clearly established routines. For example, Sharon, a member of the student sample, described a positive classroom experience this way: "If a teacher sees people not doing their work, it's good to spread them around so no one gets into trouble" (Appendix H, Sharon - #S/12/9/F/AA, questions 8-9). Another student said, "It's easy to keep working in . . . class. She keeps the room quiet to help students concentrate" (Appendix H, Dakota - #S/8/9/M/AI, questions 8-9). Several responses indicated that students want classrooms to reflect order. Underscoring this thought was a student who said, "Don't give up! Talk to students about their behavior." The perception of a clear behavioral expectation in class was seen in 12 (10%) of the students' responses and in 8 (6%) of the teacher' responses. The data revealed administrative descriptions as responses from both groups suggested classroom routines and discipline.

A typical teacher response related to a positive classroom environment was, “I help set the tone, acknowledge we are all here to learn” (Appendix I, Sandra - #1/F/AA/Grade 9/22 years, question 2). Other teachers expressed comparable perceptions, such as: “Although students may think they are making the decisions, I still have a lot of structure” (Appendix I, Deborah - #2/F/W/Grade 7/03 years, question 3). Aspects of responses related to the expectation of classroom routines were included in this subtheme. One teacher commented, “Students realize I am consistent” (Appendix I, Ausbra - #4/M/W/Elementary/30 years, question 8). Results for both sample groups indicated that classroom routines were perceived as contributing to academically at risk students' positive education experiences.

Affective

The subtheme of affective contributions was expressed in 144 (59%) of the total responses. Sixty-nine (60%) responses were identified for the student sample and 75 (57%) responses were identified for the teacher sample. The following comment was representative of sentiments expressed by the student sample:

When a teacher says, “. . . thank you for doing a good job in my class today,” it makes me feel good. Instead of just working hard today, I feel like doing my best to show her that I can do good every day. (Appendix H, Sharon - #S/12/9/F/AA, questions 8-9).

Another student said, “In some classes, you feel like just doing it - at least trying. You feel like the teacher is pushing you as far as you can go. It's give and take between you and the teacher” (Appendix H, Roberto - #S/2/7/M/H, questions 8-9). Throughout the interviews, this reference to a desire for learning was prevalent. Student and teacher

samples labeled as affective were similar. Based on the frequency of the sample groups' responses, the findings indicated that students were more likely to work hard if they perceived positive teacher feedback.

Teachers' comments included, "I seek to motivate" and "I use encouragement to get my kids motivated and give lots of praise for their efforts" (Appendix I, Deborah - #2/F/W/Grade 7/03 years, question 4). Overall, 50% of the combined responses for students and teachers were related to the subtheme of affective contributions.

In the same way, participants' responses within this category were indicative of self-efficacy. Specific to this study, self-efficacy connotes the students' belief in their capacity to learn. Students' responses that reflected self-efficacy included, "Some teachers inspire kids to do well, get a good education, do well in life. This is helpful to students" (Appendix H, Yuki - #S/11/9/F/AI, question 8-9). This student continued, "They [teachers] say things like, 'Let's see if you can succeed, try your best, and don't give up'" (Appendix I, questions 8-9). In describing how teachers made positive contributions to his education experience, one student stated, "You try your best and feel like you have faith in yourself" (Appendix H, Glenn - #S/6/9/M/AA, questions 8-9).

Similarly, students and teachers referenced self-efficacy as participants described classroom conditions that cultivate students' well-being. This was illustrated by one teacher who stated, "Yes, students may feel they still struggle, but they better understand the importance of putting forth their best efforts" (Appendix I, Sandra - #1/F/AA/Grade 9/ 22 years, question 2). Sandra continued by stating, "It fosters a positive learning environment overall as other students say, "Good job man!" (Appendix I, question 2). Additional comments included, "I believe students can conquer whatever they set

themselves up to do if they put forth the effort” (Appendix I, Gwen - #3/F/AA/Grade 6/10 years, question 2) and “I want students to know I'm here to help them help themselves” (Appendix I, Sandra - #1/F/AA/Grade 9/22 years, question 2). Collectively, the student and teacher samples in this subtheme generated 59% of all classroom environment comments.

Participants' responses reflected the belief that all students have the capacity to learn and that guidance toward preparing long-range goals is encouraged: “Students learn to develop a life plan and determine what to do” (Appendix I, Patrick - #7/M/W/Grade 9/39 years, question 2). Patrick added the expectation that students “continually apply themselves and look for new areas of talent” (Appendix I, question 7). In sum, positive contributions made to students' education experiences appears to create a climate that affects students' affective qualities such as academic self-concept.

Similar to self-efficacy, when the attributes of classroom environment were explored, one characteristic seems to be its effect on students' affective development in, for example, academic self-concept and self-esteem. Referenced as an atmosphere that promotes learning, the climate is supportive (Stringfield & Land, 2002). Throughout the interviews, participants' responses identified a supportive or nurturing environment.

One student stated: “I like having beanbags and pillows in class. They're comfortable when I read” (Appendix H, Roberto - #S/2/7/M/H, questions 8-9). Another shared, “He [the teacher] wants to make sure we understand why we're doing the work” (Appendix H, Veronica - #S/4/7/AA, questions 8-9). Another student stated, “Make it comfortable for me to ask questions” (Appendix H, Yuki - #S/11/9/F/AI, questions 6-7).

Although students in general commented that teachers ask if there are questions, it was perceived, that only a few provided supports within the class for students to do so.

Teachers confirmed this attribute: “My philosophy is to nurture, I have a naturally nurturing spirit” (Appendix I, Sandra - #1/F/AA/Grade 9/22 years, question 1). Another stated, “My actions are pretty nurturing, like a grandma. I try to give students individual attention. If they look bothered, I give them a pat on the shoulder” (Appendix I, Deborah - #2/F/W/Grade 7/03 years, question 1).

Teachers' comments revealed an environment that is accepting of a broad range of learning styles. Teachers reinforced acceptance: “students feel as comfortable as possible” (Appendix I, Sandra - #1/F/AA/Grade 9/22 years, question 1) and “every kid is unique” (Appendix I, Thelma - #6/F/W/Grades 7-9/NR, question 1). This viewpoint is emphasized as one teacher's comments included “tapping into their natural talents” (Appendix I, Sandra - #1/F/AA/Grade 9/22 years, question 8). Although this concept embodies support, it is relevant to note that it is coupled with academic expectations. As one teacher said, ““Most importantly, I don't want them [students] to think they can get by doing the least work possible” (Appendix I, Sandra - #1/F/AA/Grade 9/22 years, question 1). In sum, the responses identified were characteristic of a nurturing environment. Given both samples, the comments provided within the subtheme of affective contributions were more apparent in depth and consistency.

Cognitive

One-third of the comments categorized related to cognitive aspects of the classroom environment. Thirty-four (30%) of the responses were made by the students and 48 (37%) were made by the teachers. For example, one student mentioned teachers

who “challenge me!” (Appendix H, Yuki - #S/11/9/F/AI, questions 6-7). Another student spoke of situations where teachers, “. . . teach new things and let students try” (Appendix H, Maria - #S/3/7/F/H, questions 4-5). The student continued, “. . . this [knowledge] travels with us to the next level” (Appendix H, questions 4-5). Likewise, in describing a positive learning climate, a student said, “We're always doing fun things in Mrs. ___ class. We don't just sit there and hear her talk” (Appendix H, Dakota - #S/8/9/M/AI, questions 8-9). Given these examples, students' perceptions of the classroom environment that fosters knowledge as opportunities for learning include interactions between students and resources in the environment and are student centered.

Students mentioned the willingness of teachers who allowed them to work on assignments after school, use technology, and included engaging projects to enhance lessons. Specifically addressing project-based learning, one student stated:

The best things I like are the projects! They're fun and help you learn.

It helps me having study notes, that way I don't have all this stuff I don't need. I like it when I know exactly what I have to do. (Appendix H, Glenn - #S/6/9/M/AA, questions 8-9).

Students commented that learning was “fun” and that teachers who made positive contributions to their education experience provided an environment where time was taken to present information in a variety of ways if students did not understand.

The concept of cognitive contributions was further expressed by a teacher who stated, “I adopt a variety of instructional strategies; hands-on, visual learning to understand what works best for them [students]” (Appendix I, Sandra - #1/F/AA/Grade 9/22 years, question 5). Another teacher said that learning, “involves collaboration, trust,

and a great deal of work” (Appendix I, Ausbra - #4/M/W/Elementary/30 years, question 3). Providing instruction that is differentiated speaks to a wide range of abilities. One teacher commented, “For those who are reticent about reading, I provide instruction in small chunks” (Appendix I, Sandra - #1/F/AA/Grade 9/22 years, question 2). In these examples, the analysis indicated that teachers made conscious efforts to convey instruction in a purposeful manner.

Summary

The classroom environment was categorized into three subthemes: (a) administrative, (b) affective, (c) and cognitive. Two-hundred and forty-six responses referenced positive contributions teachers make to students' education experiences. Twenty (8%) of the responses referenced the administrative subtheme, 144 (59%) referenced the affective subtheme, and 82 (33%) referenced the cognitive subtheme.

The concept of affective contributions was prevalent and included the majority of responses from the student and teacher sample groups. Findings within this category indicated student motivation, self-efficacy, and support or nurturing. Second most prevalent was the cognitive subtheme that indicated a student-centered learning environment. Third most prevalent was the administrative subtheme that included classroom routines. Many of the responses were referenced across the representative samples of African American, Hispanic, and American Indian academically at risk minority students. Taken together, responses from the student and teacher sample groups connote interactions between students and resources in the classroom environment.

Teacher Attributes

This category pertained to the patterns related to thoughts and feelings that appeared to influence the action of teachers in the classroom. The attributes examined were manifested in the teacher's self-awareness and the ways in which the teacher thinks about teaching. The analysis of relevant teacher responses (see Table 3) indicated that 136 total responses were identified using these criteria. There were 73 students' comments and 63 teacher responses designated as fitting this category. Two major subthemes, described the scope of professional attributes discussed by the participants. Results were organized by the 33 (24%) cognitive and 103 (76%) non-cognitive descriptions of teachers elicited from the sample groups.

Table 3.

Responses Related to Teacher Attributes

Themes	Students	Teachers	Total
Cognitive	16 (22%)	17 (27%)	33 (24%)
Non-cognitive	57 (78%)	46 (73%)	103 (76%)
Total Responses	73 (100%)	63 (100%)	136 (100%)

Cognitive

Cognitive contributions were defined as the awareness teachers expressed concerning habitual patterns of behaviors in the classroom. Cognitive contributions included 16 (22%) responses from the student group and 17 (27%) responses from the teacher group. For the student group, the message primarily indicated the manner in which students ask questions. "Don't be afraid to ask questions, but be fragile"

(Appendix H, Traci - #S/7/9/F/AA, questions 8-9). While this perspective referenced classroom instruction and the tendency of students to ask questions, there was also the acknowledgement of a protocol for doing so.

Congruent with the criterion of self-reflection, responses from the teacher group indicated an awareness of the complexities surrounding academically at risk students. Teachers stated, “I often ask, what am I doing that he's not responding? Is it trust? Sincerity?” (Appendix I, Deborah - #2/F/W/Grade 7/03 years, question 1). Other comments included, “What is the perception of my students about me? How do I validate their feelings?” (Appendix I, Thelma - #6/F/W/Grades 7-9/NR, question 6) and “How can I make a difference with my learning?” (Appendix I, Sandra - #1/F/AA/Grade 9/22 years, question 7). These perspectives were provided overall as participants sought to describe the impact of their thoughts and feelings in relation to students' education experiences in the classroom.

