CREATING AN "ECOLOGICAL FIT" THROUGH SUPPORTIVE

TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

DISSERTATION

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by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to all of the children that have inspired me during my work as a public school teacher and principal.

I also dedicate this work in memory of my brother, "Rudy," who encouraged me to become a teacher. He was an extraordinary teacher. His love for teaching and for the children he worked with has filled my heart with many special memories that have inspired me through my educational journey. I would also like to dedicate this work in memory of my father, "Ruben." He instilled in me the importance of learning and perseverance.

Lastly, I dedicate this work to two very important people in my life whose love, strength and prayer have guided me through many endeavors including this one. First, my mother, who was my first teacher and role model, for being a strong pillar of hope and encouragement everyday. And, to my partner and companion, who has been the wind beneath my wings and somehow has made all of this possible.

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ABSTRACT

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By

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This qualitative study was based on the challenges of today's urban schools and highlights the work of teachers in these schools who have achieved increased successes in student achievement. Demographic changes in today's urban schools have fueled an increased gap in the backgrounds of the students and their teachers. Many teachers also lack an awareness of the importance of supportive teacher-student relationships.

The purpose of this study was to document and describe the positive connections teachers make with students and to explain the nature of supportive teacher-student relationships. It is those positive connections and supportive relationships that form the

basis for creating "ecologically fit" classrooms for all students. Through this study, teachers' understandings and actions for sustaining and developing supportive teacher-student relationships were explicated.

The study took place in an urban elementary school and involved three teachers and the students and parents from each of the teachers' classes. All participants in the study were interviewed and observed on numerous occasions to obtain first-hand knowledge of their views and perceptions about supportive teacher-student relationships.

The study's findings clearly showed that culturally responsive teaching is essential in creating and maintaining supportive teacher-student relationships. Supportive teaching requires teachers to develop their own self-awareness and to understand where they are in their relationships with their students. In doing so, teachers are better equipped to create caring and supportive classroom environments that help meet the needs of diverse student populations.

In conclusion, the researcher found that culturally responsive teaching and supportive teacher-student relationships directly attributed to the increased academic achievements of students instructed by the teachers who participated in this study. Furthermore, the researcher inferred that when teachers utilize culturally responsive teaching methods and create supportive teacher-student relationships in their classrooms, they ultimately provide the best overall education for all students

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I have been principal at United Elementary for eight years and have enjoyed my work thus far, despite the many demands that are placed on me everyday. When I enter the school building each morning, I must be ready to handle the many situations that arise. A favorite part of my job is when I am able to stand outside and greet students as they come in for a new day of learning. On most days, all of the children are excited about coming to school but some days there are a few children who enter the building that are not ready or excited about the opportunity to learn. I ask myself, "is it us at the school, or did they experience something outside of school that is making them feel this way?" Whatever the case may be, I continuously ask myself, "is every teacher ready to provide high quality teaching to every child that comes through our doors?"

According to educationalist and philosopher, Nel Noddings (1992)

"In today's typical classroom there are many children from homes in which both parents do paid work, other children who have single parents, many who have half-siblings or temporary siblings unrelated by blood, some who have foster parents, and some who really have no parents at all." (p. 1)

The makeup of the classrooms at United is not any different from those that Noddings describes. I ask myself, "What must we, the educators at United, do in our classrooms to ensure that every child is treated equally and that high quality learning environments are at the center of our school?" As the principal of United, I recognized that our classroom learning environments were different from classroom to classroom. I felt that some of our teachers created instability within the learning community. As I studied our discipline data, I concluded that some of our teachers had difficulty working with some of our students. These same teachers labeled students as unmotivated to learn but did not recognize their own failures as educators. In my eyes, these teachers were deficit thinkers and it was evident in their practice. Dabney (1980) explains deficit thinking further, "The historical emphasis upon capacity for learning has been to perceive school learning as primarily dependent upon the presumed ability of the student, rather than upon the quality of the learning environment" (as cited in Valencia, 1997, p. 8).

For some teachers it is tremendously challenging to try to match curricular demands and instructional strategies to the academic, social and emotional needs of each student. It is my assumption that many students are not "connected" with their teachers; that is they have not developed a relationship with their teacher and are misunderstood, thus they are sent out of their classrooms for someone else to "deal" with. But as Haberman (1995) explains,

> Whatever the reasons for children's behavior—whether poverty, personality, a handicapping condition, a dysfunctional home, or an abusive environment—classroom teachers are responsible for managing children, seeing that they work together in a confined space for long periods, and ensuring that they learn. (p. 22)

As I reflected on our students, the literature and conversations I had with United teachers wanting to know how some of their colleagues had successfully built relationships with their students, I was left with many questions about the teaching and learning that takes place everyday at our school. How are we helping all of our children learn everyday? How am I helping our teachers create high quality learning environments? Have teachers made connections with the students and their families? What are these relationships like? How do the teachers get to know each student individually?

Valenzuela (1999), in her ethnographic investigation of academic achievement and schooling orientations among Mexican and Mexican American students at a high school in Houston, Texas points out:

> When real-life concerns are thrust into the classroom, many teachers find themselves in uncomfortable and disorienting positions. They may be called not only to impart their expert knowledge, but also to deal with barriers to students' learning of which they may not be fully aware or trained to recognize. If and when they do become aware of these contingencies, time and skill constraints remain. (p. 74)

Through this qualitative study, my hope is to answer some of these questions and solve the mystery of how some teachers are successfully developing relationships with their students and helping them have success in school, while others do not.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to document and describe the connections teachers make with students, which in turn captures the richness of their classroom environments and explains the nature of the teacher-student relationship. In talking with selected teachers and observing teacher-student interactions, I wanted to gain a better understanding of the strategies that elementary teachers implement to maximize learning and minimize the behavioral difficulties that can result when students' needs go unrecognized or unattended. Noddings (1992) states,

> School, like a family is a multipurpose institution. It cannot concentrate only on academic goals any more than a family can restrict its responsibilities to, say, feeding and housing its children. Schools cannot accomplish their academic goals without attending to the fundamental needs of students for continuity and care. (p. 63-64)

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework employed in this qualitative study integrates Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, Noddings' work on care in education, the ideas on teachers' self-awareness in Spindler and Spindler's cultural therapy and Palmer's work on selfhood. These concepts are interrelated and provide a basis for understanding the factors that shape teacher-student relationships, which in turn are the basis for creating ecologically fit classrooms for all students. This study investigated what these relationships looked like, how they were shaped, how they interacted with the contexts in which they developed and their impact on students' growth and development. The conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 1.
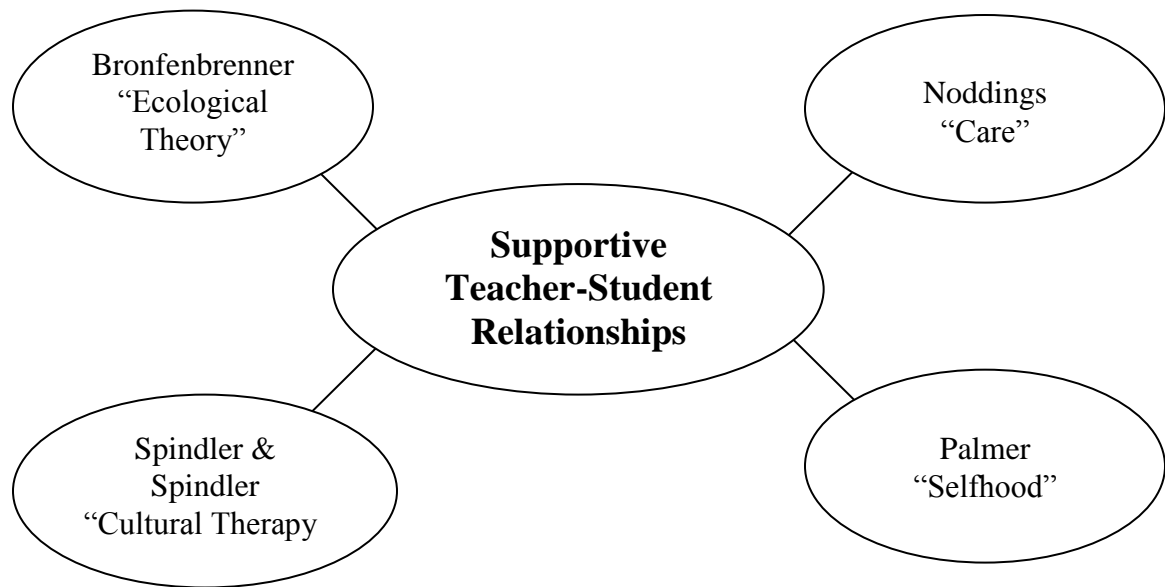
Figure 1: The Study's Conceptual Framework

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory (1998) is an elaboration of his earlier ecological theory in which he added to the concept of proximal process a greater emphasis on the importance of the environment and the interaction between the individual and his/her environment. Proximal processes are the interactions in the individual's immediate environment. These experiences that a child has with the people or objects in these settings are "the primary engines of human development" (Bronfenbrenner, p. 996).

Bronfenbrenner's model of ecology of human development acknowledges that humans do not develop in isolation, but in relation to their family and home, school, community, and society. In his original ecology of human development work, Bronfenbrenner (1998) identified four types of nested systems, with directional influences within and between systems. These systems were microsystem, mesosystem,

exosystem and macrosystem. Each of these systems contain factors that can powerfully shape developments, as can the interaction of factors across systems. The focus for this study was on the microsystem. The *microsystem* describes the aspects of the environment that directly influence the individual. In this case it would be the teacher-student relationship and the classroom. This research views the classroom and the teacher-student relationship as a complex environment in which the teachers and students explore, negotiate, and assemble personal knowledge, beliefs and interpretations of their environments through ongoing interactions. Bronfenbrenner's (1998) model explains the ecology of child development:

> Child development takes place through processes of progressively more complex interaction between an active child and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time. (p. 996)

Noddings' (1992) work on care is connected to these ideas. She believes that good teaching begins with the construction of trusting relationships and works continually to build on the foundation of trust. Noddings argues, "The first job of schools is to care for our children. We should educate all our children not only for competence but also for caring" (p. xiv). She also feels "teachers must thoroughly understand their own and their students perspectives and experiences" (p. 19). Noddings also believes that teachers who see their students as caring and who look upon the act of teaching as an opportunity to participate in caring encounters will be teaching their students more than academic knowledge. The students and the teachers would then be in a relationship that is authentic not aesthetic. Noddings (1984, 1992) contends that aesthetic caring is focused on the

technical side of teaching and learning. Valenzuela (1999) explains Noddings' ideas of aesthetic caring and authentic caring—"Aesthetic caring is based on a commitment to ideas or practices that purportedly lead to achievement as opposed to authentic caring that emphasizes relations of reciprocity between the students and the teachers" (p. 61).

Cultural therapy is also connected to creating ecologically fit classrooms. Louise and George Spindler (2000) describe cultural therapy as

A process of bringing one's own culture, in its manifold forms-assumptions, goals, values, beliefs, and communicative modes—to a level of awareness that permits one to perceive it as a potential bias in social interaction and in the acquisition or transmission of skills and knowledge. For teachers, cultural therapy can be used to increase awareness of the cultural assumptions they bring to the classroom that affect their behavior and their interactions with students—particularly students of color (if they are white). (p. 367)

Lastly, Palmer's work on selfhood also assisted me to explore the basis of teacher-student relationships and how these factors contribute to ecologically fit classrooms. Palmer (1998) believes that good teaching is more than technique and argues,

Good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher. Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together....When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life—and when I cannot see them clearly, I cannot teach them well. When I do not know myself, I cannot know my subject—not at the deepest levels

of embodied, personal meaning. I will know it only abstractly, from a distance, a

congeries of concepts as far removed from the world as I am from personal truth.

(p. 2)

Through this study, I uncovered the make-up of the teacher-student relationship

based on the works of Bronfenbrenner, Noddings, Spindler and Spindler and Palmer.

Through the analysis of the teacher-student relationships, I was able to explain how the

teachers in this study influenced the teacher-student relationship and student

achievement.

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

The following questions were investigated through this study: What do supportive

teacher-student relationships look like and how are they shaped? How do they interact

with the contexts in which they develop? and What is the impact of supportive teacher-

student relationships?

Through this study I wanted to identify how successful teachers were forming

supportive relationships with children and the specific strategies teachers implemented to

assist students to have greater success in school academically, socially and emotionally.

Mary Harvey, psychologist and trauma expert, describes a community that responds in

helpful ways as an "ecological fit."

The construct of an "ecological fit" refers to the quality and helpfulness of the

relationship existing between the individual and his or her social context.

Interventions that achieve ecological fit are those that enhance the

environment—person relationship, i.e., that reduce isolation, foster social

competence, support positive coping and promote belongingness in relevant social

contexts. (Harvey, 1996, p.7)

Through this study successful teachers, students and parents' stories were collected to

identify how teachers are able to successfully create this type of community—an

"ecological fit," within their classrooms to help children learn. From these stories a

strategy was developed to support the type of teacher who creates a community that

responds in helpful ways.

Definition of Terms

1) *Supportive student-teacher relationship*-A relationship that fosters an
   ecological fit.

2) *Ecological fit*-The quality and helpfulness of the relationship existing
   between the individual and his or her social context. Interventions that
   achieve ecological fit are those that enhance the environment-person
   relationship, i.e., that reduce isolation, foster social competence, support
   positive coping and promote belongingness in relevant social contexts.
   (Harvey, 1996, p. 7)

3) *Urban schools*-Schools located in large central cities characterized with
   high rates of poverty.

4) *Caring*-A connection or encounter between two human beings—a carer
   and a recipient of care, or cared-for. (Noddings, 1992, p. 15)

5) *Aesthetic Caring*-Caring about things and ideas; concerned with form and
   non-personal content. (Noddings, 1984, p. 21)

6) *Authentic Caring*-Emphasizes relations of reciprocity between teachers and students. (Noddings, 1984, 1992; Valenzuela, 1999, p. 61)

7) *Selfhood*-The identity and integrity of an individual. (Palmer, 1998, p. 10)

8) *Successful Teacher*-A teacher that is able to create supportive social contexts and develop positive relationships with students while promoting high academic standards.

9) *Students placed at risk*-Students who are not experiencing success in school and therefore have an increased potential to drop out. They are usually low academic achievers who exhibit low self-esteem and who encounter major obstacles to successful completion of his/her academic program.

Assumptions

I made several assumptions in this study. I assumed that teachers would be honet in their interviews with me and that they would exhibit typical teacher behaviors during their observations. I also assumed I had the skills to observe the teachers and that my observations would reflect their typical behaviors. The success of the methods used, interviewing and observing, relied on my interpersonal skills and ability to guide the conversations to deeper levels of consideration.

Limitations

One limitation to this study was that it was situated at only one elementary school and, therefore, I only captured the perceptions of teachers who were working with a particular population of students. Multiple studies of this type will be necessary to yield findings that are transferable to other school settings.

Another limitation was the position that I hold on the campus. While interviewing and observing the teachers, I had to refrain from assuming the principal/supervisor role. I needed to abstain from offering suggestions or assistance during the observations and conversations, remaining true to the observation and interview processes planned for the study. The participants also needed to understand that, during the data gathering phase of the study, I was there to record their perceptions of the phenomenon being studied and the ways they established their relationships with their students, not to evaluate, brainstorm or problem solve. Full cooperation of the participants was also critical to this qualitative study. If there were situations in which the participants did not share all that I hoped to explore, these situations weakened the study.