The analysis referenced teachers who have a sense of humor. Both sample groups provided responses. One student in particular expressed that teachers who displayed a sense of humor appeared “more open-minded” (Appendix H, Glenn - #S/6/9/M/AA, questions 8-9). It was also pointed out that while these teachers did not necessarily tell jokes, they seemed “calm.” Students claimed to enjoy a class because the teacher was “so funny.” Similarly, one teacher claimed, “I make them laugh and try to make the class fun and interesting” (Appendix I, Patrick - #7/M/Grade 9/39 years, question 3). In comparison to previously mentioned concepts, responses referencing a teacher's sense of humor were more prevalent among male than female participants. The

analysis of results also indicated the concept of humor appeared to have greater significance with the students than with the teachers.

Cognitive contributions also referenced the attribute of competence. This attribute concerned a teacher's understanding of the subject matter and ability to convey knowledge in a skilled manner. Students' explanations of teacher knowledge and application were referenced by a teachers' capacity to foster learning and their willingness to provide help. One student said, "The teacher is smart, easy going, and always willing to help" (Appendix H, Ted - #S/1/7/M/AA, questions 1-3). Another student referenced this connection by noting the educator's effectiveness. In this respect, the analysis of students' comments draws attention to teachers who made positive contributions to their education experiences while demonstrating the skills of subject application and related professional characteristics.

Participants in the teacher group shared a common perspective when referencing competence, as supported by the following comments: "Good teachers make a tough job look easy . . . We work together for one purpose - to give our best to our students" (Appendix I, Patrick - #7/M/W/Grade 9/39 years, question 9). Responses indicated that teachers were committed to displaying competence. Supporting comments included, "It's easier to teach anything if you make it palpable [clear]. All children can learn" (Appendix I, Ausbra - # 4/M/W/Elementary/30 years, question 2). Accompanying these comments, Table 3 indicated the concept of competence as a predominant response throughout the category of cognitive contributions. By linking participants' responses to the criteria of competence, results from the student group (22%) and the teacher group

(27%) were comparable. Despite frequency differences, participants in both groups indicated similar thoughts.

Non-Cognitive

Responses for the subtheme of non-cognitive contributions were prevalent throughout the broad category of teacher attributes. A total of 103 (76%) responses were provided by both sample groups. The results included 57 (78%) responses from the students and 46 (73%) responses from the teachers. While most of the responses were included within the student sample (78%), the percentage of responses for the teacher sample (73%) was similar. A key attribute referenced was teacher helpfulness. For participants in the student group, the perception of teachers who displayed support was explicit. For example, students stated:

Teachers who want their kids to do well would describe themselves as someone who's helpful to students. These teachers seem to be more “laid back” [more relaxed] - don't seem to be mad. (Appendix H, Christiana - #S/10/9/F/H, questions 1-3).

Sometimes if a teacher seems too hard or mean, it's because he wants you to get a good education - to do good in life. He wants his kids to do well. I would say that person is helpful. (Appendix H, Ted - #S/1/7/M/AA, questions 4-5).

Similarly, for teachers who held this view, the thought of supporting students was also noted by Patrick in his focus on helping students. (Appendix I, Patrick - #7/M/W/Grade 9/39 years, question 2).

When the attribute of helpfulness is studied, results referenced ways teachers think about teaching when conveying instruction. The perception of helpfulness by

teachers was recurrent in this category, most often reported by students. In these examples, the majority of responses referenced teachers' behaviors that reflected positive contributions to students' learning experiences.

Responses indicating an educator's passion for teaching and learning included verbal statements within the subtheme of non-cognitive contributions. Responses either referenced or were directly related to the criterion by the participants. Participants mentioned the positive impact of a teacher as related to the teacher's feelings about the profession. One student shared the following: "It's obvious that he [the teacher] loves teaching . . . makes things fun while still orderly" (Appendix H, Veronica - #S/4/7/F/AA, questions 1-3). Likewise, teachers described their enthusiasm in a positive manner that supported their enjoyment in working with students.

The expression of a teacher's enthusiasm emerged as the most prevalent response by educators within this category. A teacher reported, "I want students to see that I am physically excited about the lesson, about my job" (Appendix I, Deborah - #2/F/W/Grade 7/03 years, question 1). Additional comments from Deborah included, "I am a high energy teacher. I am very expressive. Enthusiasm translates well!" In these examples, professional growth was also discussed, as teachers indicated the benefits of experienced and novice staff working collaboratively through professional development (Appendix I). One teacher stated, "As veteran teachers, we may feel we know it all, but is this to the benefit of the child?" (Appendix I, Gwen - #3/F/AA/Grade 6/10 years, question 9).

While the perception of being calm and patient defined the characteristics of composure, it also closely paralleled the concept of teacher enthusiasm. Of the individual verbal statements, the student group provided the majority of the responses. Students

pointed out positive contributions to their education experiences by referencing, “Teachers' attitudes are more mellow, they're more calm” (Appendix H, Glenn - #S/6/9/M/AA, questions 8-9) and “He's . . . cool” (Appendix H, Christiana -#S/10/9/F/H, questions 1-3). In the analysis of teachers' thoughts, one comment referenced a need for patience in working with academically at risk students. One veteran teacher noted, “We must be more sensitive to the needs of kids, learn how to stretch our patience” (Appendix I, Sandra - #1/F/AA/Grade 9/22 years, question 9).

Although clearly noted, thoughts expressed by participants in the teacher group (approximately 3%) were rare when related to expression of the concept by students (approximately 17%). In sum, more than three times as many relevant responses were given by the student group participants.

To a smaller degree, less than 10% of the responses by the student and teacher sample groups were comments that referenced the criteria of empathy. Comments referenced teachers who understood the difficulty academically at risk students experience with learning. Responses from students described teachers “who don't give up on you” (Appendix H, Glenn- #S/6/9/M/AA, questions 8-9). Teachers' responses were defined as comments that addressed, how “do you inject compassion into professionals?” (Appendix I, Thelma - #6/F/W/Grades 7-9, question 9). Another teacher responded, “I often tell my classes, ‘You are part of my perfect equation’” (Appendix I, Deborah - #2/F/W/Grade 7/03 years, question 1). She reiterated, “They realize I don't give up on them” (Appendix I, question 1). Analysis of the responses indicated that responses from females were more often indicative of comments that reflected empathy.

Similarly, findings referenced the attribute of friendliness. That attribute incorporated the criteria of habitual patterns related to one's thoughts and feelings, which, in turn, impacted the actions taken in the classroom. Teachers indicated approximately twice as many relevant responses related to friendliness than the students did. A comment from one of the students illustrated the friendly nature of a teacher: "He's friendly, outgoing, and strict - but not too strict" (Appendix H, Veronica - #S/4/7/F/AA, questions 8-9). In the same way, the attribute was referenced by a participant in the teacher group when he mentioned being friendly in settings throughout the school as well as in the classroom. He explained, "When in the hallway, I catch them being good, and in the cafeteria I'll eat lunch with them" (Appendix I, Ausbra - #4/M/W/Elementary/30 years, question 5). Likewise, "I greet them each morning as they enter the building. I welcome positively . . .saying things like great hair and I give high fives" (Appendix I, question 2). The concept of friendliness had equal significance as the one of empathy.

Further responses by teachers stated that all students should be treated equitably, regardless of race/ethnicity or learning differences. Teachers discussed matters congruent with equity by emphasizing, "It is important that I am fair to all students" (Appendix I, Sandra - #1/F/AA/Grade 9/22 years, question 5) and "I am an advocate for my kids" (Appendix I, Thelma - #6/F/W/Grades 7-9/NR, question 1). On a particular note, one female teacher, who was not of minority descent, mentioned the need to address students if racial insults were expressed. The teacher explained, ". . . when African American male students choose to use the 'N' word in school, I call them on it. I treat students the same way that I treat my own kids" (Appendix I, Thelma - #6/F/W/Grades 7-9/NR, question 1). While the teacher indicated the students' use of the word was not done

in an angry manner, she did not perceive it appropriate in contributing to students' positive education experiences. In reflecting on the concept of equity overall, analysis indicated the attribute received the least number of responses.

While not widespread, attributes of character emerged as a subtheme. For example, participants referenced attributes manifested in the ways teachers think about teaching. Both sample groups made comments on commitment and understanding. Responses referenced teachers who were extraordinary. As students stated, “She is a very special lady” (Appendix H, Jerry - #S/9/9/M/AA, questions 8-9) and “You can just tell that she is full of heart and inspiration” (Appendix H, Maria -# - S/3/7/F/H, questions 8-9).

Accompanying these responses, teachers' comments indicated similar qualities. One teacher spoke about choosing to practice dependability and honesty (Appendix I). Throughout the interviews, specific features related to character were referenced. For example, one teacher said, “My qualities are those things which make up who I am as a person and how I interact with students” (Appendix I, Ausbra - #4/M/W/Elementary/30 years, question 9). In summary, non-cognitive descriptions of character were referenced as participants identified ways teachers made positive contributions to students' education experiences. In general, within the subtheme of non-cognitive contributions, the criterion of character was referenced more often than the criterion of equity.

Last, a recurring aspect of this subtheme was the self-awareness of a teacher in thinking about the ways in which he/she considers teaching. The majority of responses referenced regarding the individual differences of students and instruction that is actively created. Congruent with the criteria of a teacher's flexible teaching style, participants'

responses illustrated the varied learning experiences students bring to the classroom. Students strongly referenced teachers' instructional approaches that made positive contributions to their education experiences. Supporting this perspective, students commented: "Help us learn things from our point of view, see if we can succeed" (Appendix H, Maria - #S/3/7/F/H, questions 6-7) and "Everyone makes mistakes and everyone doesn't learn at the same time" (Appendix H, Roberto - #S/2/7/M/H, questions 6-7). Further comments included, "Explain work in a different way - show me" (Appendix H, Glenn - #S/6/9/M/AA, question 10). In addition, the desire for rigorous assignments was clearly noted: "With some teachers, I can say, "Don't give me the easy problems - give me the harder stuff" (Appendix H, Christiana - #S/10/9/F/H, question 10).

Similar to the responses by the students, participants in the teacher group were also clear in speaking to the attribute of an educator's flexible teaching style. Typical of the teachers' statements was Thelma who said, "All students are not at the same level; nor do they have the same learning styles" (Appendix I, Thelma - #6/F/W/Grades 7-9/NR, question 9). "It bothers me when everyone is expected to learn the same way" (Appendix I, question 1). "Students have varying abilities that need to be taken into consideration" (Appendix I, question 1). In emphasizing the need for students to recognize their learning differences, one teacher explained, "As a teacher, I encourage students to use their differences to make a difference to take advantage of their opportunities" (Appendix I, Sandra - #1/F/AA/Grade 9/22 years, question 2). Teachers acknowledged understanding "that students have many complexities" (Appendix I,

Thelma - #6/F/W/Grades 7-9/NR, question 9) and “not everything they do will they do well” (Appendix I, Gwen - #3/F/AA/Grade 6/10 years, question 1). As previously noted, throughout the interviews the non-cognitive contribution of a flexible teaching style was indicated as the most prevalent attribute within the broad category of teacher attributes. By sample group, there were more responses from the teacher group than from the student group. Results provided through the collective voices of the sample populations indicated in-depth reflections across gender and racial/ethnic groups.

Summary

Findings from this study support descriptions of teachers who made positive contributions to the educational experiences of academically at risk minority students. Results were based on the semi-structured interviews of two sample groups. The student group included 12 academically at risk minority students representative of adolescent African American, Hispanic, and American Indian learners. The teacher group included seven educators identified by these students. All participants were representatives of a public school district in a small urban area. The analysis of participants' interviews provided 642 responses across the three broad categories of Teacher-Student Relationships, Classroom Environment, and Teacher Attributes. Two hundred sixty responses were indicated in the category of Teacher-Student Relationships, 246 in the category of Classroom Environment, and 136 in the category of Teacher Attributes.

The broad category of Teacher-Student Relationships defined the manner in which the teacher and student(s) interacted in the classroom pertinent to the students' development. Relationships manifested in cognitive and social-emotional contexts indicated the key subtheme of teacher-student interactions and communication (137;

53%). The participants indicated positive presuppositions, genuine interest, and the aspect of teachers speaking in a pleasant tone rather than yelling. The students provided 117 total responses in contrast to the teachers, who provided 143. The participants' responses suggested support of positive teacher-student interactions and of teachers who take time to explain things. Further descriptions of Teacher-Student Relationships emphasized caring, trust, and respect, with 80 (31%) responses and affirming success with 43 (16%) responses.

Relationships manifested in cognitive and social-emotional contexts defined the concept of affirming success. In particular, the teacher's knowledge of instructional techniques and recognition of students' accomplishments was indicated. Overall, although responses for the broad category of Teacher-Student Relationships consisted of the majority of responses (260) in contrast to Classroom Environment (246) the data were similar.

In the broad category of Classroom Environment, the responses were descriptive of teachers' contributions to the social-emotional climate that students experience and the interactions between students and resources in the environment. Findings in this category included features related to students' affective qualities such as self-esteem, academic self-concept, achievement motivation, and self-efficacy. Based on the total responses from both sample groups, three prevalent subthemes emerged: affective contributions with 144 (59%) responses, cognitive with 82 (33%) responses, and administrative with 20 (8%) responses. Within the subtheme of affective contributions, key responses referenced learning environments that fostered motivation, encouragement, and self-

efficacy. While both the student 69 (60%) and teacher 75 (57%) sample groups provided responses related to this concept, more descriptions were expressed by students.

Responses within the subtheme of cognitive contributions consisted of references to instruction that was challenging and purposeful. For this category, teachers provided 48 (37%) responses and students 34 (30%) responses. Common statements by teachers indicated differentiated instruction, and for students, responses indicated a learning atmosphere that was conducive to asking questions. Responses for this subtheme represented approximately one-third of the responses (82; 33%).

The 20 (8%) comments about administrative contributions consisted of behavioral expectations and classroom management. Students were clear in stating that teachers who made positive contributions to their positive education experience demonstrated effective classroom management. For students who described teachers who made a positive contribution in this area, classrooms were orderly and procedures were established. In addition, while students were aware that managing student behavior could be a challenge, they encouraged teachers not to give up.

Further analysis referenced the broad category of teacher attributes. Results reflected the criteria of habitual patterns related to one's thoughts and feelings, which, in turn, impacted actions taken in the classroom. The prevalent subthemes expressed by the participants were descriptive of cognitive 33 (24%) and non-cognitive contributions 103 (76%). Within the subtheme of cognitive contributions, the attribute of humor was often referenced. Responses by students indicated that teachers who demonstrated a sense of humor appeared more relaxed. For teachers, humor was embedded in their philosophy of making classes "fun and interesting" (Appendix I).

Findings also indicated competence as a descriptor of teachers who made positive contributions to students' education experiences. Students spoke of their teachers' understanding of the subject matter and their ability to convey instruction. In turn, educators indicated that competence was embedded within their skills as professionals. Results in the subtheme of cognitive contributions consisted of 16 (22%) responses from students and 17 (27%) from teachers.

Non-cognitive contributions consisted of 103 (76%) participants' responses. Fifty-seven (78%) responses were reported by students and 46 (73%) were reported by teachers. Attributes in this category indicated the subthemes of helpfulness, a calm and patient demeanor, teaching and learning, friendliness, and flexible teaching style. Prevalent patterns indicated a teacher's willingness to help students and to consider students' learning styles and interests. While both sample groups indicated helpfulness, it was mentioned more often by the students. Participants' responses were expressed across racial/ethnic groups, grade levels, and gender.

In sum, eight key subthemes emerged across the categories of Teacher-Student Relationships, Classroom Environment, and Teacher Attributes. The participants from the student and teacher sample groups provided descriptions of teachers who made positive contributions to the education experiences of academically at risk minority students.

Analysis of descriptions across the subthemes was closely represented for the cognitive subthemes with 16 (22%) for the students and 17 (27%) for teachers. General trends indicated like perspectives in the broad category of classroom environment. Specific to the subtheme of affective descriptors, 69 (60%) responses were reported by

students and 75 (57%) by teachers. Consistent with these findings were the participants' thoughts on self-efficacy, student motivation, and nurturing. This was indicated as recurrent comments by students that included references to teachers who “want to make sure we understand why we're doing the work,” who “make it comfortable for us to ask questions,” and who “inspire kids to do well” (Appendix H). Similarly, teachers' perspectives of the ways classroom conditions cultivated knowledge included: “I believe students can conquer whatever they set themselves up to do if they put forth the effort” (Appendix I, Gwen - #3/F/AA/Grade 6/10 years), “I seek to motivate” (Appendix I, Deborah - #2/F/W/Grade 7/03 years, question 4), and “It's important for them to understand, I will and I can do better” (Appendix I, Sandra - #1/F/AA/Grade 9/22 years, question 6).

For the student and teacher sample groups combined, the responses 144 (59%) for the subtheme of affective descriptions were referenced more frequently than for other subthemes. More than 50% of the participants within each sample group inferred self-efficacy, student motivation, and nurturing as fundamental components related to the classroom environment.

Analysis of other descriptions was noted in the cognitive subtheme related to teacher attributes. Students' responses were referenced by 16 (22%) statements and teachers responses by 17 (27%). For example, Christiana (Appendix H, #S/10/9/F/H, questions 6-7) stated, “Have a sense of humor, don't give up on us” and Glenn (Appendix H, #S/6/9/M/AA, questions 8-9) said, “I like it when teachers have a sense of humor. They seem more open-minded.”

Likewise, examples for competence included information about asking questions. While students indicated teachers often ask if there are questions, students suggested that particular teachers made it more comfortable to do so. Traci commented, “Don’t be afraid to ask questions” (Appendix H, #S/7/9/F/AA, questions 8-9) and Yuki indicated that teachers who made a positive contribution to her education experience, “Make it comfortable for me to ask questions” (Appendix H, #S/11/9/F/AI, questions 6-7).

In contrast, the analysis of teachers’ responses cited humor as an attribute within one's instructional practice. For instance Patrick said, “I make them laugh and try to make the class fun and interesting” (Appendix I, #7/M/W/Grade 9/39 years, question). While the use of humor was not observed as a tool by itself, it was perceived as a disposition that helped make learning enjoyable. As evidenced by Deborah, “When steps are taken to make learning enjoyable, you will hear students say, ‘I love this class, time goes so fast!’”

As noted earlier, cognitive contributions referenced the attribute of competence. This professional characteristic was denoted by the teacher's capacity to convey knowledge in a skilled manner. For example, the findings suggested that these teachers exhibit content pedagogical knowledge as well as collaboratively draw on the knowledge of colleagues. In sum, the perspectives of how teachers make a positive contribution to the student's education experience was indicated by one teacher as he stated, “We work together for one purpose - to give our best to our students” (Appendix I, Patrick - #7/M/W/T/Grade 9/39 years, question 9).

Results were primarily different in the subtheme of caring, trust, and respect. For students, 20 (17%) responses were reported and for teachers 60 (42%) responses were

reported. While both groups indicated the perception of caring and of reciprocal respect, the perspective of trust was referenced more often by teachers. For teachers, trust appeared to focus on personal growth as one teacher stated, “I often ask, ‘What am I not doing, that he's not responding? Is it trust?’” (Appendix H, Deborah - #2/F/W/Grade 7/03 years).

Students indicated the attribute of helpfulness within the non-cognitive subtheme with approximately 13 (20%) responses in contrast to teachers with 1 (2%) responses. For students, this finding appeared to underscore the importance of teachers who focus on high expectations while providing adequate support to help students succeed. Students indicated multiple examples with statements that included, “She takes a lot of time for kids” (Appendix H, James - # S/5/8/M/AA, questions 8-9) and “Teachers who want their kids to do well would describe themselves as someone who's helpful to students” (Appendix H, Jerry - #S/9/M/AA, questions 8-9).

CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

*"An emphasis on positive recognition rather than a focus on
negative consequences is crucial."*

--- Stringfield & Land, 2002, p.57

The purpose of this study was to examine perceptions of ethnic minority, academically at risk adolescents and their teachers to the ways in which they were perceived as making a positive difference in students' learning. For this descriptive study, participants provided responses to semi-structured interview questions. The first sample group consisted of 12 adolescent learners across the ethnic and racial minority student populations of African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students at a junior high school (six male and six female students in grades 7-9). All students met the criteria for academically at risk as determined by the State Department of Education. The second sample consisted of seven educators who the students believed made positive contributions to their education experience. The teacher sample consisted of four female and three male educators. Both the student and teacher sample groups were selected from the Midwest public school district associated with this research.

Two critical questions guided this study.

1. According to academically at risk minority students, what are ways in which particular teachers make a positive contribution to the students' education experience?
2. According to the above-identified teachers, what are ways in which they make a positive contribution to the students' education experience?

Chapter Five consists of the summary of findings, discussion, implications for practice, and future research. The limitations of the study are explored in addition to suggestions for future research related to educating academically at risk minority students.

Summary of the Findings

Research indicates the increasing number of academically at risk minority learners in classrooms today is increasing the need for adequate instruction (Children's Defense Fund, 2005; Dallman-Jones, 2006; Education Trust, 2006; Bridgeland et al. 2006). Similarly, in many instances, research suggests that teachers do not think they are sufficiently prepared to address the learning needs of these students (Brown, 2007; Dallman-Jones, 2006; Delpit, 2006). Although, the literature suggested a broader perspective in educating these learners, there were few empirical investigations focusing on student voice (Delpit, 2006; McAllister & Irvine, 2000; Miller, 2005).

Based on a critical review of the literature, student and teacher comments were sorted into three broad categories: classroom environment, teacher student relationships, and teacher attributes. Classroom environment refers to the climate that affects students' affective qualities such as self-esteem, academic self-concept, achievement motivation, and self-efficacy. The term connotes the teacher's contributions to the social-emotional climate that students experience. Classroom environment includes interactions between students and resources in the environment. Teacher student relationships describe the manner in which the teacher and student(s) interact in the classroom, pertinent to the student's development. Relationships are manifested in cognitive and social-emotional contexts. Teacher attributes incorporates habitual patterns related to teacher's thoughts and feelings, which in turn impacts the action taken in a classroom. Attributes

are manifested in the teacher's self-awareness and in the ways in which the teacher thinks about teaching. In addition, teacher attributes include professional behaviors and ethical standards.

A descriptive research design was considered an appropriate method of inquiry because the data could describe select factors that contribute to the learning of academically at risk minority students. In-depth semi-structured interviews were used to collect data based on the participants' understanding and personal experience associated with the research topic. Based on the principles of qualitative research, the procedure for analysis included: (1) examining the definitions, (2) transcribing the student and teacher interviews, and (3) sorting the participants' responses according to the definitions (Lockyer, 2004). Likewise, as is characteristic of qualitative investigations, inductive analysis allowed the researcher to analyze and categorize data and the emergent sub-themes. Overall, the participants' responses yielded results across the three broad categories of: (1) classroom environment, (2) teacher student relationships, and (3) teacher attributes.