A final limitation was my limited exploration of cultural therapy. As the researcher, I did not fully explore the level to which participating teachers examined their own cultural assumptions and how these assumptions affected their relationships with students.

<center>Significance of the Study</center>

The significance of this study was based on the challenges of today's urban schools and the teachers who work in these schools who defy the odds and achieve increases in student success. According to Gehrke (2005),

> One out of four American children attends school in an urban district; one out of every six American children lives in poverty; and in urban schools where most of the students are poor, two-thirds or more of the children fail to reach even the 'basic' level of achievement on national tests. (p.14)

Today's schools employ individuals with varying degrees of competence and many are from different backgrounds than the students they teach. Those who teach in urban schools work in environments much different from other schools and perhaps different from their own schooling. Gehrke (2005) states, "a mismatch exists between the backgrounds of most teachers and the students for whom they are responsible" (p.15). The demographic changes in today's schools have led to an increasing gap between the backgrounds of students and their teachers. Many of these employees also lack awareness of the importance of teacher-student relationships.

According to Noddings (1999), teacher-student relationships "provide the foundation for pedagogical activities" (p. 205). First, as teachers listen to their students and respond with care they are gaining their trust and it is likely that the students will want to try to learn what they are being taught. Second, through these caring and trusting relationships, teachers learn about their students' needs, interests, talents, and working habits. Through these conversations, teachers gain important ideas about how to create lessons and plan for individual needs. Finally, through teacher-student relationships, teachers are able to learn how much more than the standard curriculum students need to learn in order to be successful. My goal in doing this research was to help inform teachers how to develop high quality and culturally responsive relationships with all of their students and through these relationships meet the academic and affective needs of those students.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Teacher-student relationships are an integral part of the educational process. This topic has been studied through qualitative and quantitative research focusing on the role of the teacher as the one responsible for whether or not student learning occurs. The literature on teacher-student relationships is found across several disciplines. Some of the more current research is concerned with the relationships that are formed between teachers and students placed at risk, especially poor, urban, minority children. When researching the connections that teachers make with students and how these relationships are made, it was evident that in the most positive relationships students' voices are being recognized and heard.

Importance of Teacher-Child Relationships

The child relationship literature examines different aspects of how children adjust to school environments, not necessarily the ways that teachers form relationships with students. Until recently this literature focused primarily on examining children's relationships with peers. Historically, school adjustment has been characterized in terms of students' academic performance, progress or achievement (Birch & Ladd, 1997).

A study by Birch & Ladd (1997) focused on closeness, dependency, and conflict and how these features were related to the kindergartner's adjustment to school. Birch concluded "children who share a close relationship with the teacher may perceive the school environment as a supportive one, enabling children to become self-directed and responsible participants in the classroom" (p. 76). However, this study was limited in that it only studied Kindergarteners.

Baker (1999) also concluded that satisfaction with school may be affected by student-teacher interactions and suggested that further research using both experimental and qualitative methods was needed to document the efficacy of the development of "an academic orientation and intrinsic motivation to learn that is promoted by social relatedness to others who share those values" (p. 58). In yet another study, Eccles & Midgley (1989) concluded "a caring psychologically safe classroom environment predicted children's satisfaction with school" (p.139). All three of these studies revealed that close relationships between the teacher and the student were important to adjustment and satisfaction with school. However, these studies did not capture the teachers' stories revealing how they formed close relationships with their students.

<div align="center">Supportive Schools and Relationships</div>

Although these studies looked at aspects and functions of relationships, they did not necessarily describe how teachers and students develop relationships. Many of these studies captured the importance of having supportive schools and why this is important for students' learning. For example, a study by Herb (2005) of middle and high school students that interviewed teachers and surveyed students defined supportive schools as those in which teachers intentionally provided academic assistance to students. The

teachers in this study described caring classrooms as those with mutual respect, discipline, safety, and security for all students.

In an interpretative ethnography of high school students' perceptions of their teachers, it was found that the teacher-student relationship is the number one factor in their learning. In this study, Richards (2006) concluded that for high school students the teacher-student relationship is an emotional and safety concern, but he does not go into any depth about how these relationships are formed. He also found that students felt that they do more and learn more when they are working with teachers who are more positive and supportive.

Heacox (2005) found in his study of middle school students that building positive relationships with students is beneficial but difficult to accomplish. Heacox surveyed teachers on how they build relationships with their students. Teachers said they accomplish this by being honest, respectful, and fair with all students. Some of the teachers said that it is important to be aware of each student's needs and try to understand each student's reality. What was not found in this research was how the teachers' stories build these relationships; there were no findings on the actual strategies teachers used to form positive relationships with their students.

In a study of low and middle-income 6th, 7th and 8th grade students, Bosworth (1995) found that students see caring as grounded in relationships. Bosworth observed 300 classrooms and interviewed 100 students to find that it is essential to build caring communities by promoting activities and attitudes that develop relationships. However, Bosworth did not explain the actual strategies and activities used to do this. This study

focused on teacher and student perceptions of caring, not necessarily on the development of teacher-student relationships.

Boyd (2005) examined the emotional intelligence of teachers and students' perceptions of their teachers' behaviors in the classroom. Boyd concluded, "The teacher with emotional intelligence possesses the ability to care, empathize, and recognize the needs of students in the educational setting and therefore is able to create a positive classroom climate that motivates each student to learn" (p. 46). The most important finding of this study, which relied on an emotional intelligence test for teachers, teacher exit interviews, and student questionnaires, was that teachers' behaviors mattered most to students in terms of their relationships, perceptions, and the feeling that the classroom is emotionally safe. Boyd reported that the results of her study indicated that an emotionally safe classroom is more conducive to learning, but she does not give specific strategies on how to accomplish this.

Lacey's (2005) study identified specific strategies teachers implemented to build positive relationships with students. This study's targeted population was African American students. Lacey gathered descriptions of teachers' perceptions on how their relationships with students influenced the students' school success. Lacey also made specific links to a theoretical framework built around attachment theory and a developmental systems perspective which posits that there are multiple factors that influence human functioning and development. Through the teachers' descriptions, Lacey was able to identify specific attributes that teachers felt were responsible for the positive relationships they formed with their students. The major themes were: (a) displays of teacher approval and support pertaining to students' learning and behavior; (b)

recognition of students' individual and cultural strengths; and (c) establishment of care and trust between teachers and students.

<div align="center">Care</div>

An area that centers on the relationships that teachers form with their students is care. Valenzuela (1999) states, "The literature on caring is properly premised on the notion that individuals need to be recognized and addressed as whole beings. All people share a basic need to be understood, appreciated, and respected" (p. 108). According to Noddings (1992), the structures of current schooling work against care, and at the same time, the need for care is perhaps greater than ever. She describes caring as relational. She says "a caring relation is, in its most basic form, a connection or encounter between two human beings―a carer and a recipient of care, or cared-for" (p. 15). Noddings also believes that greater emphasis should be placed on developing the attitudes and skills required to sustain caring relations. She says "caring teachers listen and respond differently to their students" (p. 19).

Noddings (1984) categorizes caring as aesthetic caring and authentic caring. She uses the expression "aesthetical caring for caring about things and ideas with nonpersonal content; there is no "other" toward whom we move, no other subjectivity reality to grasp, and there is no second person to whom an attitude is conveyed." (p. 21). A teacher who displays aesthetical caring would be focused on rules, goals, objectives, and subject matter before caring for the students. Authentic caring "involves stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference into the other's. When we care, we consider the other's point of view, his objective needs, and what he expects of us" (1984, p. 24). Furthermore, Noddings (1984) explains,

The one-caring as teacher is engrossed in the cared-for and undergoes a

motivational displacement toward the projects of the cared-for. She is present to

the other and places her motive power in his service. The student is infinitely

more important than the subject matter. This recognition does not reduce either

the teacher's power or her responsibility. (p. 176)

Gay (2000) states "caring interpersonal relationships are characterized by

patience, persistence, facilitation, validation, and empowerment for the participants" (p.

47). Foster (1995) found that caring teachers "concern themselves with the complete

development of children" (p. 576). She explained further by saying "they are explicit

about teaching and modeling personal values that they view as foundations of learning

and living. These include patience, persistence and responsibility to self and others"

(p. 576).

Gay (2000) believes that educators express the power of these relationships in

different ways. She notes that caring teachers and administrators do not limit their

interactions with students solely to academic work. She explains, "They demonstrate

concerns for their students' emotional, physical, economic, and interpersonal conditions

as well" (p. 47). Several studies, (Jones, 1981; Siddle-Walker 1993; Sowell, 1976) found

that, for those teachers that demonstrated concerns for their students, a consistently caring

classroom climate was created that made students more willing to participate in learning

activities and encouraged higher levels of achievement. As a result, "the psychological

and tangible attention revealed in the interpersonal relationships…contributed strongly to

[the students'] academic and life success" (Siddle-Walker, 1993, p. 75). In other studies

(Bartolome, 1994; Kozol, 1991; Priallaman & Eaker, 1994), it was found that "when

teaching effectiveness gets reduced to methodological considerations and when no explicit culture of caring is in place, teachers lose the capacity to respond to their students as whole human beings and schools become uncaring places" (as cited in Valenzuela, p. 74).

Tarlow (1996) describes caring as an ongoing, action-driven process of "supportive, affective and instrumental interchanges embedded in reciprocal relationships" (p. 81). Gay (2000) feels that a caring person is "sensitive to, emotionally invested in, and attentive to the needs and interests of others" (p. 48). Tarlow's (1996) study of caring in families, schools, and voluntary agencies shows that caring has elements of both reciprocity and community because the "caring process …confronts the person cared for, calling out to him or her to reciprocate…[and is] an acknowledgment of and respect for the meaning of the group" (p. 80-81).

Noddings believes that reciprocity is an acknowledgement by the "cared-for" that he/she has received the care being given by the "carer." This reciprocity can take different forms such as a smile, a thank-you, or a gurgle from a baby but it occurs in every caring encounter. The responsiveness of the cared-for can take many different forms, depending on the individuals, the nature of their relationship, and the dimensions of their interaction. According to Noddings (1984), this reciprocity is the sole responsibility of the cared-for in a caring relation; however, it is a very powerful role. "The one-caring is dependent on the cared-for—whatever the one-caring does is validated and made meaningful, or diminished and made meaningless, by the response of the cared-for" (p. 60-61). Similarly, Valenzuela (1999) found that students feel the need for reciprocal relationships.

Whereas teachers demand caring about school in the absence of relation, students view caring, or reciprocal relations, as the basis for all learning. Their precondition to caring about school is that they be engaged in a caring relationship with an adult at the school. (p. 79)

In her work on care, Noddings (1992) explains the four major components of moral education from the perspective of an ethic of caring. The four components are: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Modeling according to Noddings is vital in the scheme of caring. She feels that in this framework, "we are not trying to teach students principles and ways of applying them to problems through chains of mathematical reasoning. Rather, we have to show how to care in our own relations with cared-fors" (p. 22). In other words, she feels that teachers do not tell their students to care; instead they show them how to care by creating relations with them.

The second component in moral education is dialogue. Noddings explains, "Dialogue is a common search for understanding, empathy, or appreciation. It can be playful or serious, logical or imaginative, goal or process oriented, but it is always a genuine quest for something underdetermined at the beginning" (p. 23). Dialogue provides for a connection between the parties and helps maintain caring relations. She says that dialogue

Provides us with the knowledge of each other that forms a foundation for response in caring. We respond most effectively as carers when we understand what the other needs and the history of this need. Continuing dialogue builds up a substantial knowledge of one another that serves to guide our responses. (p. 23)

The third essential component in moral education is practice. Experiences, according to Noddings (1992), are what will shape attitudes and mentalities. She feels that "if we want people to approach moral life prepared to care, we need to provide opportunities for them to gain skills in care giving" (pp. 23-24). She explains this by comparing it to "organizations with training programs designed not only teach specific skills but also to "shape minds," that is, to induce certain attitudes and ways of looking at the world" (p. 23).

The last component of moral education from the perspective of caring is confirmation. Buber (1965) described confirmation as

> An act of affirming and encouraging the best in others. When we confirm someone, we spot a better self and encourage its development. We can do this only if we know the other well enough to see what he or she is trying to become. (p. 83)

Noddings (1992) also explains that confirmation is "built from a knowledge of a particular other and by listening carefully to what she or he tells us. Confirmation cannot be done by formula; instead a relation of trust must ground it" (p. 25).

Happy classrooms are a characteristic of caring in schools. Noddings (2003) feels that happy classrooms are a continuous negotiated balance between expressed and inferred needs. Inferred needs according to Noddings are "those needs that adults impose on children and are most of the needs met in school" (p. 242). She also believes that adults should be very careful in identifying and pursuing inferred needs, and should listen respectfully to what children offer as expressed needs. Noddings says "students will do things for teachers whose care is regularly demonstrated, and caring involves responding

to the expressed needs of the cared for" (2003, p. 242). Expressed needs according to Noddings are those needs such as pleasure, play and fun.

Overall, the classroom environment should reflect both inferred and expressed needs and the universal desire for happiness. "There should be a minimum of pain (and none deliberately inflicted), many opportunities for pleasure, and overt recognition of connection between development of desirable dispositions and happiness" (Noddings, 2003, p. 246).

<div align="center">Culturally Responsive Teaching</div>

Another area of research that directly ties into the relationship between teacher and student is research that looks directly at what students say about their teachers and the teachers' relationships with students. A study by Wilson & Corbett (2001) revealed that the quality of the relationship between students and their teachers was a phenomenon that was central to inner-city students. Among African-American elementary students, Howard (2001) found that students preferred teachers who displayed caring bonds and attitudes toward them, and teachers who established community—and family type classroom environments. Brown (2004) conducted a study with thirteen urban educators teaching from first through twelfth grades, selected from seven cities in the United States. These teachers were interviewed to determine whether the classroom management strategies they used reflected the research on culturally responsive teaching. Brown's study determined that teachers used a number of specific management strategies that support culturally responsive pedagogy. One important finding was that all thirteen teachers interviewed "relied on their strong relationships with students built on trust

rather than on fear or punishment to maintain a cooperative learning environment" (p. 286).

Gay's (2000) work on culturally responsive teaching also shows that students feel a need to have a personal connection with their teachers. She explains that this happens "when teachers acknowledge their presence, honor their intellect, respect them as human beings, and make them feel like they are important. In other words, they empower students by legitimizing their "voice" and "visibility" (p. 49). In the same way, Ladson-Billings (1994) says, "culturally responsive teachers who practice culturally relevant methods can be identified by the way they see themselves and others. They see their teaching as an art rather than a technical skill" (p. 25). Guerra & Nelson (2007) also stress that "culturally responsive teachers build on students' 'funds of knowledge' and make accommodations in their practice and interactions to better serve the thinking, learning, communication, and relational styles of diverse students and families" (p. 59).