While distinct patterns were identified in each of the three broad categories, results describing teachers who made positive contributions to the learning of academically at risk minority students suggested participants' statements were distributed across the different categories. In sum, the analysis yielded six hundred and forty-two comments related to factors that are believed to contribute to students' positive education experiences. In the disaggregated data, teacher student relationships included 260 responses, classroom environment included 246, and teacher attributes 136. Eight key subthemes were identified. First, teacher student relationships included the subthemes of

interactions/communication; caring, trust, and respect; and affirming success. Second, classroom environment consisted of administrative, affective, and cognitive. Third, teacher attributes included cognitive and non-cognitive subthemes.

DISCUSSION

Teacher and Student Relationships

Fundamental to this study is the broad category of teacher student relationships. As discussed earlier, this category describes the manner in which the teacher and student(s) interact in the classroom, pertinent to the student's development. Relationships are manifested in cognitive and social-emotional contexts. Data analysis from the sample groups provided clear and succinct responses that yielded three emergent patterns. These subthemes consisted of interactions and communication (53%); caring, trust, and respect (31%); and affirming success (16%).

Interactions and Communication. Findings reveal responses given the most attention are those that suggest positive interactions and communication by students (67%). The students' comments are predominant in number in comparison to the responses of teachers (41%). In transcending the subtheme of teacher student interactions and communication, conclusions from this current study suggest a progressive curriculum orientation.

Findings are consistent with the research of Stipek (2006) who indicated students are more likely to function effectively when they perceive they are valued. Descriptions of participants' interactions and communication yielded the most responses (53%) overall within the category of teacher student relationships. For students, these behaviors included the perception of the teacher's commitment to students. Students across grade

levels appeared to favor teachers who take the time to cultivate teacher student relationships.

For teachers, their descriptions of interactions and communication are congruent with students' descriptions of behaviors that influence positive interactions. Reciprocal and cordial communication is perceived important in conveying expectations and in helping students develop appropriate skills to voice their thoughts. As evidenced by the statement, "I give unconditional professional love and support" (Ausbra - #4/M/W/Elementary/30 years, question 1) teachers' responses indicate positive presuppositions about students along with an instructional focus to help students succeed. These findings support Strahan and Layell (2006) who suggest the relevance of pro-social behaviors in the exploration of ways in which teachers are perceived to influence learning.

Additionally, findings in this current study suggest the support of culturally responsive teaching in relationship to the literature as indicated by Williams (2003). Culturally responsive teaching is illustrated as teachers suggest fostering interpersonal relations in addition to academic achievement. These findings also align with the literature in suggesting that teachers who nurture positive teacher student relationships are perceived to exhibit teaching styles that are supportive (Benard, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Caring, Trust, and Respect. Reflective of genuine concern for the well-being of students, caring is descriptive of the criterion that manifests teacher student relationships in cognitive and social-emotional contexts. Students suggest responsiveness to teachers who provide "extra time" and who express that they do not want students to give up.

Students' responses suggest that their perceptions of teachers are important in recognizing matters of care, trust, and respect as related to positive contributions to their education experience. For example, one pupil discussed that if a teacher unintentionally offended a student in class with a comment about his or her religion, it was important to apologize. The student was clear in stating the apology could apply to the class in general or to the individual student, but either way the apology was important. For students, this simple act suggests respect for not only the student's religious beliefs but for him or her as a person.

Additionally, findings in this current study suggest that "pushing" students to achieve, reflects caring. Students perceived teachers to care for them if they promoted high academic expectations along with instructional support. These findings are consistent with many studies that suggest teachers should purposefully have caring and respectful interactions with learners while encouraging them to do well (Gay, 2000; McBee, 2007; McLaughlin, 1994; Noddings, 2002; and Schussler & Collins, 2006). For the students, results from this current study are consistent with the findings of McBee (2007) who suggests that educators go beyond the rhetoric of caring to developing concrete approaches that model specific mannerisms.

Based on the analysis of teacher data, caring in education reflects thoughts and actions expressed beyond the perception of teacher support. For the teachers, the perception of caring, trust, and respect indicates interactions beyond the cognitive context. It consists of managing student behavior and offering support for students who are self-conscious or for those who do not have adequate resources, supplies, or clothing. In comparison to the students' responses 20 (17%), teachers 60 (42%) reported responses

that fit the criteria of caring, trust, and respect. For example, if teachers encourage students to do well, are pleasant to work with, or foster hope, these behaviors suggest caring. Similarly, although teachers express giving "pats" on the back when students do well, they also express concern when students misbehave. Findings of teachers' responses in this current study suggest that caring, trust, and respect are relevant in the process of building positive teacher student relationships and in cultivating the learning of academically at risk minority students.

Findings in this current study suggest that the responses mentioned by both sample groups are consistent in denoting respect for students as individuals as well as for their ethnic or racial group and culture (Lockwood, 1996; Saenger & Lewis-Charp, 2003). Consistent with the research literature, results from this current study suggest that the perceptions of care, trust, and respect in the teacher student relationship matter in the schooling of academically at risk students (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lewis & Kim, 2008; Stipek, 2006). While this current study does not address student achievement, it does suggest that caring and supportive social contexts make positive contributions to the education experiences of academically at risk learners.

Classroom Environment

Congruent with findings from studies examining the classroom environment, results indicate a task-oriented and teacher supported learning atmosphere. Three subthemes were identified: administrative (8%), affective (59%), and cognitive (33%). Although, responses for both sample groups (10% students, 6% teachers) were closely represented within the administrative subtheme, this perspective was least mentioned overall in comparison to the subthemes of affective and cognitive. Despite the clear reference to

effective classroom management, participants indicated prevalence toward descriptions of teachers that suggested the affective domains of learning.

Affective. The affective criteria include the student's academic self-concept and self-esteem. For students, it suggests the positive contributions made by teachers to motivate them to do their best or at least try. Findings in this study suggest that a positive classroom environment fosters self-efficacy and students feel "inspired" to learn. Students expressed belief in their capacity to learn while also indicating the environment was conducive for asking questions. In addition, findings suggest the classroom environment may consist of pillows and beanbags to create a physically comfortable atmosphere.

Regardless of obstacles in life, findings suggest that students aspire to do well. Consistent with classroom climate research, findings in this study suggest self-efficacy denotes a caring classroom community and the student's ability to make positive adjustments (Benard, 2004; Downey, 2008; Morales, 2008; Plastino, n.d.). Drawing from the results of this current study, students suggest insights related to learning and self-efficacy for academically at risk minority students. For learners across minority racial and ethnic populations, findings from this current study suggest a glimpse of the influences of self-efficacy for academically at risk African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students.

For teachers, findings from this current study suggest that while academically at risk students may struggle, they have an understanding of the importance of attempting tasks that may be difficult. Teachers suggest that they serve the purpose of helping students to help themselves. In nurturing students, findings suggest teachers build on students'

learning styles. Teachers purposely seek to motivate their learners and to help them with planning of future goals. Rather than viewing lessons as ways to cover single objectives, findings from this current study suggest that teachers encourage students to look at the "big picture" and in ways that are relevant for real-world learning. Consistent with classroom environment research, this current study suggests teachers perceive that each child has value and can succeed (Downey, 2008; Waxman & Padron, 2003-2004).

Cognitive. "Challenge me!" clearly acknowledges one student. Similar student responses voice the sentiment of academically at risk students as findings in this current study suggest learning that is student centered. Findings also indicate that while educators might believe that academically at risk students prefer less complicated tasks, results from this current study suggest that students rather have relevant and engaging lessons.

The results of this study also suggest students enjoy lessons that are participatory rather than sessions in which students "just sit" and listen to the teacher. Findings from students also include the use of technology and project-based learning in suggesting descriptions of teachers who make positive contributions to their education experience. Consistent with classroom environment research, the students' responses suggest an atmosphere that cultivates knowledge (Benard, 2004; Dorman, 2002; Downey, 2008). Students' responses connote academic self-concept and academic motivation as related to the criteria of the classroom environment and academically at risk minority students.

Teachers' responses also indicate the application of instructional strategies. However, for teachers, findings suggest the recurrent use of instructional techniques embedded within the teacher's practice. Findings suggest that teachers who are perceived to make

positive contributions to students' education experience adopt a hands-on and collaborative learning philosophy. Findings also suggest teachers provide instruction in small meaningful chunks and are subtle in differentiating instruction. Findings indicate instruction is direct, diverse, and serious while emphasizing conscious efforts by teachers that focus on student engagement.

Consistent with findings in classroom environment research, this current study suggests relationships and personal development. The findings align with several studies that suggest the classroom environment relates to human behavior and learning (Dorman et. al., 2004; Fraser, 1994; and Moos, 1987). By considering the demographic trends of diverse student populations today, findings in this current study suggest insights that foster a deeper understanding of how academically at risk minority students perceive teachers who make positive contributions to their learning. The results of this study also suggest the classroom environment is instrumental in either encouraging or discouraging student learning (Stringfield & Land, 2002).

Teacher Attributes

Teacher attributes call to mind the personal beliefs and core values of educators. Often indicated as the characteristics of a "great teacher," findings in this current study consist of two distinct categories: cognitive (24%) responses and non-cognitive (76%) responses. The attributes examined are manifested in the teacher's self-awareness and in ways in which the teacher thinks about his or teaching. Given this current study, findings support the research of Gardner (2000) and Poplin and Weeres (1992) who indicate teachers' attributes influence student learning.

Cognitive. Results in this current study found that responses fit the criteria denoting habitual patterns of behaviors. In reflecting on academically at risk students' perceptions of teachers who make positive contributions to their education experience, this study found students are not afraid to ask teachers questions. Findings also suggest that students perceive teachers as approachable who do not "yell" at students. Teachers are perceived as having a sense of humor and demonstrating behaviors that suggest an "easy-going" manner.

The results of this study also suggest that students perceive teachers to have admirable qualities. Students view teachers as "leaders" and they "look up to them." Similarly, students suggest teachers are "smart." However, findings suggest that while teachers are knowledgeable they also are skilled in conveying information to students in a comprehensible manner.

Non-cognitive. Non-cognitive contributions suggest attributes manifested in the ways teachers think about teaching. Participants' responses (78% students, 73% teachers) suggest helpfulness, equity, enthusiasm for learning, student engagement, and differentiated instruction. Findings suggest participants' perceptual beliefs are embedded across the sample groups of both students and teachers.

Students suggest teachers are "full of heart" and demonstrate character that espouses a love for the profession. Findings indicate teachers are special people who students perceive as friendly and who want students to do well. Findings also suggest if teachers appear "too hard," it is because they want students to obtain a good education. While students mention receiving help from teachers, the findings suggest teachers explain work in different ways and help them learn based on their learning style. Findings suggest

students desire purposeful instruction and benefit from teachers who talk with them individually.

While findings suggest teachers enjoy teaching, it also suggests teachers value opportunities for learning. Findings suggest teachers welcome ways in which to work with novice staff to share ideas and problem-solve. Teachers look to enhance their practice through professional development and apply a variety of instructional approaches. Findings suggest teachers realize students do not learn in the same manner and build on their individual strengths.

Teachers are flexible and indicate empathy for the background experiences students bring to the classroom. Findings suggest teachers are friendly across settings and welcome students in a positive manner. Concerning matters of equity and race, findings in this current study suggest teachers do not allow the use of racial slurs in class even when students are speaking of their own ethnic group. For example, if students choose to use a derogatory term toward peers, teachers address the situation rather than ignore it. Similar to the ethnographic research of Ladson-Billings (2009), findings suggest that cultural competence is important toward working effectively with academically at risk minority students.

In conclusion, consistent with findings in this current research, results are in alignment with research-based developments that indicate instruction must be purposeful and responsive to the needs of academically at risk minority students. Additionally, findings in this study suggest that insights gained through the student voice and of teachers perceived to influence these students' education experience provide a deeper

understanding of ways in which teachers make positive contributions to a student's learning.

Implications for Practice

The analysis from this current study suggests a firmly grounded and consistent approach toward educating academically at risk minority students. By gaining a deeper understanding of what students perceive to contribute to their learning experience, the findings indicate a construct that addresses learning through pro-social behaviors and relevant instruction. In developing teacher practice, the findings indicate strategic focal points that are three-fold: 1) heighten teacher awareness of professional dispositions in relationship to working effectively with all learners; 2) build on instructional practice that embeds research-developed strategies and techniques to engage students in purposeful and differentiated learning; and 3) convey instruction with adequate support in a manner that is challenging while fostering self-efficacy.

Based on the specific comments from students and teachers in this current study, essential thoughts to guide teacher practice are outlined in this section.

First, determine a clear understanding of academically at risk minority students and the term self-efficacy through well-defined examples and professional dialogue. The detailed analysis of participants' responses through the Affective subtheme of the classroom environment provides concrete findings to guide professional discourse across multiple paths.

Second, identify and recognize teacher attributes in relationship to ways teachers are perceived to make positive contributions to the education experience of academically at risk learners. The role of dispositions suggests specific behaviors within the subthemes

yielding cognitive and non-cognitive responses. While comments include descriptions of teachers who exhibit a sense of humor and who appear calm, additional comments also focus on a teacher's willingness to provide adequate support in explaining information to students.

Third, associate teacher knowledge, pedagogy, and skills to ways that foster positive teacher student interactions and communication. Students appear to value the manner in which teachers convey thoughts and instruction. Speaking in a manner that does not involve a negative vocal tone is a recurrent comment by both students and teachers. Congruent with the subtheme of positive interactions and communication is the subtheme denoting caring, trust, and respect. For teachers, the perception of caring, trust, and respect is denotes discipline with respect and in some instances taking time with students.

Finally, in self-reflecting and applying the research-based findings of this study, educators are encouraged to consider bolder and more holistic initiatives in responding to learning and academically at risk minority learners. Critical to the suggested approach indicates a framework that is consistent and coherent with the "big picture" of what is to be accomplished as the focal point of curriculum. Although the challenge to achieve success is multi-faceted, research indicates positive contributions can be realized through insights gained from students and teachers most closely related to this situation.

Future Research

As this current study is representative of adolescent academically at risk minority students from the African American, Hispanic, and American Indian populations at a junior high school, future investigations suggest a longitudinal study. Following the progress of these students as they navigate through the high school level and identifying

teachers perceived to contribute to their education experience in grades 1-12 would provide additional data toward a more comprehensive study. Additionally, research could be conducted on a larger student sample across multiple grade levels in order to expand the findings to similar student populations at other schools.

The quest to determine corresponding factors and improved student success poses critical questions for researchers. Continued exploration in the study of academically at risk minority learners is recommended to: 1) assess under what conditions factors affect outcomes and 2) provide applicable processes to guide education policy. In order to develop a deeper understanding of ways teachers contribute positively to students' education experiences, the study indicates looking beyond the stigma of the term academically at risk toward a broadened instructional perspective that builds on the language of relationships (Benard, 1992; Goffman, 1963).

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Appendix A

Student Participants

Participant	Grade	Gender	Race / Ethnicity
1 - Ted	7	M	AA #S/1/7/M/AA
2 - Roberto	7	M	H #S/2/7/M/H
3 - Maria	7	F	H #S/3/7/F/H
4 - Veronica	7	F	AA #S/4/7/F/AA
5 - James	8	M	AA #S/5/8/M/AA
6 - Glenn	9	M	AA #S/6/9/M/AA
7 - Traci	9	F	AA #S/7/9/F/AA
8 - Dakota	9	M	AI #S/8/9/M/AI
9 - Jerry	9	M	AA #S/9/9/M/AA
10 - Christiana	9	F	H #S/10/9/F/H
11 - Yuki	9	F	AI #S/11/9/F/AI
12 - Sharon	9	F	AA #S/12/9/F/AA

n=12

Appendix B

Teacher Participants

Educators Identified by the Student Participants

Participants	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Other	Code
1 - Sandra	F	AA	Grade 9	#1/F/AA/Grade 9/22 years
2 - Deborah	F	W	Grades 7	#2/F/W/Grade 7/03 years
3 - Gwen	F	AA	Grade 6	#3/F/AA/Grade 6/ 10 years
4 - Ausbra	M	W	Elementary level	#4/M/W/Elementary/30 years
5 - Orin	M	W	Grade 6 (telephone / email contact)	#5/M/W/Grade 6/years of service not reported, could not interview
6 - Thelma	F	W	Grades 7-9	#6/F/W/Grades 7-9/years of service not reported
7 - Patrick	M	W	Grade 9	#7/M/W/Grade 9/39 years

n = 7

Appendix C

DVD Video Scenes

Descriptors of DVD Video Scenes - Accidental Hero - Room # 408

Scene	Title	Other
1	Setting the Standard	High expectations
2	Shaping Students' Destiny	High expectations / purposeful learning
3	Diversity	Racial and ethnic / social
4	Early Experiences with the Profession	Novice teacher
5	Minority Statistic	Racial stereotype
6	Racial Perspectives	Racial insights
7	Student's Perception of the Teacher	Perception of teacher's professional dispositions
8	Heading in the Wrong Direction	Crime
9	The Teacher's Perspective	Reflection / self-analysis
10	We Are More Alike Than We Are Different	Tolerance
11	Perception is Reality	Student outcomes

Appendix D

Content Validity Judges

Content Validity Judges - Demographics

Respondent	Position	Gender	Ethnicity
1	administrator	male	Caucasian
2	learning coach	female	Caucasian
3	counselor	female	African-American
4	school nurse	female	Hispanic
5	educator	male	Caucasian
6	educator	female	Caucasian
7	educator	female	Caucasian
8	librarian	female	Caucasian
9	educator	female	African-American

n=9

Appendix E

Semi-Structured Student Interview Questions

Introduction:

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this project. The purpose of the project is to identify actions and attitudes that students believe their teachers do/demonstrate to help them succeed in school. As mentioned earlier, all responses will be kept confidential. Participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you choose **not** to participate, you may stop at any time.

1. What words would you use to describe Mr. Lindsey?
Why would you use these words to describe Mr. Lindsey?
2. Describe the students' opinions of Mr. Lindsey. What examples support your opinions?
3. How does Mr. Lindsey describe himself?
4. How does he help students to learn?
5. Does he give students a sense of hope? What examples support your thoughts?
6. What do students learn about themselves?
7. What might we learn about students and learning from watching these scenes?
8. Think out loud about what your teachers have done or said that have helped you do your best in school. What examples can you share?
9. In considering the students in Mr. Lindsey's classroom and your own successful school experiences, what information can you share to help educators better understand how teachers' actions and words can encourage students to do their best.
10. How can teachers and students work together to improve communication in the classroom?

Appendix F

Semi-Structured Teacher Interview Questions

Open-ended Interview Teacher Questions:

The following questions will be provided for teachers. You are asked to evaluate each question below for clarity, comprehension, and relevance. Please complete the checklist after reviewing all items.

1. How do you describe your philosophy to help all students do their best in school?
 - a) Your actions?
 - b) Your beliefs?
 - c) Your values?
2. What examples characterize your thoughts to help all students?
3. Describe students' learning in your classroom?
4. How do you deepen students' understanding about learning concepts?
5. How do you motivate students or give them a sense of hope? How might students describe learning in your classroom?
6. From these experiences, what do you realize about students and learning?
7. What do you perceive students learn about themselves?
8. How might students describe your strengths as a classroom teacher? What might they suggest for class improvements?
9. In reflecting on the "big picture" in curriculum, how might such information be used overall for teacher training or staff development?

Appendix G

Research Forms

Approved by the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus, University of Kansas. Approval expires one year from 12/15/2008. HSCL #17724
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PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM

Examining Students' Perceptions of How Teachers' Dispositions (Behaviors) Influence Their Academic Achievement

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Curriculum and Teaching 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

Your child is being invited to participate in a research study to learn more about ways their teachers help them to learn. If you and your child decide that he/she agrees to participate in the study, your child will be asked to identify those things that teachers say and do to motivate them to do their best in the classroom.

PROCEDURES

Randomly selected students in grades 7-9 will be asked to:

- Answer several interview questions during three different ELT (Extended Learning Time) class periods.
- Reply to interview, questions which will last about 30-45 minutes, each class period.
- Respond to questions which will vary in difficulty. Some questions will be more than difficult than others but there are no right or wrong answers.
- Give their opinions about those things that teachers do to motivate them to do their best in the classroom.
- Skip any question that he/she does not want to answer.

- Audiotapes of the interviews will be used by the researcher only and stored in a locked file cabinet.

RISKS

There are no risks associated with this study. Remember your child does not have to answer any question that he/she does not want to and he/she may choose to stop participation in the project at any time. Your child does not have to be in this study, participation is voluntary.

BENEFITS

Choosing not to participate in this study will not affect your student's grades or how he/she is treated in the classroom. Benefits from this study will help to identify those things that teachers say and do to motivate students to do their best in the classroom.

PAYMENT TO PARTICIPANTS

Participation in this project will be voluntary. Students will not be paid for their involvement in this research.

PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY

Your child's name will not be associated in any way with the information collected with the research findings from this study. The researcher will use a study number or a code instead of your child's name. The researchers will not share information about your child unless required by law or unless you give written permission. "Permission granted on this date to use and disclose your information remains in effect indefinitely. By signing this form you give permission for the use and disclosure of your information for purposes of this study at any time in the future."

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, your child cannot participate in this study.

CANCELLING THIS CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You may withdraw your consent to allow participation of your child in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose information collected about your child, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to: Cheryl J. Wright, South Junior High School, 2734 Louisiana, Lawrence, KS or by e-mail

to: cjwrightku23@yahoo.com. If you cancel permission to use your child's information, the researchers will stop collecting additional information about your child. However, the research team may use and disclose information that was gathered before they received your cancellation, as described above.

QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION

Questions about procedures should be directed to the researcher listed at the end of this consent form.

PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION:

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. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my child's rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, email dhann@ku.edu.

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.

Type/Print Participant's Name

Date

Parent/Guardian Signature

Researcher Contact Information

Cheryl Wright
Principal Investigator
Department of Curriculum & Teaching
Teaching
School of Education
Joseph R. Pearson Hall
1122 West Campus Rd.
349.
Lawrence, KS 66045-3101

South Junior High School
2734 Louisiana Street
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Dr. Reva Friedman-Nimz
Faculty Advisor
Department of Curriculum &
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Joseph R. Pearson Hall
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785.864.5207
revacf@ku.edu

Approved by the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus, University of Kansas. Approval expires one year from 12/15/2008. HSCL #17724
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EDUCATOR INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Examining At-Risk Students' Perceptions of How Teachers' Dispositions Influence Their Academic Achievement

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Curriculum and Teaching 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 agree to 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

- To identify from the perspective of low income, ethnic minority, academically at-risk early adolescents (students in grades 7-9) teachers who are making a positive difference in their learning and;
- To elicit the above students' descriptions of the ways in which their named teachers demonstrate particular attitudes and beliefs (referred to as dispositions) that make a positive difference in these students' learning.