Culturally responsive teachers also believe that all students can learn and succeed and do not permit failure in their classrooms. According to Ladson-Billings (1994):

Such teachers [culturally responsive teachers] can also be identified by the ways in which they structure their social interactions: Their relationships with students are fluid and equitable and extend beyond the classroom. They demonstrate a connectedness with all of their students and encourage that same connectedness between the students. They encourage a community of learners; they encourage their students to learn collaboratively. (p. 25)

The literature also indicates that culturally responsive teachers are critical of the curriculum and engage their students in critiquing the status quo. These teachers do not

disregard issues of race and culture, instead they engage students in learning how to challenge and cope with discrimination and prejudice to bring about change. One way culturally responsive teachers do this is by connecting the subject matter to their students' worlds. Delpit (2006) explains,

> Teachers must also learn about the brilliance the students bring with them "in their blood." Until they appreciate the wonders of the cultures represented before them they cannot appreciate the potential of those who sit before them, nor can they begin to link their students' histories and worlds to the subject matter they present in the classroom. (p. 182)

"Culturally responsive teachers take an assets-based approach to teaching low socioeconomic and racial/ethnic minority students. An assets-based approach bases teaching and learning on strengths students already possess, including knowledge that they bring with them to the classroom" (Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon, 2010, p. 443). Learning is connected to the students' culture in the classroom, in the school, at home, and in the community.

<p style="text-align:center">Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory</p>

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), a well-known psychologist who worked in the areas of developmental psychology, child rearing, and human ecology offers insight into how the forces and interactions of a child's environment shape a child's development. Through his ecological systems theory, Bronfenbrenner explained how everything in a child and the child's environment affects how a child grows and develops. He labeled different aspects or levels of the environment that influence children's development,

including the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

The *microsystem* is the immediate environment the child lives in and is also where I place the teacher-student relationship.

A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics. A setting is a place where people can readily engage in face-to-face interaction-home, day care center, playground, and so on. The factors of activity, role, and interpersonal relation constitutethe elements, or building blocks of the microsystem. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22)

Children's microsystems include any immediate relationships or organizations they interact with, such as their immediate family or caregivers and their school or daycare. How these groups or organizations interact with the child will have an effect on how the child develops; the more encouraging and nurturing these relationships and places are, the better the child will be able to develop. The important aspect of the microsystem is the direct contact and interaction with the child for a substantial period of time.

The *mesosystem,* which is the next layer in Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, "consists of the connections between children's immediate settings and surroundings…It encompasses connections between microsystems, such as home, school, neighborhood, and child-care center, that foster children's development" (Berk, 2000, p. 28). The connections made between the teacher and their students' home and community are important to this study. It is important to remember that everything that a teacher says

and does, not only to each student, but also to the people who have everyday contact and influence over that student, will affect the student's development. These relationships and interactions will be studied to see their effects on the development of the teacher-student relationship and to see how these interactions affect the student's personal, social, and academic development, all of which relate to the concept of ecologically fit classrooms.

The last three environmental systems of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, the exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem will not be focal points in this study; however explanations of the three systems help us to understand the entire ecological theory now known as the bioecological theory. The third layer in Bronfenbrenner's theory is referred to as an *exosystem*. "An exosystem refers to one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). The exosystem surrounds the mesosystem and refers to social settings that affect the child but do not include the child. Some examples of an exosystem of a young child might include a parent's workplace, health services in the community, the parents' network of friends, and the activities of the school board. The exosystem does not cross the child's path directly, but indirectly, and do have a huge affect on the child.

The *macrosystem*, which is the outermost layer of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, consists of things that influence and sometimes support the child within the environment such as culture, subculture, norms, and laws. Finally, the *chronosystem* underlies all the other systems and involves the way in which the passage of time, historical events, and historical changes affect interactions and experiences. According to

Bronfenbrenner, there are two environmental conditions that are necessary for human development: loving a child unconditionally and spending time with the child. The ecological theory was one guide to this research. This theory holds that the most significant educational variable does not exist at the level of instructional materials, school districts, resources, and programs, but at the level of the individual teacher and the teacher-student relationship.

<div align="center">Cultural Therapy</div>

The literature on cultural therapy was reviewed as part of what shapes teacher-student relationships because, as Spindler and Spindler (2000) state, the "sociocultural position and experience of the individual is a better predictor of classroom behavior, particularly in respect to selective bias (on the part of the teacher) in perception of and interaction with students" (p. 367). The cultural therapy Spindler and Spindler conducted focused on the culture of the teacher and the ways in which this culture biased relationships with students in classrooms.

> For teachers, cultural therapy is an intervention that can be used as a first step to impact and change behaviors, attitudes, and assumptions that are biased (and often discriminatory) and thus detrimental to students whose cultural backgrounds are different from their own. (p. 367)

Cultural therapy allows teachers to understand their own culture and position as well as why they may find the behavior of a culturally different person to be offensive, appalling, or frustrating. "For students (particularly minority students), the goal of cultural therapy is to empower them rather than to blame them" (p. 368). The whole idea is to give power to students to understand the factors that work against them and to give

them the capacity to fight the obstacles they encounter so that they are able to have access to power and opportunity.

Spindler (1999) believes "culture is necessary to human status and functioning;" however, he also claims "it is the basis for ethnocentrism, something teachers and others who make judgments about people and act on them cannot afford" (p. 466). Spindler also suggests that a healthy identification with one's own culture is desirable. Accompanying this identification is cultural blindness, which is what cultural therapy intends to correct. Spindler's experiences "with the process to date indicates that there are at least three forms of cultural knowledge of particular importance. They are mundane cultural knowledge, self-other cultural knowledge, and submerged cultural knowledge (or hidden assumptions)" (p. 466).

According to Spindler (1999), "mundane cultural knowledge" is the kind of knowledge that we use to get along in everyday situations: how to put on one's pants, how to get through the door, or recognize a public building" (p. 466). It is the kind of knowledge we use to get through the day and we do not think much about. What is important to understand about mundane cultural knowledge is that "it affects perception and therefore action with things and people" (p. 467). Self-examination of perceptions and the reasons for them is a technique for cultural sensitization that is a form of cultural therapy.

The second form of cultural knowledge that Spindler (1999) refers to in the cultural therapy process is self-other cultural knowledge. This is "something we use constantly to place ourselves in relation to others and it directly affects our self-expression, as well as our feelings about ourselves" (p. 467). In a thorough ethnography

on a teacher's classroom behavior Spindler learned that the teacher, who prided himself on being open to his students, helpful to those with problems, accessible, and friendly, in reality exhibited these behaviors only toward those students like him (white, Protestant, middle to upper class, and mainstream). He was not mean or hostile to the students who were different from him; he simply ignored them. "He did not know how to relate to them. He did not understand why his classes were not meaningful to them" (p. 467). This self-other aspect in which a teacher can develop a more comprehensive perception of his/her relations with his/her students is what is important to this study of teacher-student relationships.

The third form of cultural knowledge in Spindler's (1999) cultural therapy is referred to as submerged cultural knowledge. "Much of what we do every day is an indirect expression of submerged cultural understandings (or hidden assumptions) that permeate every dimension of our beliefs and attitudes" (p. 468). Through the "cross-cultural reflective interview" technique, Spindler gave teachers, administrators, and students the opportunity to view and respond to videos taken of their schools and classrooms and videos of other's schools and classrooms. "The observed differences in the action in the two settings, Schoenhausen and Roseville, caused teachers and children to reflect back on their own behavior at the same time that they were pronouncing perceptions of the behavior of the other" (Spindler & Spindler, 2000, p. 284). This technique helped them see that submerged culture attitudes permeated every aspect of the programs in the two schools. "The essential feature is that a mirror of one's own behavior and assumptions as a teacher is held up for one to view and reflect on, in interaction with the ethnographer/therapist" (Spindler, 1999, p. 469). This technique was not one that was

used in this study but it is nonetheless important to understand Spindler's three forms of cultural knowledge and how these can be used in the cultural therapy process. "Most teachers are idealistic, many are quite liberal in their political and social beliefs, but they are products of their culture and live within the framework of values and symbols that are a part of that culture" (Spindler, 1997, p. 260).

Recent research on successful teachers in urban poor schools also points to teachers knowing themselves and their environment. Gehrke (2005) found "knowing one's own cultural identity and social identity also leads to a better understanding of the students and their identities and experiences" (p. 15). This is important because of the mismatch between the backgrounds of most teachers and the students they teach.

During this study, the concept of awareness and acknowledgement of one's own culture and its potential bias in social interactions and in the transmission of skills and knowledge was not explored in depth. This was a limitation of the study. In retrospect, I believe it would have been advantageous to have examined more closely the effects of the teacher-participants' awareness and acknowledgment of the effects of their own culture on their teaching.

<div align="center">Selfhood</div>

Parker Palmer, like Spindler, believes that we teach who we are. "Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my student, my subject, and our way of being together" (Palmer, 1998, p. 2). Palmer believes that in order to teach one must look at her soul and gain self-knowledge. This self-knowledge allows the teacher to know her subject and her students. Without knowing herself, the teacher will see her students

through a dark lens in the shadows of her own unexamined life, and when she cannot see clearly, she cannot teach students well. "Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness" (Palmer, 1998, p. 11). Palmer's idea of connectedness is what I will be looking for in this research.

Palmer (1998) believes "good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher" (p. 10). Identity to Palmer is made up of all of the forces that make up our lives. He describes identity as

> An evolving nexus where all the forces that constitute my life converge in the mystery of self: my genetic makeup, the nature of the man and woman who gave me life, the culture in which I was raised, people who have sustained me and people who have done me harm, the good and ill I have done to others and to myself, the experience of love and suffering-and much, much more. (p. 13)

Palmer believes that a teacher's understanding of his or her identity is the first crucial step in finding new ways to teach and connect with his or her students.

By integrity Palmer (1998) means whatever wholeness one can find within those connections that constitute one's life. "Integrity lies in relating to those forces in ways that bring me wholeness and life rather than fragmentation and death" (p. 13). Palmer feels that with integrity, one becomes more whole and becomes more real by acknowledging the whole of who you are.

Palmer (1998) also points out two truths about teaching that connect to this study. One of these truths is "what we teach will never 'take' unless it connects with the inward, living core of our students' lives, with our students' inward teachers" (p. 31). This truth takes teaching beyond the daily routines, the repetition, and memorizing techniques that

are implemented in some classrooms. He feels that students will not be transformed with this type of teaching.

The second truth that Palmer (1998) believes is important in acknowledging the whole person is that "we can speak to the teacher within our students only when we are on speaking terms with the teacher within ourselves" (p. 31). Palmer describes the teacher who speaks like a cartoon character—as if words are floating in front of their students' faces—as someone who has grown deaf to their inner guide and has lost touch with a sense of self. He feels "deep speaks to deep, and when we have not sounded our own depths, we cannot sound the depths of our students' lives" (p. 31).

Palmer (1998) also suggests that in order to acknowledge the "self," one must be clear in the understanding of knowing. He explains knowing as "a human way to seek relationship and, in the process, to have encounters and exchanges that will inevitably alter us. At its deepest reaches, knowing is always communal" (p. 54). Palmer (1993) explains further,

> The act of knowing is an act of love, the act of entertaining and embracing the reality of the other, of allowing the other to enter and embrace our own. In such knowing we know and are known as members of one community, and our knowing becomes a way of reweaving that community's bonds. (p. 8)

The encounters and exchanges and the community bonds that are developed through the act of knowing was part of what I was looking for in this study, because these encounters, exchanges, and bonds may well be the path to ecologically fit classrooms. Palmer's ideas were used in this research to help analyze the teacher-student relationships in hopes of

finding what teachers were doing to develop these relationships and help their students succeed.

<div align="center">Teacher Expectations and Beliefs</div>

This body of literature is focused on teachers' beliefs and classroom management and how these can affect the relationships in the classrooms. For example, culturally responsive teachers use communication processes that reflect students' values and beliefs about learning, the responsibilities of teachers, and the roles of students in school settings (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994). In effectively managed classrooms, students are generally involved in developing a classroom social environment in which students agree to cooperate with their teachers and fellow students in pursuit of academic growth (Brown, 2004). Furthermore, there is a large amount of literature which states that achievement is enhanced by high expectations for students in conjunction with a classroom climate characterized by encouragement and support (Bernard, 1995; Stockard & Mayberry, 1992; Wang et al. 1994).

Ladson-Billings (1994) described the nature of classrooms of effective teachers of African American students by stating, "Psychological safety is a hallmark of each of these classrooms. The students feel comfortable and supported" (p. 73). Ullucci (2005) argues that the most powerful force in shaping classroom community is teachers' beliefs about children. She explains that the same fairness, sensitivity, and high expectations teachers want for their own children should be reflected in the way teachers treat children in their care. Gay (2000) explains,

> Teachers who genuinely care about students generate higher level of all kinds of
> success than those who do not. They have high performance expectations and will

settle for nothing less than high achievement. Failure is simply unacceptable to

them, so they work diligently to see that success for students happens. (p. 47)

Good & Brophy (1997) compiled a comprehensive investigation of teacher expectations

and how they affect student achievement. They concluded that "many students in most

classrooms are not reaching their potential because their teachers do not expect much

from them and are satisfied with poor or mediocre performance when they could obtain

something better" (p. 70).

Maintaining high expectations is a characteristic that effective teachers of the

urban poor held for all students. Brophy (1999) and Zeichner (2003) found that

successful teachers believe that all children can learn; therefore, they maintain high

expectations for all students, regardless of where they teach or the backgrounds of their

students. From research and practice, specific trends in teacher expectations have

emerged. One of these trends was the "self-fulfilling prophecy effect," which was

popularized by Rosenthal and Jacobson's 1968 study, *Pygmalion in the Classroom*. It

was learned through this study that if teachers expected students to be high or low

achievers, they would cause this to happen by their actions. In other words, teachers'

assumptions about students' intelligence and conduct affect how they treat students in

instructional interactions. Over time, these treatments strongly influence the degree of

student learning. It is these interactions in particular that I focused on in this study. Gay

(2000) adds to these findings by explaining that teachers also "attribute student failure to

lack of intellectual ability and poor home environments rather than to the quality of their

teaching" (p. 60).

Another trend that has emerged alongside teacher expectations is teacher efficacy. Ashton & Webb (1986) found that teaching efficacy stems from the beliefs teachers hold about their abilities to positively affect the academic achievement of particular students. Teacher efficacy influences teachers' choices of activities, the efforts they exhibit, and their persistence in the face of obstacles and challenging situations. In another study it was found that teachers' sense of efficacy is one of the few teacher characteristics consistently related to student achievement.

> Teachers who believe that student learning can be influenced by effective teaching despite home and peer influence and who have confidence in their ability to teach persist longer in their teaching efforts, proved greater academic focus in the classroom, give different types of feedback, and ultimately improve student performance. (Gibson & Dembo, 1984, p. 580)

The teacher-student relationships that I investigated suggested that teacher expectations, beliefs and efficacy affected the students' personal, social and academic development. I specifically investigated the development of teacher-student relationships and the impacts these relationships had on students and their learning.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative research methods were developed in the social sciences to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena; they are designed to help researchers understand people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live. "Qualitative methodologists have described three major purposes for research: to explore, explain or describe a phenomenon" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 33). Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as

> An inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

In qualitative research, the researcher's role is to "gain a 'holistic' (systemic, encompassing, integrated) overview of the context under study: its logic, its arrangements, its explicit and implicit rules" (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 6). In this study, I used a case study method to describe the "ecological fit" created by teachers identified as developing supportive relationships with students. Through this study the

teachers' understandings and actions for the development and sustaining of supportive teacher-student relationships were explicated.