PROCEDURES

You are invited to participate in a research study to gain a deeper understanding about ways teachers are making a positive difference in students' learning. You will be asked to answer open-ended questions (during three separate interview sessions) at your convenience before, during, or after school. You may choose to participate through either individual interview sessions or in small focus groups. Responses will be audio-recorded and confidentiality will be maintained by coding participants' identities and responses.

RISKS

There are no risks anticipated with the participation of this study.

BENEFITS

Anticipated benefits from this study will identify specific teacher dispositions or behaviors and how at-risk students of color perceive those teacher dispositions to contribute to their academic success.

PAYMENT TO PARTICIPANTS

Participation will be voluntary. There will not be any monetary compensation received for involvement with this research.

PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY

Participants' names will not be associated in any way with the information collected with the research findings from this study. The researcher will use a study number or a pseudonym instead of the participant's name. The researchers will not share information about the participant unless required by law or unless the participant gives written permission. "Permission granted on this date to use and disclose your information remains in effect indefinitely. By signing this form you give permission for the use and disclosure of your information for purposes of this study at any time in the future."

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.

CANCELLING THIS CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to: Cheryl J. Wright, South Junior High School, 2734 Louisiana, Lawrence, KS 66046 or by e-mail to: cjwrightku23@yahoo.com. If you cancel permission to use your information, the researcher will stop collecting additional information about you. However, the research team may use and disclose information that was gathered before they received your cancellation, as described above.

QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION

Questions about procedures should be directed to the researcher listed at the end of this consent form.

PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION:

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. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, email dhann@ku.edu or mdenning@ku.edu.

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

 Type/Print Participant's Name

 Date
Researcher Contact Information

Cheryl Wright
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Appendix H

Students' Responses to Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Questions

1. What words would you use to describe Mr. Lindsey?
Why would you use these words to describe Mr. Lindsey?
2. Describe the students' opinions of Mr. Lindsey. What examples support your opinions?
3. How does Mr. Lindsey describe himself?

Students	Responses
Ted #S/1/7/M/AA	<p>The teacher is funny and happy, yet motivating.</p> <p>The teacher is smart, easy going, and always willing to help.</p> <p>He wants his kids to do well.</p>
Roberto #S/2/7/M/H	The teacher cares and doesn't want you to give up.
Veronica #S/4/7/F/AA	It's obvious that he loves teaching, . . . makes things fun while still orderly.
Glenn #S/6/9/M/AA	This teacher is easy to get along with and really cares about his students.
Traci #S/7/9/F/AA	Teachers are great people to take the time especially with these kids.
Christiana #S/10/9/F/H	He's laid back and cool, keeps you on track without you even knowing it.

Questions

4. How does he help students to learn?

5. Does he give students a sense of hope? What examples support your thoughts?

Students	Responses
Ted #S/1/7/M/AA	I would say that person is helpful.
Roberto #S/2/7/M/H	The teacher cares and doesn't want you to give up. The teacher helps to explain things, makes things easier.
Maria #S/3/7/F/H	Teach new things and let students try. This travels with us to the next level. You go much further than you thought because they believe in you. You learn to try your hardest it helps a lot. You know the teacher is not going to stop being on your back, but if you work with them, you get more done.

Questions

6. What do students learn about themselves?

7. What might we learn about students and learning from watching these scenes?

Students	Responses
Ted #S/1/7/M/AA	Not all black kids have it hard. "Some teachers have no clue about what offends me."
Roberto #S/2/7/M/H	It's a lot better to inform kids rather than yell. Everyone makes mistakes and everyone doesn't learn at the same time. Talk to students individually, but "Don't walk around and talk non-stop." You can succeed if you try hard.

Students	Responses
Maria #S/3/7/F/H	<p>Help us learn things from our point of view . . . see if we can succeed.</p> <p>We have to try to do the work, we can't always say, "It's the teacher's fault."</p>
Veronica #S/4/7/F/AA	Without this teacher, I'd be the most unorganized student ever.
James #S/5/8/M/AA	Make learning fun!
Christiana #S/10/9/F/H	<p>Respect us. Listen.</p> <p>Have a sense of humor, don't give up on us.</p> <p>We know teachers get frustrated, but don't give up.</p>
Yuki #S/11/9/F/AI	Challenge me! Make it comfortable for me to ask questions. Do not give up. It will help me put more effort into my work.
Sharon #S/12/9/F/AA	It's inspirational, pushes all students to achieve something!

Questions

8. Think out loud about what your teachers have done or said that helped you to do your best in school.
9. In considering the students in Mr. Lindsey's classroom and your own successful school experiences, what information can you share to help educators better understand how teachers' actions and words can encourage students to do their best.

Students	Responses
Ted #S/1/7/M/AA	<p>Sometimes if a teacher seems too hard or mean, it's because he wants you to get a good education - to do good in life.</p> <p>For teachers who yell, it makes me more resistant to doing the work. The more they yell, the less I want to work. One teacher who really helped me didn't yell and took the time to explain things.</p> <p>Sometimes though, the meanest teachers are those who care. They make sure you get the point.</p>
Roberto #S/2/7/M/H	<p>In some classes, you feel like just doing it - at least trying. You feel like the teacher is pushing you as far as you can go. It's give and take between you and the teacher. The teacher pushes (wants you to do your best), but you have to try (put forth the effort). You have more confidence.</p> <p>You have fun in class; the teacher wants all of his students to succeed.</p> <p>If you know the student is struggling, try one – on-one help.</p> <p>I like having beanbags and pillows in class. They're comfortable when I read. I can</p>

	<p>relax. I get tired sitting in chairs all day.</p> <p>A good teacher is a nice person who helps me with job interviews.</p> <p>This teacher is very kind about letting your homework slide for a while, but will eventually track you down for it.</p> <p>A good teacher makes the work seem easy.</p>
<p>Maria #S/3/7/F/H</p>	<p>If teachers say something offensive, not knowing it bothers you, it's important to apologize (e.g., religion, race). It doesn't have to be in front of the whole class, but it's important.</p> <p>Sometimes a teacher will say, "I know you want to give up" and they show you another way of doing the work.</p> <p>You can just tell that she is full of heart and inspiration.</p> <p>An amazing teacher who always has cool games to help us learn.</p> <p>My ___ teacher is awesome! She is bright, friendly , talks to me in the hall. Some teachers make you want to succeed!</p>

<p>Veronica #S/4/7/F/AA</p>	<p>The way a teacher explains things makes a difference.</p> <p>If a teacher says, "everything is going to be alright" or "you have a good head on your shoulders," it makes me want to try harder.</p> <p>Things aren't always easy.</p> <p>I know that when teachers are on your back they're pushing you to do your best. I like Mr. ___ because he does that and treats all students equally. He [the teacher] wants to make sure we understand why we're doing the work. He's not disrespectful. He's friendly, outgoing, and strict - but not too strict.</p> <p>When a teacher speaks positively, it helps me - pushes me to get my work done.</p> <p>It helps if teachers don't point people out in class if they're doing something wrong. Instead be general. It's better to say everyone, it's more respectful.</p>
<p>James #S/5/8/M/AA</p>	<p>Some teachers definitely have a way of pushing you. . . you know they care . . . they give you hope you want to learn, to try. They help you, they're generous . . . don't care about your background. They</p>

	<p>don't judge you.</p> <p>Recognize students' work. Let students know when they're doing a good job.</p> <p>She takes a lot of time for kids.</p> <p>Her class was fun.</p> <p>Let's us do things to see if we understand.</p> <p>It's boring to just read aloud. It's more interesting when teachers say, "Did you know?"</p>
Glenn #S/6/9/M/AA	<p>Make it (learning) fun. Build more of a relationship, students feel more comfortable.</p> <p>Teachers' attitudes are more mellow, they're more calm. Teachers seem better able to relate to students. They're more understanding, more patient.</p> <p>Teachers who don't give up on you. They relate to you, give you extra time with them, and are very caring. They want you to go to college; they've been through the "struggle". You try your best and feel like you have faith in yourself.</p> <p>You say, "I know I can do better."</p> <p>She will never be forgotten.</p>

	<p>The best things I like are projects! They're fun and help you learn.</p> <p>I put more effort into my work.</p> <p>Also, let students work on the assignments for about 15 minutes and then come around and see if they need help.</p> <p>It helps me having study notes, that way I don't have all this stuff I don't need. I like it when I know exactly what I have to do.</p> <p>I like it when teachers have a sense of humor. They seem more open-minded.</p>
Traci #S/7/9/F/AA	<p>For teachers who don't let you down, you can relate to them better. They seem to put more effort into their teaching.</p> <p>Don't give up! Talk to students about their behavior. Don't be afraid to ask questions, but be fragile. Don't put smart kids on different levels.</p> <p>She is a good teacher with many years of experience.</p> <p>She is attentive, helpful, never gives up on a student.</p> <p>Some teachers have a way of connecting, pushing you to your limits and you feel like you're trying hard.</p>

	<p>Don't judge black, white kids, experiences – [you] can't do that in this day and age. Don't prejudge.</p>
Dakota #S/8/9/M/AI	<p>Correct us but don't punish us. Help us do things we don't want to do, like speaking in front of class. We might have stage fright.</p> <p>You can tell some teachers are trying to give back, you learn from that. They inspire you not to give up. They've had a hard life and now they're helping you. It's nice.</p> <p>They're like a leader, kids look up to them. They have good teaching techniques.</p> <p>It's nice when a teacher says hi to you outside of class. Even if they don't remember your name, at least they're taking time to recognize you.</p> <p>She has a great personality, is caring, loves her students.</p> <p>She's a great person.</p> <p>It's easy to keep working in Mrs. _</p>

	<p>class. She keeps the room quiet to help students concentrate.</p> <p>She (the teacher) let's students come after school.</p> <p>We're always doing fun things in Ms. _____ class.</p> <p>We don't just sit there and hear her talk.</p> <p>I like using the laptops and if I don't understand something, it helps when the teacher explains things in a different way.</p>
Jerry #S/9/M/AA	<p>Don't give up, but don't be too aggressive either. Don't try to force us.</p> <p>Teachers who help everyone to do their best, to succeed because they want kids to get a good education, to do good in life.</p> <p>When you work with some teachers, you just feel like trying your best. You don't want to give up. You learn, it doesn't matter where you come from, you can do better with your grades. The teacher says, "You're improving, you're doing better."</p>

	<p>She is a very special lady.</p> <p>It's fun playing games in class! The games help me want to learn, to remember.</p> <p>These teachers seem to be more "laid back" (more relaxed) - "don't seem to be mad."</p> <p>Teachers who want their kids to do well would describe themselves as someone who's helpful to students.</p>
Christina #S/10/9/F/H	<p>Teachers give students hope by talking sense into them. If they "mess up" the teacher explains . . . They're nice, they don't yell about what you did wrong.</p> <p>I would say these kind of teachers care about students. They like to joke around. It's not like they're coming in and telling jokes, it's just that they seem more human, more calm.</p> <p>They don't give up.</p> <p>They stand in front of the door and say, "Hey, I like . . .," or "Don't forget . . ." I</p>