Marshall & Rossman state that explanatory studies "show relationships, (frequently as perceived by the participants in the study) between events and the meaning of the relationships" (2006, p. 33). This study examined the relationships that were formed between culturally responsive teachers and their students. It describes how events, strategies, beliefs, and attitudes, and the interactions of teachers between their students interrelate to result in supportive teacher-student relationships and student achievement.

This case study attempts to shed light on the development of supportive teacher-student relationships by examining identified teachers that exemplify this phenomenon. According to Yin (2003), a case study is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly defined" (p. 13). This case study investigated supportive teacher-student relationships by gathering the views of teachers, students, and parents. It is hoped that this study and similar studies, taken together, will develop a knowledge base that will enable teachers in other schools to develop the kind of teacher-student relationships described here.

According to Wardekker "the theory implicit in the interpretive paradigm is of human beings as interpreters and constructors of a meaningful world" (2000, p.259). I was not the typical researcher coming into an unfamiliar site studying a phenomenon with which I had no experience. I was a classroom teacher for eleven years and had experience with the process of developing teacher-student relationships. Even with these

many years of experience, I did not want to begin to describe the world of the teacher and how teacher-student relationships are developed without understanding teachers' experiences in the present. I entered the teacher's everyday social world, not as principal, but as researcher and observer, in order to grasp how the teacher develops relationships with students and then to describe the teachers' views. My research was best represented by the term "ecological fit," specifically the interventions that successful teachers use to enhance environment—person relationships, reduce isolation, foster social competence, support positive coping and promote belongingness in the school setting. In my work, I believe ecologically fit classrooms are best represented by a combination of four theoretical models: Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory, Noddings Care Theory, Spindler and Spindler's Cultural Therapy and Palmer's Selfhood.

Site Selection

The site for the study was an elementary school that is a part of a large urban school district and has children from prekindergarten through sixth grade. The school serves about 94% economically disadvantaged children, 34% of which are limited English proficient and 99% of which are minority. One of the school's goals continues to be that of building and refining a model of education for children in urban communities of poverty. I am the principal of this elementary school.

I am in my eighth year as principal of this school and have built trusting relationships with the staff members. Based on the trust and commitment I have with the students and the staff, I was able to conduct a thorough study, maintaining trustworthiness throughout. Marshall & Rossman (2006) acknowledge the positive aspects of having complete access to the study site, including "relatively easy access to

participants; reduced time expenditure for certain aspects of data collection; a feasible location for research; and the potential to build trusting relationships" (p. 62).

As principal I have witnessed first-hand the accomplishments and the struggles of our students and teachers that occur on a daily basis. At United, I have seen some of our teachers struggle as they attempt to teach our students. The reason I chose my own campus as the site for this study was so we could claim ownership of the findings. My hope was for this ownership to open the door for the staff to learn from their colleagues on their own campus. Toma (2000) says, "closeness to the people and the phenomenon through intense interactions provides subjective understandings that can greatly increase the quality of qualitative data" (p.180). I wanted us to learn how successful colleagues developed and sustained supportive teacher-student relationships with all students.

<center>Participant Selection</center>

Participants were identified through an extreme sampling strategy. Patton explains this strategy as "selecting cases that are information rich because they are unusual or special in some way, such as outstanding successes or notable failures" (2002, p. 231). To learn how teachers develop teacher-student relationships, "extreme cases or highly unusual manifestations of this phenomenon will be studied" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

The first phase of the selection process began with an informal faculty meeting. I talked with all of the teachers at a staff meeting explaining the study that I had chosen to complete and asked them to identify the teacher or teachers that I should study. By bringing my study out into the open, I showed the staff that this study was not about choosing favorites; it was about identifying the teacher or teachers who built supportive

relationships with primarily low SES, racial and ethnic minority students, and to learn from those teachers how this can be accomplished.

An outside educator, who was approved by my dissertation committee, conducted the nomination part of the study so that the teachers would not feel my presence or my role as their principal as a form of coercion or pressure to consent to participate or not participate. The outside educator was a Bilingual Curriculum Specialist from a nearby elementary school who had been a classroom teacher at her school and was currently a master teacher/teacher facilitator. She modeled lessons, provided guidance with curriculum and instruction, mentored teachers, and worked with children in small groups. She did not hold any type of supervisory role on her campus.

A research-based description of the type of teacher who was being sought as a participant for this study was provided to each staff member. The teacher description is included as Appendix A. Along with the teacher description, a nomination form was given to each staff member. The nomination form is included as Appendix B. I asked them to anonymously write down the name of the teacher or teachers who they were recommending for the study, reminding them that self-nominations were acceptable.

Groups of parents and community members were also asked to nominate teachers who they believed fit the description for this study. The outside educator spoke with the parents and community members during one of the weekly principal-parent coffee hours. She explained the study and its purpose to the two groups. They were provided with the research-based teacher description and the nomination form and additional nominations were collected. I was not present at these nomination sessions.

The outside educator contacted each of the teachers nominated for the study, described the study to the nominees, emphasized that participation was purely voluntary, answered any questions about the study, and asked the nominees if they were willing to participate. Permission forms included space for the nominees to describe any feedback or concerns about the project. The outside educator collected signed permission forms from those willing to participate and the forms were given to the investigator. The teacher participant consent form is included as Appendix C. The outside educator did not share with the investigator or with anyone else the names of teachers who were nominated but did not choose to participate. The outside educator destroyed the nomination forms of those who declined to participate.

The second phase of the selection process consisted of interviews with the school support staff, including the counselor, social worker, and parent support specialist. Before sharing the volunteer list with the school support staff, the support staff members were asked to complete a consent form assenting their participation in the selection process. The support staff consent form is included as Appendix D. I gave each staff member who agreed to participate in the study the research-based description of the type of teacher that I was seeking for this study.

I shared the list of participants with members of the support staff. I spoke with them individually and asked them to identify the teachers from the volunteer list whom they felt formed the most supportive relationships with their students. Each support staff member identified the teachers whom they believed developed and sustained supportive teacher-student relationships. The support staff was asked not to discuss deliberations on

this phase of the selection process with anyone but the investigator. Based on these discussions, I chose teachers for the third phase of the selection process.

In phase three, I compared the support staff's, the faculty's, the parents' and the community members' choices to my own perceptions, and chose a preliminary sample consisting of teachers repeatedly identified through this snowball sampling. In phase four, I conducted preliminary, non-evaluative classroom observations of those in the preliminary sample, comparing the observed teachers' behaviors to the research-based description of highly successful, culturally responsive teachers. Based on these observations, the most perceived culturally responsive teachers were selected for the primary study. I met individually with the three identified teachers and invited them to participate in the study, explained their role in the study, and obtained a voluntary commitment by having them sign another participant consent form. Before initiation of the primary study, the selected teachers were reminded that they could drop out of the study at that point or at any time during the study.

Because I am the principal of the school, there were procedures put in place to protect the teacher-participants. The teachers who were selected were not evaluated or appraised by me, the principal. Instead, the assistant principal of the campus was the evaluator or appraiser of the participating teachers. The assistant principal conducted any formal and informal observations that were tied to the teacher-participants summative appraisals. The observations that I conducted for this research project were not tied to their yearly observations or appraisals. These were kept totally separate. The assistant principal also handled any situations that arose among the participating teachers, students, and/or their parents.

The participating teachers were asked to nominate three students from their classes who they felt would be able to contribute to the purpose of the study. Once a child was nominated, the students' parents were automatically nominated. I met with the nominated students as a group after school and explained the study and answered any questions that they had about the study. We met in the counselors' room, which is a neutral and comfortable location for most students. Because as the principal of the school, I had already established a child-principal relationship that did not necessarily revolve around my authoritative position but rather on knowing each individual student and their families, I felt very comfortable talking to them as a group and felt that they received me as a non-threatening supporter of students and their families. I had already established myself as someone with high expectations, someone who listens and someone who is fair with all who enter our school during the many campus events and activities and in my daily interactions with the students and their families.

I told the students that I would call their parents to set up a time to meet with them in their homes to discuss the study because I wanted to invite their parents to participate as well. I made sure that the children understood that they could deny participation even after I spoke with them or with their parents and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. I explained to the students that our relationships would not change whether or not they participated. I also explained to the students that the study was to identify the nature of the teacher-student relationship and not to observe how the student worked/participated in the classroom. I also told them that this study was not to observe teachers and students so that I could give the teachers and/or students a grade but rather to gather information to help us build better relationships with all students in our school. I

explained to them that there would be no right or wrong thoughts and ideas that they would share with me, but rather that their input was valuable in understanding the teacher-student relationship.

I contacted each of the parents and set a time to visit with them personally about the study. I gave the consent forms to the parents if the parent and child were interested in participating. I asked them to sign a consent form for themselves and their child if they chose to participate. On the consent forms there was also a place for the parent and child to give me feedback regarding the study's conditions or their concerns with being participants. They were told to bring the consent forms to the school office. Out of respect for the students, the consent form included a place for the child to give assent to participate along with their parents' signature. The English and Spanish parent and child consent forms are included as Appendix E.

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

"Typically qualitative researchers rely on four methods for gathering information: (a) participating in the setting, (b) observing directly, (c) interviewing in-depth, and (d) analyzing documents and material culture" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 97). I collected data through observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. As the researcher and the principal of the school where the study was conducted, I was in the setting on a daily basis observing and hearing the reality the participants' experienced. I was a full participant in the study due to my position and role at the school. DeWalt & DeWalt (2002) say "the tacit understandings gained during participant observation facilitate the intuitive moments when a selection of notes about events,

people, and conversations comes together to provide us with a deeper insight and

understanding of behavior" (p. 13).

Interviews

Interviews are essential sources of case study information. Yin (2003) explains,

"the interviews will appear to be guided conversations rather than structured queries" (p.

89). Through these conversations, I gained the participants' perspective on the

development and maintenance of teacher-student relationships and the role they play in

relation to student achievement and to the creation of "ecologically fit" classrooms. The

interviews were open-ended, yielding friendly and non-threatening types of questions.

Yin (2003) explains, "case study interviews are of an open-ended nature, in which you

can ask key respondents about the facts of a matter as well as their opinions about events"

(p. 90).

The interviewing process for teachers began with the teacher answering questions

about her or his educational platform. The educational platform revealed the teachers'

educational beliefs. According to Glickman et al. (2007),

> A person's cultural background is an important aspect of what he or she believes
>
> about education. Educators' beliefs about education often are influenced by
>
> cultural assumptions they may not be aware of because the assumptions are so
>
> deeply ingrained and taken for granted. These assumptions can influence the
>
> curriculum that educators design, their relationships with students and parents, the
>
> lessons they plan, and so forth. (p. 108)

Initially, I was going to conduct at least three semi-structured interviews with

each of the teachers in order to document in their own words their perceptions and

experiences on how they built teacher-student relationships and how they managed to maintain them throughout a school year. However, after the first two interviews, I reached saturation; I was no longer hearing or seeing new information.

The primary strategy for interviewing was, "to capture the deep meaning of experience in the participants' own words" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 55). The interviews helped uncover the teachers' perspectives on the development of teacher-student relationships and their views on how an "ecological fit" was created in their classrooms. Semi-structured interviews were used because they were neither highly structured nor unstructured and created comfortable conversation. Merriam (1998) describes this less structured interview format as having "either all of the questions more flexibly worded, or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions" (p. 74). This semi-structured format allowed me to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging views of the participants, and to any new views on the topic.

I asked each of the teachers where they wanted to complete the interview. I wanted them to choose a place that they would be most comfortable, perhaps their classroom or my office, and where there would be a remote chance of being interrupted. Two of the teacher interviews were conducted outside of the campus at a neutral place chosen by the participant. The interviews were audio taped through the use of a digital recorder for the sole purpose of verbatim data collection. The fact that the interviews were recorded reduced the possibility of misunderstanding (Fontana & Frey, 1994). I kept the digital recordings in a secure place. During each of the interviews I also took notes, which helped me formulate new questions as the interviews progressed (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006) and provided back-up data in case of technical difficulties.

For the initial interviews, I used a protocol of interview topics to serve as a guide for my conversations with the teachers. The interview protocol allowed me freedom to explore, probe, and ask other types of follow-up questions that illuminated the subject of teacher-student relationships (Patton, 2002).

The second semi-structured interviews were guided by themes and new questions that arose from the first set of interviews. These follow-up interviews helped clarify and expand on information gleaned from the first interviews. After each interview was transcribed, I asked the teacher to review the accuracy of the transcripts and to add any missing information that they felt was important to the study. The two teacher interviews were each approximately one hour in length.

Spontaneous conversations during the regular school day were conducted with the teacher participants to understand their views about situations that occurred, which were directly related to the teacher-student relationship. I wrote notes on these conversations as soon as possible so I that I could capture the participants' perspectives. The basic interview questions for both teacher interviews are included as Appendixes F and G.

I also conducted interviews with two to three students from each of the participants' classrooms and with their parents. The teachers were asked to select the students that they believed would contribute the most insights to the teacher-student relationships. The interviews were conducted separately, first with the students and then with their parents. These interviews were also open-ended and semi-structured. Since I was both the principal of the school and the researcher, I ensured that my approach was "conveying the attitude that the participant's views were valuable and useful" (Marshall

& Rossman, 2006, p. 101). The basic interview questions for students and parents written in both English and Spanish are included as Appendixes H and I.

I made sure that the participating teachers, students and parents understood that all of the information they provided was confidential and only for the use of the research study. I obtained written, informed consent from all participants prior to their participation and throughout the study.

Observations

I observed the participating teachers' up to three times in the semester to identify the "ecological fit"—the interventions that enhanced the environment-person relationships, reduced isolation, fostered social competence, supported positive coping, and promoted belongingness in the school setting and how they were able to create this for their students. I scheduled the observation days and times with the participants in advance.

During the observations, I used an observation protocol, which is included as Appendix J. My individual observations were to figure out what the teacher was doing by looking at the interactions, moves, and strategies that helped sustain their relationships with their students. I observed to see how the teacher used relationships to support children. I also looked for ways that the teacher promoted the environment-person relationships, reduced isolation, fostered social competence, supported positive coping, and promoted belongingness in the school setting.

I observed peer-to-peer interactions in relation to the conceptual framework of an "ecological fit." I looked to see how peer relationships interacted with teacher-student relationships. I had another person videotape all of the classroom observations, which

then allowed me to take notes during the observations. The videotaping made it possible for me to return to the observation for review as needed. Glesne (1999) explains the use of videotaping,

> As the density of data collected with videotape is greater than that of human observation or audio recording, and the nature of the record is permanent, in that it is possible to return to the observation repeatedly. For microanalysis, or focusing on one aspect of everyday interaction, videotaping is invaluable. (p. 57)

I observed the teachers not only when they were teaching the students but also during student-teacher-parent conferences. These occurred late in the spring semester of the school year. I was able to capture how and what the teacher was doing during these conferences to help sustain the teacher-student relationship. I observed these conferences to see the manner in which the teacher supported the students inside and outside of the classroom. I did not participate in the conference; rather, I simply observed the teacher's interactions with the student and the parent. The parent-teacher conferences of two of the participants were videotaped. The third teacher participant's parent conferences were not videotaped due to a malfunction in the equipment; however, detailed notes were taken during these meetings.

Observations were also conducted during one grade level meeting and one faculty meeting. During these observations, I looked and listened for any connections that were made to the development and sustaining of the teacher-student relationship. I took brief field notes during these observations, which were expanded to a full description shortly after the actual observation.

Supplemental Data

The teachers were asked to maintain a daily journal throughout the study. According to Marshall & Rossman (2006), "journals, supplement participant observation, interviewing, and observation with gathering and analyzing documents produced in the course of everyday events or constructed specifically for the research at hand" (p. 107). This journal provided another avenue for teachers to share their perceptions and perspectives on the development of teacher-student relationships. Merriam (1998) reminds us that personal documents such as diaries reflect the participant's perspective, which is what I sought in this study. She goes on to say that "personal documents are a reliable source of data concerning a person's attitudes, beliefs, and view of the world" (p. 116). I completed a document analysis of the journals during the middle of the study and at the end of the study to help me gain a better understanding of the teachers' relationships with their students and to compare with the other data collected.

I reviewed other forms of supplemental data. Glesne (1999) tells us "documents corroborate your observations and interviews and thus make your findings more trustworthy. Beyond corroboration, they may raise questions about your hunches and thereby shape new directions for observations and interviews" (p. 58). I asked the teachers to share any documents that they created and/or used that they felt significantly helped them develop supportive relationships with their students.

I collected and analyzed documents and materials such as parent newsletters, notes to parents, memos, announcements, notes to students, and other artifacts that the teachers believed significantly enhanced the development of their relationships with their students. I analyzed these documents to see if they shed any light on how each individual

teacher developed relationships with their students and how they supported these students both in and out of the classrooms. The review of documents was an unobtrusive method, rich in portraying the values and beliefs of the participants in the setting (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 107).

I took photographs during the observations that captured the classroom environment, including teacher-student and peer-to-peer interactions in a different format. The sole purpose of the photographs was to help gather visual representations of the daily interactions of participants, interactions that might not be fully portrayed in the audio and written data that was gathered. Collier & Collier (1986) see photography as a means of collecting precise information "with qualifying and contextual relationships that are usually missing from codified written notes" (p. 10). I then interviewed the participants about their pictures and uncovered items that I did not otherwise see for myself or understand.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

Since there was a massive amount of data collected, I reviewed, organized, and analyzed the data as data were collected. Patton (2002) feels that "overlapping of data collection and analysis improves both the quality of data collected and the quality of the analysis so long as the fieldworker takes care not to allow these initial interpretations to overly confine analytical possibilities" (p. 436).

I transcribed the audiotapes/digital recordings, read them for accuracy, coded the transcripts, and identified tentative patterns and themes prior to the next scheduled interview. These tentative patterns and themes helped generate the questions for the next

interview. I shared the tentative patterns and themes with the participants to check for accuracy and any alternative explanations.

My most general codes identified three broad categories of data that paralleled the three research questions. Within these three broad categories, I carried out open coding, allowing specific categories to emerge from the data. "During open coding, data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined and compared for similarities and differences" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 102). I organized the data by teacher. I created three spreadsheets for each teacher, one for each research question. I assigned a color code to each of the research questions. I used the same colors to code the interview questions, the classroom observation protocol and the parent-teacher conference data, which helped organize the data by research question. Through open coding, I coded all complete thoughts in the interview transcripts. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), "this approach to coding can be used at any time but is especially useful when the researcher already has several categories and wants to code specifically in relation to them" (p. 120). At this point, assigned codes were displayed on each teacher's spreadsheet by research question. After open coding was completed, axial coding was used to identify themes and patterns across the data. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998) "the purpose of axial coding is to begin the process of reassembling data that were fractured during open coding. Axial coding is the act of relating categories to subcategories along the lines of their properties and dimensions " (p. 124). This process helped me form well-developed categories and themes that I will discuss in Chapter 4.

Validity and Trustworthiness

One way that I assured validity and trustworthiness throughout the study was through triangulation. "The use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 4). Triangulation strengthens reliability as well as internal validity. Comparison of data derived from multiple data gathering methods—interviews, observations, and review of supplemental data—was one type of triangulation in this study. Another form of triangulation was the comparison of data from different subjects; successful teachers, peer teachers, students, and parents. A third type of triangulation was the data analysis by multiple reviewers; colleagues from outside the research setting were asked to review data and compare their conclusions to mine.

Patton (2002) states, "In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the instrument. The credibility of qualitative methods, therefore, hinges to a great extent on the skill, competence and rigor of the person doing fieldwork" (p. 14). Because I was so close to the actual research by being there everyday in the trenches with the teachers and students, I kept a journal and/or notes during the research process in which I recorded my own assumptions and biases. "Journals and diaries are written documents that record the researcher's personal reactions and concerns throughout the course of fieldwork" (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002, p. 152). I asked a colleague to review the journal and compare it to my data interpretations. This was one way of checking my findings.

After all of the data were analyzed, I conducted a member check by asking the participants to review my tentative findings and provide me with their perceptions of the

validity of the findings in written form. This was done to enhance the trustworthiness of the research.

<div style="text-align:center">Ethical Considerations</div>

Confidentiality of the participants, students and data collected was very important in this study. Maintaining confidentiality was important so that the trust and the working relationships I had with the participants would not be jeopardized. I concealed names, locations, and other identifying information so that the people who had been observed were protected (Patton, 2002). Some of the data that the participants shared was very personal so confidentiality of this data was of utmost importance. I honored and respected the information that they chose to share with me. I also assured the teacher participants that this study would not interfere or compromise their annual evaluations in any way.

All participants—teachers, parents, and students—were given the opportunity to review the interview and observation summaries and any emerging themes and patterns I had identified in the previous phase of the study prior to their participation in the next phase of data collection. Participants were also reminded prior to each new phase of the study that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw their participation at any time. Ongoing consent forms were provided and collected prior to each phase of data collection. This was to assure that participants were continuously informed and that their participation was voluntary throughout the project. The ongoing consent forms, written in both English and Spanish, are included as Appendix K.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Teacher-student relationships were the focus of this case study. Throughout all of the interview sessions, I could not help but remember my own relationships with the students I taught and ponder on the relationships that I have with each of the interviewees: the children, the parents and the teachers. Before the data analysis and the findings are explained, I will give a brief history of United Elementary and a brief description of the relationships I have established with the three teacher-participants and include a description of each of the teacher-participants and of myself. These descriptions will provide a context for the findings to be presented.

Placing the Findings in Context

Our School's History

United Elementary was built in 1936 and is one of seventy-eight elementary schools in a large urban school district in Texas. United Elementary is located on the east side of the city and was built to educate the growing number of children in this largely Hispanic community. The first several decades of the school's history showed a steady increase of students, mostly Hispanic and some African American, through the halls of United Elementary.

However, in 1980, district mandatory busing changed the complexity of the student population of this neighborhood school as students from one of the city's west side schools were bused to United. The students in grades Pre-K, fourth, fifth and sixth grades from the west side school were bused to United and the first, second and third graders from United were bused to the west side school. This was done to comply with federal court rulings to abolish the segregation of races in public schools. In 1987, the busing order was withdrawn and United once again became a neighborhood school.

Since 1987, United has served a student population that is made up of approximately 87% Hispanic, 12% African American and less than 1% White children. Although the neighborhood itself has experienced some gentrification, the school demographics have not changed. Most of the children that attend the school are neighborhood children. There are two housing complexes, which were two of the original developments that were built under the Housing Act of 1937 authored by then Congressman Lyndon Baines Johnson. The first residents moved into one of the housing units in 1939 and a year later residents were moving into the second development. These two housing developments still provide a home for many of our families. Some of the families live in small homes near and around the school. Through the gentrification numerous high-rise apartment buildings and condominiums have been built near the school. There has also been influx of coffee shops and small retail businesses that have opened up in the neighborhood.

Beside the school, there is a community recreation facility that many of the children utilize after school and on the weekends. This center provides after school and weekend activities such as sports events, arts and crafts, and computer and dance classes.

This recreation center also manages the upkeep of an outdoor stage and a public playground that the United children and staff utilize throughout the school year.

Another community resource that is available to our children and their families is Communities in Schools. This is an organization that started at United in 2001, when I became principal, and has been a strong part of the learning community for the past eight years. I feel that it is important to mention this program as part of our school's history because it provides many of the programs and services that our students and their families need and it has been a program that I as the principal have relied on to help us make a difference in our children's lives and in their learning.

"Communities in Schools (CIS) is the nation's leading community-based organization helping kids succeed in school and prepare for life. It's nonprofit, nonpartisan, and dedicated to ending the dropout epidemic in the United States" (Milliken, 2007, p. xvii). CIS creates comprehensive support systems around the schools. It identifies the most critical needs of students and their families that could prevent children from succeeding in school and in life. It finds and coordinates community resources, volunteers, and agencies that work in partnership with the school. Some of the services CIS has provided for our United children and families are: after school tutoring—SmartKids, after school enrichment classes, one-to-one individual counseling and small group counseling through friendship groups, leadership groups and peer mediation. CIS also provides families with wrap around services such as clothing, food and outside resources for physical and mental health care. This year alone they have worked with about one hundred-fifty students and their families.

During the 1990-1991 school year, United's test scores on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills tests (TAAS) ranked the school as one of the lowest in the district. Sixteen of the thirty-eight United teachers left the school for other teaching positions at other schools and marked the beginning of some huge changes at United. The next year, 1992, United Elementary began a partnership with Austin Interfaith, the local chapter of the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation, an organization whose primary purpose is to build power—the ability to act-and whose principal outcome is social change.

One of Austin Interfaith's first actions with the campus was to initiate a Neighborhood Walk, during which the United faculty and staff, together with members of area churches, went out into the neighborhood, knocking on doors and talking to the families that sent their children to United. Immediately the community became more involved in the workings of the school, strengthening this budding partnership. The neighborhood walk concept continues to be part of the United's school and neighborhood culture. This work and inspiration benefited the United learning community with the creation of new instructional and after school programs, health care partnerships and stronger school-community relationships.

I have been the principal at United since 2001. Before my appointment, the principals did not stay more than two to three years, and teachers often tell me that I have broken a record by staying at United this long. When I began working at United, there was a stable faculty and staff with experience ranging from novice to twenty-five years. I remember the district human resources coordinator telling me, "Oh you won't have trouble hiring for United. The school does not have a high turnover rate and whenever there is an opening, everybody wants to teach there." Most of the teachers at United

seemed to be empowered to speak up for their rights and for the children in their classes. At times, I agreed with them but there were times that their views went totally against my own views and practices as an educator.

When I began working at United one of the practices that I employed to get to know the staff was to have individual meetings with them. During these meetings I wanted to learn more about their individual "story," and asked the teachers to talk to me about themselves as teachers and individuals. These meetings helped me gather a better understanding of each teacher's values, beliefs and teaching philosophies. At the same time, they were able to listen to my story as well. I was able to establish strong, positive relationships with most of the staff through this type of sharing.

I admit the first year was not an easy year for me. I was not only a first year principal but I was a first year principal at a school that had an established climate with seasoned and empowered teachers. Because I was a new principal, I did a lot of observing and I asked a lot of questions about programs and procedures that were already in place. I remember one particular program, the "United Young Scientists" (UYS) that had been in place at United since 1993. It was a program that had been established to help some of the sixth graders in the school be better prepared for admission to the science magnet program at one of the district's middle schools. This program was started because history had shown that up until 1993 only one student from United had ever been accepted into the magnet program. Although the idea was to help children gain access to other schools and district programs that were providing higher-level learning, the class at United that was dedicated for this purpose seemed exclusive and isolated. This class in particular was composed of sixth graders that had been selected by a United committee of

teachers through an application and review process. Before the end of the fifth grade, the students had to submit an application to be considered for the class. There were three sixth grade classes that were formed—two "regular" classes and the "young scientist" class.

I immediately began to see immense differences in the three classes. The three teachers were experienced and seemed to care for the children and the children seemed happy in their classrooms and with their teachers. However, the differences I saw were in the children themselves—I noticed how they treated each other. The UYS class walked around the school as if only they existed. They had their own class t-shirts with their names on them and they participated in exclusive field trips and school activities. The other sixth grade classes did not participate in the same type of activities. Both "regular" classes followed the same schedule and the students in these two classes interacted with each other, but the UYS class had its own schedule and UYS students did not mingle at all with any students outside their class.

When I began to notice these differences, I decided I needed to learn the history behind this by talking with different people in the school. I talked with teachers, students and parents about the UYS class. It seemed that many of these stakeholders all felt the same way I did but had not spoken up, which surprised me because they all took pride in their empowerment and the changes accomplished due to their efforts. As the principal of the school, I decided that a change needed to be made and that the UYS philosophy needed to be applied throughout the sixth grade. As soon as I voiced these opinions, I came upon strong opposition from a few teachers and parents. All I wanted was for all of the children to be given the same opportunities and to be held to the highest learning

standards. If this was good for one class of children, then why would it not be good for all of them? I received hate mail and threatening phone calls. A few parents organized a petition for my removal. I stuck with my initial proposal and did not back down. I was suggesting a change that went right along with my beliefs and values and I was not going to let anyone change me or scare me in any way. My beliefs and my decisions were made with children as the focal point. I wholeheartedly believed that what I was doing was best for the students, so I stuck to my questions and continued to challenge the process.

I held many meetings with teachers and community members, including children, soliciting and listening to their opinions on the matter. I received enormous support from my associate superintendent and other central office personnel; and five long months later many of the staff members stepped forward and offered their support as well. Together, we were able to make changes to build equitable learning opportunities for all students in the years that followed. There were several components to the program that were modified, including the application process. The modified UYS program continued only for another school year, but its basic concepts were continued, now in all of the sixth grade classrooms. Today, we not only continue to send United students to the middle school science magnet program but our students are also applying for other magnet programs in the district.

The reason I tell this part of my history at United is that it is important to understand that my relationships with the staff were not formed in one day or even in one year. However, I do believe that through my years at United, I have established some strong, positive and open relationships with teachers, staff members, parents and children. I feel that I have been a role model for the formation of supportive relationships.

My Relationships with the Teacher Participants

I have established unique relationships with all of the staff members, especially with the three teacher participants in which I have strong, positive relationships. I have worked with two of the teachers, Liz and Mike, since my appointment as principal at United. I hired Belle, the third teacher-participant, at the beginning of my second year as principal.

This study was conducted to learn more about how these three teachers develop and sustain supportive teacher-student relationships, and since I have worked with them everyday for seven to eight years, I believe it is important to understand the relationship I have with each one of them. Here, I will discuss those relationships and later in this chapter I will provide a more detailed description of each participating teacher.

Mike was one of fifteen people on the interview committee the day I interviewed for the position as principal at United. Although we did not get to talk with each other one-to-one, we met on that day and soon after my appointment to United, I called Mike to set up an individual meeting. He came to my office and we talked for over an hour. He told me about himself, his family and why he was a teacher at United. He talked to me about the improvements that had happened at the school and things he felt still needed to change. He wanted to know more about my commitment to the school community and so he asked a lot of questions pushing me to tell my story.

Through our conversation that day, I realized that Mike was not there for self-recognition, but rather he was there to influence children and make a difference in their lives. I learned quickly that Mike was one of those teachers that was reflective, committed, and would not hesitate to set up time with me whenever he felt that things

were not headed in the right direction. Because of this, he and I have established a very open relationship. He can come to me without hesitation and I can go to him in the same way. We are able to talk freely and passionately without hurting each other's feelings. We may not always agree with the other's opinions but we are able to listen and appreciate the other's viewpoints. We both understand that our work is for the children.