	<p>can relate to these kind of teachers.</p> <p>I really like Mr. ___ class, he's so funny. The class is relaxed, he doesn't get angry easily. He makes us think! It shows he feels we're smart, he challenges us.</p> <p>They don't give up.</p>
Yuki #S/11/9/F/AI	<p>Teachers who take their time with me make me feel special, like when teachers keep their word [promise] or recognize your birthday. They can understand your situation.</p> <p>Some teachers inspire kids to do well, get a good education, do well in life. This is helpful to students. They say things like, "Let's see if you can succeed," "Try your best," "Don't give up."</p> <p>She is loving, caring, understanding, and patient.</p> <p>It's a good motivator to do better. If you get along with the teacher, they'll help you to understand.</p> <p>They encourage you to work hard by teaching you new things and then letting you try.</p>

Sharon #S/12/9/F/AA	<p>When a teacher says, ". . . thank you for doing a good job in my class today. " It makes me feel good. Instead of just working hard today, I feel like doing my best to show her that I can do good every day.</p> <p>It's nice when a teacher remembers you - welcomes you - smiles - and gives you hugs, even when you're not in their class anymore.</p> <p>I like it when the room is quiet. If a teacher sees people not doing their work, it's good to spread them around so no one gets into trouble.</p> <p>He makes history fun.</p> <p>I really like it when teachers take the time for me, especially . . . when she stood with me when I sang in front of . . . She kept her word.</p>

Question

10. How can teachers and students work together to improve communication in the classroom?

Students	Responses
Ted #S/1/M/AA	<p>I don't mean to be rude to teachers.</p> <p>Sometimes they get in my face and that makes me mad.</p> <p>One teacher who really helped me didn't yell and took the time to explain things.</p> <p>I don't like it when teachers have issues and are always yelling.</p>
Roberto #S/2/7/M/H	<p>Maybe, ask, "What do I need to do to teach this?" Explain- tell me.</p>
Maria #S/3/7/F/H	<p>Ms. ___ is so nice. She tells us, there's no way we will fail her class if we do all of her work and try. That motivates me to get things done.</p>
Veronica #S/4/7/F/AA	<p>When students are talking about other students in class and the teacher doesn't say anything to stop it, that causes problems.</p>
James #S/5/8/M/AA	<p>Correct us, but don't do it in an angry way. It's not nice.</p> <p>Don't talk about students not doing their work encourage them to do their best.</p> <p>When a teacher tells you to do your best throughout the year, to never give up - you</p>

	<p>feel like you have faith in yourself.</p> <p>Instead of asking the whole class if they understand, ask us individually. Make students answer questions rather than just letting them say they don't have any questions.</p> <p>More one-on-one would help.</p> <p>It helps when teachers sit down and explain things. Also, it helps when teachers are less demanding and instead say things like, "I'd appreciate it if . . ." or "please" and "thank you."</p>
Glenn #S/6/9/M/AA	<p>If you [the teacher] make a mistake, say, "I apologize."</p> <p>Don't correct me in an angry way.</p> <p>When they [teachers] use a persuasive voice and are interactive, I'm more willing to do the work.</p> <p>Explain work in a different way - show me.</p> <p>If the work is late, at least let me turn it in for 1/2 credit. I'm in a better mood then and feel more comfortable in class. "Don't assume."</p> <p>Tell me to do the work OR go to the office.</p> <p>Instead of reading for review, we could be</p>

	<p>reading ahead. Then the teacher could ask questions and we could talk about things we don't understand.</p>
Traci #S/7/9/F/AA	<p>I would say that students should actually show the teacher they can do it (the work)!</p> <p>Students should be more free / open to ask questions in class.</p>
Dakota #S/8/9/M/AI	<p>Don't yell, yelling just makes us mad.</p>
Jerry #S/9/9/male/AA	<p>Ask, "What is it that's making it [the assignment] hard?"</p> <p>The teacher says, "You're improving, you're doing better."</p> <p>Don't cave into the girls. If you set rules, follow them. If I come in late, the same rules should apply to the girls. Don't be easier on the girls.</p> <p>Know 100% before you say something.</p> <p>If I'm chewing gum and a teacher doesn't like it, it's better that they just say "spit it out" and that's it. Don't carry things on and exaggerate. Don't make a big deal out of it.</p>
Christiana #S/10/9/F/H	<p>Make it comfortable for us to ask questions in class.</p>

	<p>With some teachers, I can say, "Don't give me the easy problems - give me the harder stuff."</p> <p>They push and I know they care</p>
Yuki #S/11/9/F/AI	<p>Don't take stress out on kids if you're not having a good day. Yelling makes the kid's day worse. Talk to kids in a "calm" voice.</p>
Sharon #S/12/9/F/AA	<p>It's important to talk with students and know what's going on in their lives.</p> <p>If students trust you, they will talk. Listen when I have a problem, but you don't have to solve it. I don't want people "all up in my business."</p> <p>It's nice when a teacher remembers you - welcomes you - smiles - and gives you hugs, even when you're not in their class anymore.</p>

Appendix I

Teacher Data

Sandra- #1/F/AA/Grade 9/22 yrs

1. (How do you describe your philosophy to help all students do their best in school? Your actions, beliefs, and values?)

I like to make sure students feel as comfortable as possible. My philosophy is to nurture, I have a naturally nurturing spirit. I want students to feel at ease and realize they're not going to be overly criticized by myself or by their classmates. I want to tap into their different learning styles and compliment them on even their smallest accomplishment. Most importantly, I don't want them to think they can get by doing the least work possible.

With my students, I like to have a positive attitude. We learn from each other, I learn from them. I try not to bring my own negative experiences or prejudices into the classroom. I share my background in a positive way to establish common ground. It's a comfortable learning atmosphere where both the students and teacher can respectfully share their backgrounds - there are no put-downs. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion.

2. (What examples characterize your thoughts to help all students?)

I help set the tone, acknowledge that we are all here to learn. I want students to know I'm here to help them help themselves. I like to recognize kids' success, when they feel successful - they are more likely to volunteer answers in the classroom.

For those who are reticent about reading, I provide instruction in small chunks. It fosters confidence and dispels self-doubt. Yes, students may feel they still struggle, but they better understand the importance of putting forth their best efforts. It fosters a positive learning environment overall as other students say, "Good job man!" Such examples foster ENCOURAGEMENT and help students to feel a sense of worth. I say, "Look at what you've accomplished." I try to model this for all of my students, to show we are more alike than different.

As a teacher, I encourage students to use their differences to make a difference, to take advantage of opportunities.

3. (How do you describe students' learning in your classroom.?)

Once students find success, they want to learn more. I've found that even junior high school students like stickers.

4. (Discuss how you deepen students' understanding about learning concepts.)

Students realize they too can be successful. If someone is willing to take the time, they feel valued. Learning develops as well as a sense of self-worth and leadership.

5. (How do you motivate students or give them a sense of hope? How might students describe learning in your classroom?)

It is important that I am fair to all students. I give my students the best that I can as a teacher. I try to find out what buttons to push to help them want to learn. I adopt a variety of instructional strategies: hands-on, visual learning to understand what works best for them. I also use a lot of positive phrases, "I know I can " and "I will reach my goals!"

6. (From these experiences, what do you realize about students and learning?)

Learning expectations are very important. Teachers must be prepared to determine how to help students realize successful outcomes. How do we motivate? Equality means having opportunities, promoting self-value. If students encounter being negatively stereotyped, it's a challenge they must be able to deal with. It's important for them to understand, "I will and I can do better." Change is attitude.

7. (What do you perceive students learn about themselves?)

How can I make a difference with my learning?

8. (How might students describe your strengths as a classroom teacher? What might they suggest for class improvements?)

Students might describe me as tapping into their natural talents to help show them the way to focus on the future.

9. (In reflecting on the "big picture" in curriculum, how might such information be used overall for teacher training or staff development?)

We must be more sensitive to the needs of kids, learn how to stretch our patience. As educators, we learn to monitor and adjust. Students need support in all of their endeavors.

They need to feel valued, to prepare for real life experiences.

Deborah -#2/F/W/Teacher/Grade 7/03 years

1. (How do you describe your philosophy to help all students do their best in school? Your actions, beliefs, and values?)

I often ask , "What am I not doing, that he's not responding?" Is it trust? Sincerity? I am a high energy teacher. I am very expressive. Enthusiasm translates well. I am flamboyant. I believe in the sincerity factor, I don't use canned phrases. I want students to see that I am physically excited about the lesson, about my job. I often tell my classes, "You are part of my perfect equation." They realize I don't give up on them.

My actions are pretty nurturing like a grandma. I try to give students individual attention. If they look bothered, I give them a pat on the shoulder. School may be the only setting where students experience adult respect. It's important that I treat everyone the best I can. I try to treat people well and do the right thing. If I become irritated, I try to still be respectful. I aim to model positive behavior if I observe disrespect by students, "I would not treat you like that."

2. (What examples characterize your thoughts to help all students?)

Hopefully students realize it's a group effort to help them be more independent. I don't want them to just sit and wait for an answer. I want them to think and to work together. I want them to be more interactive. I tell them why the lesson is relevant.

3. (How do you describe students' learning in your classroom?)

I absolutely take time to present opportunities for students to share their input. It shows ownership. Although students may think they are making the decisions, I still have a lot of structure. Classroom life depends on rules and structure. With mutual respect, I want students to feel that my classroom is their world . . . their place and to treat it well. Our

learning environment is comfortable and inviting with reading areas and large colorful pillows.

4. (Discuss how you deepen students' understanding about learning concepts.)

I seek to motivate. I am very positive and encouraging. I give long wait times and use concept webs to prompt understanding. I allow students to have structured time to talk and work together because students like knowing. I am reflective, I learned a lot from last year.

5. (How do you motivate students or give them a sense of hope? How might students describe learning in your classroom?)

Instead of punishing a student who comes to class late, I say, "If everyone can get here on time 6x/in a row, we'll do ..." This sends a positive message and the class works together to ensure everyone is on time. Students like this and think it is fun because they get to talk, relax, have bean bags in the class - pink pillows and food.

6. (From these experiences, what do you realize about students and learning?)

While students may not always think they are learning in a fun atmosphere they are. As teachers, we understand that school is work and it can be considered hard and drudgery. When steps are taken to make learning enjoyable, you will hear students say, "I love this class, time goes by so fast!"

7. (What do you perceive students learn about themselves?)

8. (How might students describe your strengths as a classroom teacher? What might they suggest for class improvements?)

I just want students to come to class with a positive attitude. I want them to feel comfortable and secure.

9. (In reflecting on the "big picture" in curriculum, how might such information be used overall for teacher training or staff development?)

I use technology to motivate and engage students. I try to link my curriculum to technology as much as possible (e.g., SMART Board, airliner, clickers, projector, doc camera, VCR/DVD player).

Gwen - #3/F/AA/Teacher/Grade 06/10 years

1. (How do you describe your philosophy to help all students do their best in school? Your actions, beliefs, and values?)

I use encouragement to get my kids motivated and give lots of praise for their efforts. I help them to understand that not everything they do will they do well. **It's important** for students to try and do their best. I give pats on the back and use positive words. With pats on the back however, you have to be careful. You have to know your students.

2. (What examples characterize your thoughts to help all students?)

Learning is hands-on. I use the direct instructional approach and am subtle about differentiated instruction. I teach in small groups and work one-on-one with students. My technique is structured, direct, diverse, and serious. I believe students can conquer whatever they set themselves up to do if they put forth the effort.

3. (How do you describe students' learning in your classroom.?)

Learning is on-going. The way students learn and what they are expected to accomplish changes all of the time.

4. (Discuss how you deepen students' understanding about learning concepts.)