Liz is also an experienced teacher that was already working at United when I was appointed principal. I do not remember our first encounters, but I do know that she is also like Mike in that she does not hesitate to talk with me whenever there are concerns. She is an advocate for children and her teammates and never hesitates to speak up in meetings. Liz is outspoken and calls herself "bossy." She is very humble and is not afraid to admit when things have not gone well. She shares stories with her students and colleagues as if they were her own family and often refers to her class as a family. As a principal, I can count on Liz to be the voice of reason and to look at the big picture. She knows that I believe in her and in the work she does at United.

Liz enjoys learning and welcomes challenges. She is comfortable coming to me with any concern and telling me how she feels. We have shared laughter and tears in these eight years we have worked together. Every Christmas, Liz sends me a card and a picture of her children. I feel that Liz and I understand each other on several different levels and both of us hold a strong regard for learning and for all of our children in the school. She often says, "teaching is a calling, it is not a job." I know exactly what she means.

Belle is the youngest of the teacher participants and unlike Liz and Mike, who were already teaching at United, I hired Belle during my second year as principal. I can

still remember my interview with Belle. Normally, I have a team of administrators and teachers conduct interviews but this interview took place in the summer due to a late resignation. I was working extra hours during that summer trying to fill a bilingual teaching position. I was not having any luck and was starting to panic. Then one afternoon I came across Belle's resume and I called her immediately. She had just finished her coursework at one of the local universities and had received her certification in bilingual education. I set up an interview with her for the very next day.

When Belle arrived for the interview, she was dressed in a summer suit and looked very professional. She reminded me of myself when I interviewed for my first teaching position. She was very young, vibrant and nervous. Immediately, we were able to talk as if we had known each other for years. She spoke about her passion for teaching bilingual students and how she wanted to work at a school with a student population like United's. Since I had been a bilingual teacher for nine years, I knew exactly what she was describing. I shared some of my own teaching experiences with her during the interview. She also shared stories about her upbringing and her family. I could see that she and I had many similarities and I felt that she would be able to connect with our students and their families. As soon as Belle left the office I submitted a recommendation for employment and she was hired as a United bilingual teacher.

Since that summer day in 2002, Belle has been committed to the United learning community. Three years ago, I asked Belle to loop with her third graders to fourth grade and she took on the challenge without any hesitation. Last year, I went back to her and asked her to take on another challenge and move to the fifth grade. We were desperate to have a fifth grade bilingual teacher who could connect with students and who had

credibility with the students and their parents. She gladly accepted even though I could see that she was a bit scared.

My relationship with Belle is one of a mentor-teacher relationship. She comes to me when she feels that she has run out of ideas or when she feels that she is just not making a difference in a child's life. She is a great listener and is always ready for feedback. She is one of the teachers that I know I can count on to do anything for our students and our community. I respect her opinions and I am always ready to try new things with her because of her enthusiasm, passion and commitment to our school.

Backgrounds of Teacher Participants and Myself

Teachers, students and parents at United Elementary were invited to participate in this research study and were identified through extreme sampling. To learn how teachers develop teacher-student relationships, "extreme cases or highly unusual manifestations of this phenomenon were studied" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The extreme cases in this study were teachers who were the most highly successful at developing positive relationships with students. First, the teachers were selected and then the teachers nominated students and parents to participate in the study. I contacted each of the parent nominees and met with them individually to describe the study and seek their participation. All but one of the parents and students who were nominated chose to participate.

To help the readers develop an understanding of the teacher-participants that goes beyond the earlier discussion of my relationships with them, I will share their stories. The three teacher biographies are each unique and yet have some similarities. Since this was a case study that took place at the school where I am the principal, I will also tell some of

my own story to help clarify who I am in relationship to the participants, the school and the study.

Liz. When I asked Liz to tell me about herself, it was clear to me that her experiences and the relationships that she built over the years have been instrumental in who she is as a person and a teacher. Liz is a forty-one year old white female that has been teaching at United for nineteen years. She has taught first, second, third and fourth grades. She began her teaching career at United as a first grade teacher after graduating from a major university with a Bachelors of Art in elementary education. She also holds an English as a Second Language (ESL) certification, which she earned a few years later. Liz said "I knew I wanted to be a teacher my whole life" and commented specifically about United, "I love the children here and feel like I can make a difference in their lives." Liz feels that her upbringing and childhood mirror some of the children in her class and the school, which has helped her understand and connect with them in her nineteen years of teaching.

Liz was one of four children whose parents divorced when she was eight years old and in the third grade. After the divorce, Liz, her mother and her three siblings moved from their small hometown to a large city within the same state. During this time, her family struggled financially and lived in two different apartments. Liz said, "My mother was unable to pay the rent." Liz also remembers starting at a new school that did not have walls separating the classrooms. Instead, the rooms were divided with chalkboards and low bookshelves. At this new school Liz said, "I never felt a connection with the students or the teachers."

When that school year ended, her mother realized that she could not raise four children on her own, thus Liz's older brother and sister went to live with their father in a nearby neighborhood. Liz and her younger brother had a different father and they went to live with him in a different state. She lived with her father and her stepmother for three years. Although she did not get along with her stepmother, Liz felt that her father kept she and her brother as his priority, which made it easier to be in another unfamiliar place. During this time, Liz remembered having a wonderful teacher that was loving, kind and helpful. Liz credits this teacher with "filling the void left by my mother's absence. She made a big difference in my life." Liz's memories of this teacher help her realize the impact a teacher can have on a student's life.

At the beginning of her seventh grade year, Liz and her brother moved back with their mother. Once again, Liz describes this time as difficult. They lived in six different houses from the time she was in the seventh grade up until her high school graduation. She also told me that they spent many days without electricity or water and when they had to move they had to leave in the middle of the night to stay one step ahead of the landlord. Even though Liz described growing up in difficult circumstances, she said, "I knew that my mother loved me and that she was proud of me. Both of my parents always treated me as if I was the smartest and most beautiful girl in the world and that I could do anything I set my mind to do." As the principal of the school, I have seen Liz share this type of love, concern and encouragement with her students.

Through the many conversations I have had with Liz, she often describes her family and her upbringing as one of the reasons she became a teacher and why she has stayed at United for nineteen years. She once told me, "For as long as I can remember I

wanted to be a teacher. Just ask my younger brother, I always played school and even organized our books like library books with pockets for checkout." Although her childhood and family life were not always stable and easy, she confidently talks about her relationships with her parents and her siblings and how these formed her into the person she is today.

Liz's relationship with her older sister has been one that she has relied on through her childhood and adult life. In one of Liz's reflections she described her older sister as a caregiver. She specifically recalls the time they moved with their mother to the large city and how her sister, who was in the ninth grade at the time, walked her younger brother to his preschool and Liz to her elementary school everyday. She remembers her sister waiting at the corner until Liz entered the school building safely. In another reflection, Liz wrote about her sister,

> My sister came to the rescue again. At only twenty-four and only a year out of college herself, my sister paid for my summer college tuition, room and board and books so that I could attend the university of my choice immediately after graduating from high school. She is my hero.

This was very important to Liz because summer school was a prerequisite to attending this university. Liz uses these experiences and relationships and many more to connect with her students and families. In fact, I have heard Liz share stories from her life with her students. I have never seen her fail to have empathy and care for a child, a parent or a colleague.

Belle. Belle, the youngest teacher participant, began her teaching career at United and has now been teaching seven years. Belle is thirty-years old and Latina. She earned a Bachelor of Arts with certification in bilingual education from a university far from her hometown. She credits her parents and the strong family bonds that they have formed through the years for her determination to do well in school and to earn a college degree.

There are four children in her family, and she is the only girl. She grew up in a small town located deep in the southern tip of Texas, part of the Rio Grande Valley. Belle credits her strong family bond to the love, respect, and trust her parents taught her and her siblings. For Belle, these values allowed them to talk with their parents openly about anything, and she recognizes that this has helped them be a close, loving family. She also believes that her relationship with her family has helped her as a teacher. Belle's interviews and reflections revealed that her family values strongly affect her teaching beliefs and philosophy.

In one of her reflections Belle wrote, "My parents have always been extremely involved in our education. They saw how much they struggled to raise a family without a college degree and they wanted us to have the best education possible." Belle also remembers her parents constantly pushing her to get "A's" on her report cards and instilling in her and her siblings that education was the key to success. Her parents always encouraged her to do her best.

One thing that Belle remembers fondly is the relationship that her parents had with her teachers. She says these relationships have contributed to her deep desire to form the same type of relationships with her students and their parents. She knows how

important this was for her and her schooling and now that she is a teacher, she wants the same thing for her students.

Belle was also shaped by her relationships with her teachers. She remembers one teacher in particular who was very supportive and encouraging. This teacher would take the time to help students apply to prestigious colleges and universities, even taking them on trips to see the schools. Belle stated in a reflection, "We had so much support that we sincerely felt we could be accepted into those prestigious schools. As a result, many students were accepted, including my older brother." I have seen Belle help and encourage United students in the same way. In one interview, Belle described how her own teachers helped her and others. Belle regularly helps students with their school projects, homework, and with magnet school applications. Throughout her seven years at United, Belle has conducted after-school enrichment classes such as dance, technology and news reporting as a means to extend students' opportunities to learn.

Belle told me that her interest in becoming a teacher was sparked when she was in high school teaching catechism classes to third graders. Some of her students were struggling readers and this impacted her as their teacher. It was during this time that Belle decided to set a goal to become a teacher. She said, "I decided to become a teacher who would motivate students to learn to read and to make learning enjoyable for kids." I have seen Belle help children become better readers while she provides a learning environment that is fun and exciting. Many of her students, parents and colleagues testify to Belle's special teaching style and to the support she has provided to them over the years.

Mike. Mike, the only male teacher-participant, took a different route in becoming a teacher. He is a Latino in his late forties and grew up in a large city. Before becoming a teacher, he attended a community college in the same city where he grew up and became a freelance artist and sign painter. He did this type of work for one year. He earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from a large university and began substituting in schools. His love for art drew him back to freelance artwork and he did this for another year. At the same time, his passion for working with children was still alive and kept pulling him to do other kinds of work. The attraction to teaching and learning led him to become a teacher assistant.

When he decided to delve into this new line of work, Mike was hired at United as a teacher assistant. Shortly after becoming a teacher assistant and working directly with children, Mike realized that he wanted to share his knowledge and his passion for learning with children in a deeper way. He decided he would become a teacher and enrolled in an alternative teaching program to earn his teaching certification. He has been a teacher at United for twelve years. He knew United was the right choice for him because it was in his own neighborhood and he was familiar with its surroundings and its culture. In one of his interviews, Mike commented about working at United, "I have a connection with it because I grew up here. I understand somewhat where our kids come from."

Mike believes that learning is everywhere—in the home, in the school environment and on a sandy beach. He strongly believes that educators should provide children with opportunities for learning and allow the time to immerse themselves in the

learning. Mike told me in one of the interviews that education should give us a sense of who we are as human beings. Specifically, he said,

> Through education, we begin to understand each other, and look at each other's pasts, present, and futures. It also makes opportunities available to individuals from different backgrounds, both culturally and economically. It helps them get to a point where they have an open awareness of their surroundings and the world.

For Mike, education is the bridge that makes the world a level playing field for everyone. He works as a teacher with this possibility in mind.

During my eight years that I have worked with Mike, I have learned that for him, listening is very important. He believes that teachers should listen to their students because "without listening you may just know the surface; you will not know your students in an in-depth way." He also believes that through listening "you will develop a trusting relationship that will allow the students to let you in on who they are and where they are coming from."

What I have also learned about Mike as a teacher is that his calm demeanor and patience with the students has earned him the reputation of a caring, respectful individual. He also honors and respects different cultures and beliefs. I have been around him when he works with students to understand the world around them and how their small community is part of a larger community. He plans lessons that help his students get a clearer understanding of the world beyond their neighborhood and how their decisions and knowledge will affect the world around them. I have seen how he uses his connection with the students to help them develop their own perceptions and voice for their learning

and their community. Mike wants his students to have the same learning opportunities and choices as his own two children.

During my time as principal at United, I have seen how Mike's relationships with his mother, father, wife and children are a big part of what he shares everyday with his students and the United community. I have seen the closeness he shares with his family, showing affection and love candidly. When Mike's children were old enough to attend United and he brought them to school in the morning, they would always hug and kiss Mike goodbye, and do the same to their grandparents when they picked the children up at the end of the school day. He shares his life stories openly with his class and does not hesitate to make time when his students need him. He loves to make others laugh and because he has a quick sense of humor he is able to use this with his students. It seems that he recognizes when his students need him to be this way with them. He utilizes his time, humor and a variety of teaching techniques to build strong relationships with students so that they can be successful.

Rosa. As with the three teacher participants, my family, educational experiences and relationships have all contributed to my learning, teaching and leadership. I am a forty-four year old Latina. I grew up in a very small town with one older brother, my mother, my father and many, many extended family members. In my small hometown, everybody knew everybody. We only had one elementary school, one junior high and one high school. One of my best friend's fathers was our superintendent and her mother was my teacher for different content areas in high school. I have always believed that education and learning are a part of my destiny. Both have been enjoyable and fulfilling parts of my life as a child, teenager and adult.

Throughout this research project, whether it was during the interviews, observations or informal conversations I was conducting with the participants, I was reminded of my own experiences and relationships. It seems that everything is tied to the relationships I have formed. Everything and everyone are so interconnected. The teacher participants expressed their views on how their families played such an important role in shaping them into who they are today. I feel the same way. My parents were my first and certainly the most influential teachers I have had in my life. Although neither completed high school, my mother completed the third grade and my father the eleventh grade; the education they provided was instrumental in developing my love for learning and learning skills. In fact, I believe it was their lack of formal education that served as a catalyst for instilling the importance of education in both my older brother and me. I heard the same sentiments from the parent-participants during their interviews. They stressed the importance of education and positive relationships with the teachers because they wanted their children to have opportunities they may not have had themselves.

One of the more profound memories I have of learning came from listening to my mother read and rehearse her "desarrollos." Desarollos were faith-based talks she presented at various church retreats throughout the state of Texas. She was very committed and went to great lengths to prepare. She would slip quietly into her bedroom to reflect privately on her life and the related theme she was presenting. She would tape record herself practicing, critique the recordings and make adjustments as needed. I can still hear her voice, strong and loud and very proud of what she was sharing and teaching others. I would often find myself imitating her speech and the style of her delivery; she was confident and faced her audience without fear or hesitation.

These talks required her to share stories of personal difficulties or struggles and resulted in moments of vulnerability and contemplation. Being her usual pillar of strength, she willingly sacrificed those moments time after time knowing her work was helping others grow in their own faith and person. Through her example, I inadvertently picked up on my mother's learning style of repetition and reflection, which has served me well in my own endeavors. Most importantly, I learned about my faith, personal strength, and the power of knowledge, resiliency and most of all humility. Both of my parents supported and encouraged almost anything my older brother and I wanted to participate in, especially those related to school or church. As my coach and mentor, I recall my mother listening to me for hours on end while I practiced the French horn for band or prose and poetry readings for an upcoming competition.

My older brother was also a vital mentor and teacher throughout my life. Because he was four years older than I was, I shadowed him for most of our thirty-three years together and learned an enormous amount from him personally and professionally. It was through his example that I came to appreciate the value of relationships in my life and the part they play in my emotional and physical well-being. I witnessed his interactions with friends and colleagues and saw the time and effort he put into nurturing those relationships. He maintained relationships with a large number of friends from childhood, which I always respected.

As an educator, my older brother's influence on my career choice and ultimate teaching style set the tone for a successful career in the classroom. His eleven years of teaching were dedicated to special education and low-income students living in disadvantaged communities. As an undergraduate education student, I would visit his

campus to observe teachers in action. I was always in awe of his ability to keep total command of the class, the intense but excited look in the students' eyes, and the boundless energy and creativity he exuded with each and every lesson. I learned to do the same thing in my own classroom when I finally became a teacher. He guided me in my first years and I know I would not have made it without his support and encouragement. My brother is the reason I became a teacher. I wanted to be just like him. *(I have a huge grin, a warm feeling in my heart and tears in my eyes as I recall these special thoughts about my older brother!)*

Throughout my elementary, middle and high school years, I consistently had positive role models to help shape my educational experience. The majority of my teachers were nurturing and encouraging, and most of them went out of their way to ensure our success. There were a few special teachers who I gravitated towards, and some of these teacher-student relationships expanded into extraordinary friendships outside of school. It was those teachers who challenged me to try new things and broadened my horizons beyond anything I would have imagined for myself.

My greatest influence came from my high school civics teacher, who was also my forensics coach. She believed in my abilities from the beginning, and gave me the confidence to participate and be successful in all my endeavors. She worked hard as I learned to recite prose and poetry and ultimately helped me obtain a college scholarship on those merits. Unfortunately, I had a very hard time transitioning into college life and was not able to complete my degree at that time. I had a difficult time at this new place because I did not make any connections with anyone at the university. I knew a few people but I did not have a close relationship with any of them and I had a difficult time

making connections with anyone. This was by far one of the most negative educational experiences I have had to endure. I decided to go back home and relinquish my scholarship. This was a very hard decision because my parents did not have the money to pay for my college education, but I was not happy and they supported my decision. I moved back home and gained full-time employment for about six months. My parents, my brother and close friends continuously encouraged me to go back to college and complete my degree. With their support, I was able to move to a larger city where my brother was working and attend a university there to finish my degree. After three years I completed my degree, earning a Bachelor of Arts with a focus on bilingual education and graduated with honors.

The special relationships and experiences of my childhood and youth are what make it easy for me to connect with people, especially children. When I became a teacher, I did not know any other way to support my own students except to share my own learning experiences so that they too could feel successful and experience the nurturing feelings that I was so fortunate to have experienced throughout my educational career. As a teacher and principal, I have formed the same nurturing, positive relationships with my students and their families as my own "teachers" developed with me.

Teaching itself was very rewarding, and teaching in two languages and transitioning students from one language to the other brought added rewards. The pressure of helping my students to reach academic success was quite a challenge and extremely exhausting at times, but the exhilaration I felt watching the "light bulbs" come on made it all worth while. Being one of the youngest teachers on the campus, many of

the veteran teachers took me under their wings, which greatly contributed to my success in the classroom. The relationships I formed with them were supportive and encouraging.

Relationships are the thread in my personal story as was with the stories I shared about the three teacher-participants. Relationships are what made our stories similar and what made this research study even more important for me as the principal of United. Learning how to create ecologically fit classrooms through supportive teacher-student relationships for every student in every classroom was the goal of this study.

<div align="center">Findings For Each Research Question</div>

The findings are presented here under the three research questions. Figure 2 provides an overview of the findings. The presentation of each major theme and category begins with a story that illustrates the general nature of that theme or category.

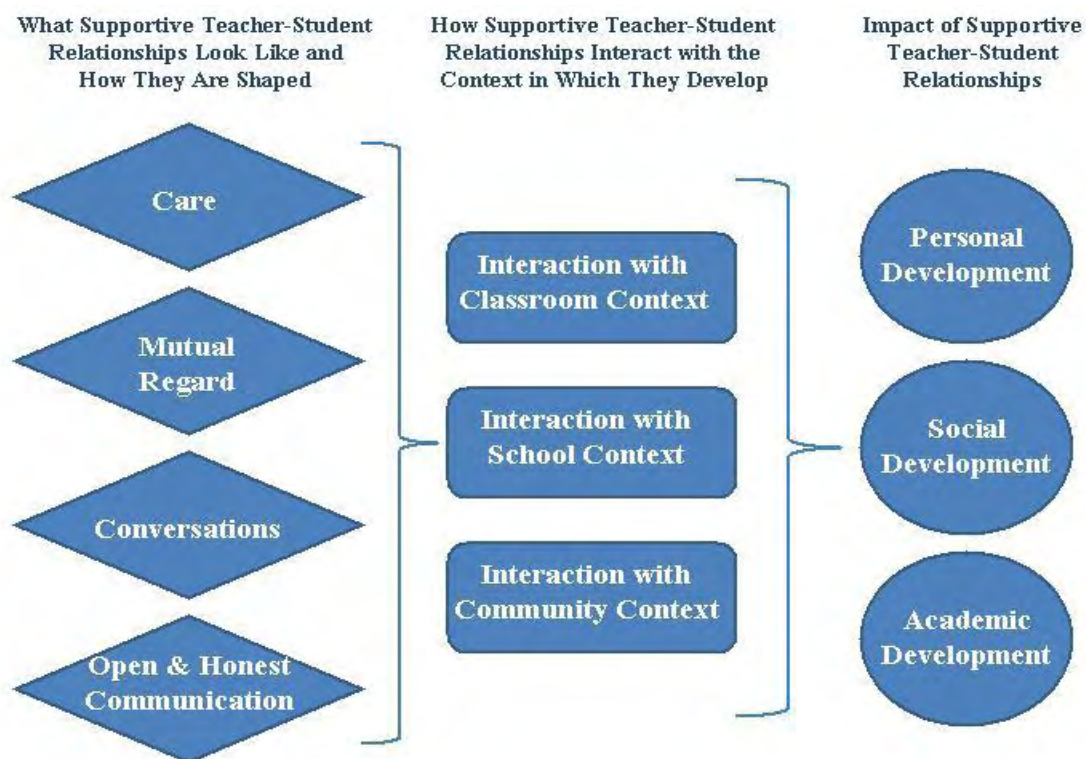| What Supportive Teacher-Student Relationships Look Like and How They Are Shaped	How Supportive Teacher-Student Relationships Interact with the Context in Which They Develop	Impact of Supportive Teacher-Student Relationships
Care	Interaction with Classroom Context	Personal Development
Mutual Regard	Interaction with School Context	Social Development
Conversations	Interaction with Community Context	Academic Development
Open & Honest Communication		

Figure 2: Overview of Results

Research Question 1: What Do Supportive Teacher-Student Relationships Look Like and

How Are They Shaped?

Four themes were identified under research question one: care, mutual regard, conversations and open and honest communication. For each of these themes, sub-themes that further explain the themes are presented.

Care

Carlos, a United student for the past three years, entered class one day almost unrecognizable, not in a physical sense, but in his emotional state. He always came to class prepared to learn and with a "happy go lucky" attitude. He was well liked by his peers and the adults in the school. This particular morning though, he was not himself. He entered very quietly and did not make eye contact with any of his friends or the teacher. Mike, Carlos' teacher, immediately recognized the unusual behaviors and thought to himself that maybe Carlos just woke up on the wrong side of the bed and he needed some time; so Mike did not engage Carlos in any conversation or ask him any questions. They both went about their morning routines. Carlos went to another class for the first period and Mike went on his break.

During his break, Mike came to my office to talk with me about Carlos' unusual behaviors and to get my opinion on how to handle the situation. Mike came to me because he knew that Carlos' mother and I kept in close contact about her boys' academic and social progress. Carlos and his seven siblings had been through some major family changes earlier in the school year and their adopted mother worked closely with the school to meet their academic and emotional needs. Carlos did not let his family situation interfere with his learning; rather, he used the experience to gain self-

confidence and trust and respect from his peers and the adults he encountered every day. In fact, he was a positive role model for his younger siblings as he communicated to the adults in his life how he wanted to be treated. He did not want anyone feeling sorry for him; rather he wanted us to focus on his learning and success.

Mike asked me if Carlos' mother had called me to inform me of anything that might have happened with Carlos to put him in such a state. I had not heard from Carlos' mother so Mike and I talked about some options on how to approach the situation. I could see the deep concern in Mike's eyes when we talked. We decided that it would be best for Mike to talk with Carlos instead of sending him to the counselor or to me because Mike and Carlos had developed a strong and trusting relationship as a result of their daily interaction. We also decided we would wait to call Carlos' mother until after Mike talked with him.

Mike asked me if I could find someone to cover his class so that he could talk with Carlos privately. I volunteered to teach his class while he spoke with Carlos. When Carlos and Mike returned to the classroom, we were well into the lesson. Both of them came in laughing. Their faces did not show any concern. To me Carlos looked like himself, with a big grin and a sense of calm—very different from what Mike had described to me earlier in the morning. Mike looked relieved and very different from the way I had seen him in my office. The time that Mike took to talk with Carlos had made a difference.

When Mike and Carlos returned to the room the other students were leading the learning so I was able to make a gradual transition from teacher to observer and allow Mike to jump right in. I decided to stay in the classroom and participate in the lesson. I

sat in a place where I could keep an eye on Carlos and get a sense of how he was doing and still be able to interact with other students. While observing the class, I noticed Mike was able to grab the students' attention. He made the students laugh during the lesson and his jokes kept them focused on what he was saying. When a student volunteered, Mike said, "I love it when you volunteer and those are some brilliant thoughts. Keep them coming." The other students would smile whenever he said things like this and others' hands would shoot up in the air for the teacher to acknowledge them.

Mike visited students' tables to assist them as they worked through a group assignment. He asked them open-ended questions to push their thinking as a group. As he monitored the learning conversations, Mike would get near the students and would even put his hand on their shoulders as an act of encouragement and a reminder that he was there for them. Mike also encouraged the students to put themselves in the situation they were studying. He suggested that the students make connections to their own lives and to use those life experiences as part of their learning.

Mike provided a rubric on the board with examples for the students to reference as they worked on their assignment. He referred to the rubric several times when the students would ask specific questions. Mike also provided a variety of story maps and graphic organizers to students to help them as they worked through the assignment. The teacher explained to several students how to complete each writing component and how each of these would lead to a complete composition. The students were able to complete this assignment with ease because Mike had given them the resources necessary to work through the assignment in parts rather than as a single activity. Not all of the students needed this extra support but it was there for those who needed it.

When the time came for the groups to share their findings with the class, Mike was very careful in setting this up. He reminded the students of the expectations for listening and participating. Carlos' group was one of the first groups to share their findings. Carlos was the leader of the group. He stood in front of the group with confidence and did not hesitate to answer any questions that were posed to him or the group.

Mike, as part of Carlos' community, responded in the helpful way that Harvey (1996) describes occurring in an ecological fit. Mike showed Carlos support for positive coping by taking the time to talk with him. Through the care that Mike shared with Carlos, he promoted belongingness and Carlos was able to return to class and fully participate.

This study showed that care was a critical factor in nurturing supportive teacher-student relationships and cultivating positive, effective, and successful learning environments in all three teachers' classrooms. Brown (2004) explains, "Most significant perhaps to each child or adolescent in urban schools is the willingness and ability of an educator to genuinely touch each student's social and emotional persona" (p. 269). Teachers in Brown's study illustrated that, "a strong commitment to an ethic of caring for students" is needed for students to commit to learning and that teachers needed "to get to their [students'] hearts before their heads" (p. 276-77). Noddings (1992, p. 22) explains, "We show kids we care by creating caring relations with them." Valenzuela (1999) found that students have a need for reciprocal relationships; "Their precondition to caring about school is that they be engaged in a caring relationship with an adult at the school" (p. 79). As the principal of United I observed and experienced daily acts of care and examples of

caring relations throughout the study. The three teacher participants agreed that the teacher must show that he or she cares for the students. Liz said,

> The students really need to feel that the teacher cares about them or cares about their outcomes, which would show that the relationship is authentic. I want my students to know that I want them in my classroom everyday, that I want the best for them and that I want them to be successful. A third party looking at the relationship might say that the teacher and the student care about each other. They might say, "that is a positive relationship."

Belle added, "you need to be caring and committed to the students because they need you; they need you for whatever, to be their teacher, their mom, their sister, their counselor, and their judge." The theme of care enveloped three sub-themes: individual academic assistance, support and encouragement, and use of humor.

Individualized academic assistance. One way that the teachers showed care for the students was through the individualized assistance they provided to all of them. Both the parents and the students stressed that this assistance was a major aspect of positive teacher-student relationships. During the classroom observations, I regularly observed the types of assistance that the parents and students described. Ladson-Billings (1995) found that culturally responsive teachers

> Saw their responsibility as working to guarantee the success of each student. The students who seemed furthest behind received plenty of individualized attention and encouragement. When students came to them with skill deficiencies, the teachers worked to help the student build bridges or scaffolding so that they could

be proficient in the more challenging work they experienced in these classrooms.

(p. 163)

The level of help the teacher gave the student looked different with every teacher and student. At times this help was given to students during the school day and at other times after school—It depended on the students and their needs. One student in Liz's class said, "Every time I needed help or when I couldn't get the right answer, Ms. Smith would sit with me and help me figure it out. " Liz 's students were well aware that she would provide assistance when needed and they did not hesitate to ask her for help. Belle also continuously provided assistance to her students. One of Belle's students said,

Ms. Garcia helped us if she saw that we needed help. She would call us to her table or her desk to help us individually but she also helped us when we worked in small groups by coming to our desks and asking us questions or giving us examples.

The kind of individualized assistance the participating teachers gave students depended on the students themselves. One of Mike's students described the assistance that Mike had provided:

On some days Mr. Cantú would let me stay after school and he would give some assistance with the homework or talk to me about what we would be studying next. Sometimes when I needed more help or time to complete my work, Mr. Cantú would find me a special place to get the work done. He would break down the work into parts for me and help me get organized. Mr. Cantú helped me a lot.

The parents also felt that the teachers' individualized assistance was vital to the teacher-student relationship. For them, when the teacher made time to help their child, the

teacher showed that he or she cared about their child's success. One of Mike's student's parents explained this assistance,

> Mr. Cantú would sit down and explain things to him and would take the time to check his work and go over it with him. Mr. Cantú would write things down for him to use to help him correct [his work].

Another of Mike's student's parents recognized how Mike helped her son. The parent felt that Mike knew exactly what her child needed to be successful and put in extra effort to accomplish this with him.

> Mr. Cantú focused on what my child was most behind in and helped him in that area. My child was not improving in his reading and Mr. Cantú focused on this area. He made an observation about my son's interests and found him some reading on that topic. That really got my son to do better and improve. I am very grateful because Mr. Cantú was a great help to my son.

> In the same manner, the parents of students in Liz's class described how she provided individualized assistance to their children. One parent said, "Ms. Smith worked with my child extra on the side…" And another parent from Liz's class remarked,

> Ms. Smith did a lot of one-to-one with my child in whatever area he needed help. She would minimize the quantity of work to help him be successful. It was still the same [level of] work but it was less [quantity].

> One of the parents of a child in Belle's class explained that Belle helped them as well as their daughter. The parent said, "When my child was having difficulty with some of the math homework, I came to Ms. Garcia and she taught me how to do the work. This helped me understand how to help my child at home."