5. (How do you motivate students or give them a sense of hope? How might students describe learning in your classroom?)

Teaching self-worth and respect are important parts of the curriculum. Teachers are asked to be good listeners. We must realize that students don't necessarily want our feedback when listening to their problems, they just want us to LISTEN.

6. (From these experiences, what do you realize about students and learning?)

A lot of students are looking for a friend. You may think, "I'm not here to be their friend" ; however, you certainly don't want to be perceived as the enemy! It's important to build trust. The students' perception may be, "Is this a person I can trust or do I need to stand guard?"

7. (What do you perceive students learn about themselves?)

8. (How might students describe your strengths as a classroom teacher? What might they suggest for class improvements?)

9. (In reflecting on the "big picture" in curriculum, how might such information be used overall for teacher training or staff development?)

Curriculum is more demanding now than several years ago. Due to the economic times and situations in society, students' needs are great. We have to consider that we may not have access to a variety of resources like we used to. We need to put our heads together and learn from each other. New teachers are in the forefront. We should allow them to share ideas and concepts. We can learn from each other and be more creative in working together. As veteran teachers, we may feel we know it all, but is this to the benefit of the child?

As teachers, how do we present ourselves? What is the big picture? We should align veteran teachers with new teachers like in mentoring programs. Fresh ideas and new information can be shared. Even at the elementary, there are different ways to divide and to read and teachers can be resourceful in working together

Ausbra - #4/M/W/Elementary/ 30 years

1. (How do you describe your philosophy to help all students do their best in school? Your actions, beliefs, and values?)

I have been influenced by my wife who has years of experience in special education. I am glad to emotionally embrace students. I give pats on the back, feed them, buy them clothes, and wash their glasses. For kids who are self-conscious about wearing glasses, I tell them "only smart kids wear glasses." If you identify the problems kids are having, the teacher/student relationship never ends. Students' voices go on. I give unconditional professional love and support. A student can make a mistake and I'll still like them as a person. I give lots of emotional hugs and trust develops.

I provide a sense of hope. I'm careful not to have too many rules - I have five. " . . . my curriculum may be typed out in one-eight words. It resembles a circle. I re-visit things that don't go well and insert class meetings. Learning is continuous for educators and students (e.g., academics, interpersonal skills, cultural responsiveness).

2. (What examples characterize your thoughts to help all students?)

It's easier to teach anything if you make it palpable. All children can learn. I value nothing but their best and have an endearing professional love for students. I greet them each morning as they enter the building. I welcome them positively . . . saying things like "great hair" and I give high fives.

I use a framework similar to Bloom's Taxonomy to establish professional relationships with students. The framework is one I've been working on for over 30 years that consists of concentric circles and the hub of a wheel. Students realize that I can treat them with dignity and still remain cordial. Along with academics I focus on fun, friendship, and character education. I use this foundation to help students identify their holes in achievement.

3. (How do you describe students' learning in your classroom?)

There is a common language between the . . . and the classroom. It involves collaboration, trust, and a great deal of work. It's the students time for more practice. All areas of public education have a written curriculum. While . . . talk about students' needs, they can also use their curriculum to help with guided reading and to share the reading load. While my goal is relationship building, I can also help kids who struggle with reading. As a . . . who is certified in Kansas , I've taught in the classroom for three years. Although my goal is relationship building, I do have a sense of reading strategies. I can help heighten awareness about the relationship piece while also connecting reading to real world issues.

4. (Discuss how you deepen students' understanding about learning concepts.)

I break learning apart and put it together again. I'm a good story teller and I use lots of history (e.g., artifacts, wagon wheel are in my office to share with students).

5. (How do you motivate students or give them a sense of hope? How might students describe learning in your classroom?)

As a . . . , one hope is for students to recognize that all social issues are at least half their fault - I want students to realize compassion. This is not fluff, it is research-based. For example, we can agree to disagree and this is how we differ. On my part, this takes a lot of organization and building of trust regardless of students' race, ethnicity, and background.

Other ways that I choose to motivate include how I welcome and bid students farewell. I greet students as they arrive and I find something good to say as they depart. When in the hallway, I "catch them being good" and in the cafeteria I'll eat lunch with them.

6. (From these experiences, what do you realize about students and learning?)

Learning centers around: 1) trust , 2) depends upon a reliance of others, and 3) suggests you don't always have to agree.

7. (What do you perceive students learn about themselves?)

It would be wonderful if all students could find a way to handle their anger. Anger interferes with their cognitive skills.

8. (How might students describe your strengths as a classroom teacher? What might they suggest for class improvements?)

I would hope students feel a sense of respect, fairness, and self- worth. These are the spokes of the wheel that promote more positive behaviors [relate to Bloom's Taxonomy as a framework]. Students realize I am consistent. A rule, although I don't have many, is

a rule. If a student is being disruptive or not doing his or her work, I simply state that, "I care for them but their behavior is not working for me."

9. (In reflecting on the "big picture" in curriculum, how might such information be used overall for teacher training or staff development?)

I've spoken about Bloom's Taxonomy and believe there is a similar framework when it comes to . . . relationship building in the classroom (e.g., Bloom and the cognitive, affective, and psychological domains). I would consider the Bloom format for teacher training and staff development through the school of education. It takes a minimum of 21 days to problem-solve and I would focus on communication and the professional characteristics I perceive of relationship building.

It seems that whether its . . . or instruction, there are seven characteristics that are most common to teacher/student interactions. Whether a person is six or sixty, they always seem to indicate: 1) fairness, 2) being nice, 3) kindness, 4) honesty, 5) sharing, 6) respect, and 7) trust. All characteristics suggest a palpable tool and are indigenous to relationship building.

Orin - #5/M/W/Teacher/ Grade 6 / NR

This teacher was pleased to be contacted and as a relatively new teacher was surprised he had made such a positive impact on a student. He wondered what he'd done to specifically give encouragement. He tries to help all learners do their best.

*Scheduling conflict limited this interview to a brief exchange of comments over the telephone..

Thelma - #6/F/W/Special Education Teacher/ Grades 7-9/NR

1. (How do you describe your philosophy to help all students do their best in school? Your actions, beliefs, and values?)

I've been doing this for a long time. Every kid is unique. Every student has a way they learn and respond best. Our job is unique because we tap into students' individual strengths and needs. I want students to be productive and contributing members of society. It bothers me when everyone is expected to learn the same way. Students have varying abilities that need to be taken into consideration. I am an advocate for my kids.

As a special education teacher, I often have to talk about the IEP and "sell " my kids. I try to convince teachers that it's in the students' best interest to have accommodations. Especially when it comes to at-risk students, you have to get to know them. Little things like "eye contact" can make a big difference with some students (e.g., some American Indian tribes).

Another item is that it is bothersome when African-American male students choose to use the "N" word in school. I call them on it. I treat students the same way that I treat my own kids.

2. (What examples characterize your thoughts to help all students?)

I hope students realize I'm fair and I respect them. I work to create that same atmosphere in my classroom. Teaching tolerance, respect, and patience are important to me. Kids are surprised when they test the boundaries with me and I take them to the

office. When I visualize respect, it looks like listening and giving students the opportunity to appropriately vent.

I work with students to develop a plan of resources for how to disagree appropriately instead of just "cussing" teachers out. For instance, students can return to the resource room if they are angry with a teacher. I help students develop tools to process problem-solving. Helping them realize they can talk with an administrator instead of getting into trouble makes a big difference.

3. (How do you describe students' learning in your classroom?)

4. (Discuss how you deepen students' understanding about learning concepts.)

It's not effective to yell. I try to get to really take the time to know my students. I give specific directions and talk with students one-on-one. When appropriate, I tell students they're doing a great job or at least that they are doing something better. Taking the time is important, students may have mental issues, health problems, or learning difficulties.

5. (How do you motivate students or give them a sense of hope? How might students describe learning in your classroom?)

Classroom management and communicating information are important.

6. (From these experiences, what do you realize about students and learning?)

For some of my students, they appear so lost by the time they get to me. There is a sense of hopelessness and for some it seems they are destined for jail. For these types of students, there appears to be a perpetual cycle. They try out for teams (e.g., football, basketball, track) as motivation to keep their grades up, then they make the team and don't work to maintain their grades. It's always somebody else's fault.

They miss some good opportunities. They become overwhelmed with negative thoughts and a sense of hopelessness. For some, there doesn't appear to be any support at home. It's frustrating for teachers because the cycle doesn't appear to change.

I have these kids for three years and you get to a level of attachment. Education is so different now than when I grew up. You respected your teachers and you didn't question them. Now kids feel you have to earn their respect. I try to teach my students that you can get a lot further if you show respect rather than demanding it. Mutual communication is important. What is the perception of my students about me? How do I validate their feelings? Remember the saying, ". . . walk a mile in my moccasins?" By telling students, "I understand why you are frustrated" and then following-up by treating them respectfully can make a difference.

7. (What do you perceive students learn about themselves?)

I share with students examples of character thought to be helpful and I hope they realize, that regardless of their capabilities, there is a place for them in the community.

8. (How might students describe your strengths as a classroom teacher? What might they suggest for class improvements?)

Sometimes students describe me as being too hard (an "evil witch"), but I take that as a compliment. I am fair and I try to treat everyone the same. I respect them as individuals and validate who they are.

9. (In reflecting on the "big picture" in curriculum, how might such information be used overall for teacher training or staff development?)

Staff development can be used to signal the importance of taking time to understand kids' backgrounds. When it comes to special education, it is not an option - it is the law. All students are not at the same level nor do they have the same learning styles. As a

special educator, I am always wearing my "salesman" face trying to sell my students to general educators. "It's a constant fight." The prevailing attitude is that special education students are not real willing to work. "How," I ask, "do you inject compassion into professionals?"

For new teachers, understand that students have many complexities. Get to know the kids' stories. Also, if kids are misbehaving use proximity to address the problem, use preferential seating, talk with them one-on-one. Let them [students] know what is expected for them to be successful in your classroom - re-direct their behaviors. Don't leave kids in the back [of the classroom] if they don't understand. Teachers need to address situations rather than just putting students out of class. Sometimes teachers need to take the initiative to go over and quietly talk with a student rather than yelling across the room, "Be quiet" or calling the office to say "Come and get him" or "I'm sending him down."

Patrick - #7/M/W/Teacher/Grade 09/39 years

1. (How do you describe your philosophy to help all students do their best in school? Your actions, beliefs, and values?)

2. (What examples characterize your thoughts to help all students?)

I am always there to help students.

3. (How do you describe students' learning in your classroom.?)

I make them laugh and try to make the class fun and interesting.

4. (Discuss how you deepen students' understanding about learning concepts.)

I know students' strengths and recommend them for help if needed.

5. (How do you motivate students or give them a sense of hope? How might students describe learning in your classroom?)

I tend to take the attention away from myself and focus on the positive attributes of other teachers I work with.

6. (From these experiences, what do you realize about students and learning?)

A number of transfer students tell me this is the first school they have ever been in where they are accepted and treated as important. Being at this school is stealthy! It's so finely tuned that you don't realize the learning right off.

7. (What do you perceive students learn about themselves?)

Students learn to develop a life plan and determine what to do. They learn to continually apply themselves and look for new areas of talent.

8. (How might students describe your strengths as a classroom teacher? What might they suggest for class improvements?)

9. (In reflecting on the "big picture" in curriculum, how might such information be used overall for teacher training or staff development?)

Good teachers make a tough job look easy. Many of us work behind the scenes. We work together for one purpose - to give our best to our students! Our success is not a happy accident. Students are talented, smart, and mature. They know a lot of stuff!