During classroom observations, I saw how the participating teachers provided individualized assistance to their students. For example, Mike sat next to a student and helped him complete a computerized reading test by reading the questions and answer choices to him. In the end, the student was successful. I also noticed that Mike never turned another student away who came for help. He would simply pause and help the student in need by answering their questions, by posing questions to get the child to reflect on their work or by acknowledging the good work they were doing. Any student who came to Mike was able to return to his or her table and continue working independently.

Both Belle and Liz assisted students individually at the students' desks by moving close to them and talking in soft voices. The students acknowledged the assistance by giving the teacher a smile or by nodding their heads in agreement with the help they received. Belle and Liz also helped students during small group instruction by giving them work matched to their learning level and focusing on their individual needs. The teachers in this study agreed with Ladson-Billings (1995) that, "Culturally relevant teaching requires that teachers attend to students' academic needs, not merely make them "feel good" (p. 160).

Support and encouragement. The teachers, students and parents all stressed support and encouragement as aspects of the teacher-student relationship. Ladson-Billings (1994), describing classrooms of effective teachers of African American students, noted, "Psychological safety is a hallmark of each of these classrooms. The students feel comfortable and supported" (p. 73). A student in Mike's class explained,

Mr. Cantú was encouraging with his words and actions. He would smile at us and he was happy. Mr. Cantú would say, "do your best" and "never give up." He would also motivate me by saying, "Do your best. It's all right, practice and never give up."

Belle's students also felt that she was encouraging and supportive. The students said that she did this in many different ways but mostly she pushed them to do "good" work and always gave them positive feedback. However, the students in Belle's class also talked about her positive attitude and energy as encouraging and supportive. One of Belle's students explained, "The teacher is always positive, happy and smiling. She is always friendly."

In the same way, a parent of one of Belle's students explained how positive she was with everyone she encountered. The parent explained,

Whenever I enter the classroom, I sense positive energy. Ms. Garcia is like a flower in the springtime; everything seems to shine in the classroom. All of the students seem happy and content. It feels good to be in her classroom. It is very positive.

The students in Liz's classroom, as well as their parents, felt that she exhibited a positive attitude and was encouraging and supportive with all of her students. One of Liz's students said, "Every time I wanted to give up, she would say 'don't give up, I'll help you and it will be easy.' I believed her." A parent of one of Liz's students said that Liz always praised her child. "Ms. Smith would allow him to show his good work to others. She wanted him to feel proud of his good work and his accomplishments."

During the classroom observations, I consistently heard the teachers praising and sharing positive words with the students. Mike used phrases like, "Those are some excellent thoughts, keep them coming" and "Wow, you made an excellent connection to your own life." This type of talk was a common practice in Liz's classroom as well. During one lesson, she was working with a group of three students and each student was reading their part of the play they were practicing. Liz said, "Very good, great. I like that expression you were using." When she said this, the student began to read louder and he smiled at Liz when he finished reading. During another observation, Belle responded to a student's contribution by saying, "I couldn't have said it better. You gave me goose bumps. I like the words you are using." The praise and positive comments were consistently present in all three teachers' classrooms.

The teacher participants discussed the positive attitude that they tried to display every day and the praise that they believed was important for every child. They felt that their positive attitude and energy made a big difference in the way the students responded to their teaching. Belle explained,

> You have to be positive and energetic. If you are up there trying to give a lesson
> and you don't really want to give it, they are going to know it and not listen to
> you. I tell my students, whatever you give off is what you are going to get back.
> So if you are in a good mood and positive, then they will be in a good mood.

Liz described the praise and encouragement she gave her students. She also felt that it was important to acknowledge the students in different ways.

> I try to do a lot of positive praise in order to motivate them. I try different things
> to show them praise, like the little bell thing when I see someone doing something

out of the box; they love doing that. I do believe we should focus on the positive

things they are doing.

The bell ringing was an incentive Liz used with her class whenever the students displayed

a kind act, shared kind words or went beyond the normal standards of conduct.

I observed encouraging, positive interactions between the teachers and their

students in all three classrooms. The teachers responded to students' comments and work

in a supportive manner. I also heard positive, encouraging words during the parent

conferences. I observed the teachers telling the parents all of the good things that the

child was doing in the class and at school.

The support and encouragement I observed was what Howard (2002) calls

"culturally connected caring"; it was given within a cultural context familiar to the

students. In this type of caring, "expectations, nurturing patterns, and forms of affection

take place in a manner that does not require students to abandon their cultural integrity"

(p. 434). Some examples of culturally connected caring that Howard identified in his

study were similar to what I found in this study; pats on the back to encourage students to

do their best and direct statements about how the teachers' felt about their students'

academic potential.

Use of humor. The teacher's use of humor was another quality of the teacher-

student relationship. Kelly (2005) cautioned, "Humor must be chosen carefully to not be

sarcastic or offensive to any group. Each teacher must have a relationship and rapport

with the students and community to understand what type of humor is acceptable" (p. 6).

The parent participants occasionally talked about how the teachers made their child feel

comfortable by being humorous or funny, but it was the students who consistently

described their teachers in this way. Berk (1998) notes, "The pedagogical use of humor has been shown to have both psychological and physiological effects on learners. Physiologically, the effects of humor and laughter have been shown to reduce anxiety, decrease stress, enhance self-esteem, and increase self-motivation" (p. 177). Although all three teachers were described as having fun in the classroom and being funny at times, there were two teachers in particular that the students consistently described as funny: Mike and Belle.

When discussing Mike's teaching, a student explained, "Mr. Cantú would joke around with us. He would tell us jokes. He would make things funny so that we could understand it more. He would make us laugh." Another student said, "Mr. Cantú always had something funny to say. He had toys that he would use to get our attention. These toys would make us laugh." A parent of a student in Mike's class also made reference to his humor.

> Mr. Cantú was giving my son an award; we did not know and we were late to school that morning so he missed the presentation. When he entered the room, the teacher said, "Son, you are in a lot of trouble. Your name was called in the auditorium this morning." My son was shocked. Then Mr. Cantú reached for the certificate and presented it to him with a huge smile. When my son told me that story, he was also smiling so big. It was through Mr. Cantú' sense of humor that he made my son happy too.

The students in Belle's class also mentioned how she liked having fun with them. It was not that she told them jokes; she found other ways to make them laugh. One of

Belle's students said, "Ms. Garcia makes things fun for us, especially when we don't understand something. She tries to make it funny. She is silly and fun."

Although the students in Liz's class did not mention her humor as consistently as students of the other two teachers, Liz described her class as a place where everyone shared laughter and fun. She said, "I think my class is fun. We laugh and we joke appropriately. We see the humor in things. We don't laugh at each other."

Students frequently referred to the participating teachers' use of humor during difficult lessons. The teachers would break the tension of the learning by helping them laugh and relax. The students also felt that the teachers were not always serious; they could be relaxed too. This sense of humor and fun made learning easier for the students; it was a motivator for learning. Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) explain, "Rather than trying to know *what to do to students*, we must work to interpret and deepen their existing knowledge and enthusiasm for learning. From this viewpoint, motivationally effective teaching is culturally responsive" (p.17). Laughter was part of the caring relationships that the teachers and the students shared. Garner (2006) says, "When properly used, humor can be an effective tool to make a class more enjoyable, reduce anxiety, and improve the learning setting. The "ha-ha" of humor in the classroom may indeed contribute to the "aha!" of learning from the student" (p. 180).

Summary. A consistently caring environment is necessary for the teacher-student relationship to flourish and for the student to be successful. The caring environment identified in this study was shaped through individualized academic assistance, support and encouragement and use of humor. Phelan, Yu and Davidson (1994) studied the variables that students perceived to have an impact on their learning and their school

activities. The students consistently stated, "teachers who had a positive impact on their learning frequently encouraged them and provided personalized attention when they began experiencing academic difficulties" (as cited in Howard, 2002, p. 429). Through academic assistance, encouragement and support, and use of humor, Mike, Belle and Liz established caring relations with their students. Gay (2000) reminds us that "this kind of caring is manifested in the form of teacher attitudes, expectations, and behaviors about students' human value, intellectual capability, and performance responsibilities. Teachers demonstrate caring for children as students and as people" (p. 45).

Mutual Regard

One Thursday afternoon during dismissal time, Belle and I were standing together monitoring the students as they left the school grounds. A parent of one of Belle's former students walked up to talk with her. They greeted each other with a hug and some small talk about how long it had been since they had seen each other. Belle asked her about her family and how they were doing and the parent asked the same of Belle. It was as if they were old friends.

The parent then told Belle that she had come to look for her because she needed a favor. Belle listened to the mother intently as the parent explained the situation. They stood very close to each other as they talked. The mother began to explain that her daughter, Nora, who was now in the eighth grade and had been with Belle when she was a third grader, was going to have a ceremony at her middle school and she would not be able to attend because she had to work the day of the celebration. The parent then asked Belle if she thought she could take her daughter to the ceremony and take her place as the parent. She told Belle that as she and Nora were discussing the work conflict and the

possibility that she would not be able to attend, Nora thought of Belle and how she would

love it if Belle could take her.

Belle asked her for the ceremony details. The parent said; "It is this Saturday,

day after tomorrow at noon." The parent immediately began to explain again why she

could not take Nora but Belle interrupted her and said, "Yes, I would be honored and

happy to take Nora." The parent gave a huge sigh of relief; I heard it from where I was

standing. The parent told Belle that Nora's aunts had bought her a new dress and that

Nora had done really well that school year academically and socially. She was very

proud of her daughter. They discussed other details such as the exact nature of the

ceremony and the time that Belle would go by their apartment to pick up Nora. They

hugged one more time and the parent thanked her over and over. Belle told the mother,

"It is my pleasure to be with Nora during such a special time. I am very proud of her and

you. Please don't worry about this anymore. It is no trouble."

After the parent departed, Belle moved closer to me to continue the conversation

we were having before this parent came to talk with her. I told Belle that I was proud of

her for being so caring and giving of her time to help this family. Belle said, "We have

had a special relationship ever since Nora was in my class. They have kept in touch with

me and have been very kind to me too. From day one, I was very open with them and

vice-versa. We trusted and understood each other." As the principal of the school and

one of Belle's mentors, I was beaming with pride.

It was evident in Belle's story that trust and respect had been established with this

parent and her child. Both the mother and the child knew that if the mother could not take

her to her ceremony, then Belle was the perfect substitute. By accepting the request to

take Nora to the ceremony, Belle was promoting belongingness for Nora and her family. Belle understood the importance of this celebration and was willing to give her time to enhance the environment-person relationship for this student. Belle and this family had formed a mutual relationship of trust, respect and open-mindedness, the three sub-themes identified within the theme of mutual regard.

Trust. All three teachers' descriptions of what the teacher-student relationship looked like included trust between the teacher and the student. Liz said, "Where this is trust, the students are not nervous to come and approach the teacher with questions." In a similar manner, the teachers in a study by Brown (2004) "relied on their strong relationships with students built on trust rather than fear or punishment to maintain a cooperative learning environment" (p. 286). Belle stated,

> You have to build trust between you and the student. Sometimes it is hard to do that but it has to be done. I want them to know that I am there for them and that I am looking out for their best interest. I am there for them to talk to as a friend and also a teacher. When the students see that you are there for them and they feel they can trust you, they open up to you. Winning the parents' trust also has to happen. They need to trust me with their children. Getting to know the parents is important in building trust. I make sure they know that I am here for their child.

Mike described trust in a somewhat different way. He said, "The teacher and the student allow themselves to be wrong in front of each other. There is a willingness to try on the part of both." Along similar lines, Miller (2002) says

> Establishing trust takes time and begins with the teacher. The teacher must trust children enough to give them the time and the tools to think for themselves, to

pose and solve problems, and to make informed decisions about learning. Trust

needs to be mutual. (p. 20)

Respect. Mike, Belle and Liz felt that mutual respect was also important in the

establishment of the teacher-student relationship. This is consistent with Delpit's (2006)

conclusion that the culturally responsive teacher establishes meaningful relationships that

garner student respect. Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) posit that culturally responsive

teaching requires that "teachers create a learning atmosphere in which students and

teachers feel respected by and connected to one another" (p. 19). Belle elaborated on the

concept of respect:

> Respect the student because the student is a person. They notice when you respect
>
> them and they will return the respect. I treat kids respectfully. I try to put myself
>
> in their shoes. I go back to a quote, 'you can make a child, or break a child,' and
>
> so you have to put yourself in their shoes. Do I want someone yelling at me in
>
> front of everybody or humiliating me? No, because they know you may not like
>
> that person.

Mike agreed that the teacher-student relationship needed to be respectful. He said, "With

respect, there is this idea that we are in this classroom together. It's about building

discussions with each other, working with each other, and being able to go on this

journey together and discovering what's around us."

One of Belle's students mentioned that Belle would always tell her students,

"Treat others the way you want to be treated. Ms. Garcia wanted us to respect each other

in the same way we wanted others to respect us. She always referred to this as one of our

most important lessons." This student perception reflects Brown's (2004) admonition that

teachers "must quickly comprehend how to effectively develop a classroom of mutual respect and cooperation if they intend to positively affect students' learning and survive professionally in an urban classroom" (p. 287).

Open-mindedness. Along with trust and respect, all three teachers felt that being open to their students' voices was important in the formation of the teacher-student relationship. Liz said, "Everyone's opinion matters in my classroom. I try to hear from everybody during most of my lessons." This reflects Miller's (2002) advice that "Respecting their [the students'] ideas, opinions, and decisions doesn't mean carte blanche acceptance, but it does mean giving their voices sincere consideration. If we're asking children to thoughtfully consider the thinking of others, we must expect no less from ourselves." (p. 20). Mike expressed his ideas on open-mindedness as follows:

It's the openness that I am always willing to hear what they have to say; that willingness to hear the perspectives they bring and having a sense to understand why they do what they do. I let them know, "give me what you can give me now and then work towards what I need you to do." This openness is key to everything. The dynamics of the classroom, they are so immense, yet, we all are in some way or another affected and we should be willing to listen and learn from others' points of view.

Belle explained open mindedness in a different way. She said, "You [the teacher] have to be open-minded to different learning, learning styles, and new learning because everything is always changing." From Belle's perspective, it was the teacher that needed to examine and change his or her practice to ensure the students' success. Belle's statement parallels Ladson-Billings' (1995) and Valenzuela's (1999) findings that

culturally responsive teachers examine their own deficiencies and boundaries and make the changes necessary to make certain students succeed.

Summary. All three teachers explained that mutual trust, respect and open mindedness were needed in shaping the teacher-student relationship. For Mike, Liz and Belle, establishing each of these sub-themes with their students is a priority because it sets the tone for learning and for the interrelationships that will take place inside and outside of their classrooms.

Conversations

Liz and her class had invited me to join them for a small celebration in their classroom. The students were being rewarded for reaching one of their class goals. Liz and her students had brought food and treats to share with each other. When I entered the room, the celebration was well on its way and most of the students had already finished eating. The students were all talking with each other at their desks and they all seemed to be enjoying this relaxing time together.

Liz was sitting with a group of students at their desks. I sat at the table nearest the door with two students but I could hear the group that was sitting with Liz. The students were talking with her about the Mother's Day flowers they were decorating. One girl in the group asked Liz if her children gave her presents. Liz told them that she had one memory that was her favorite.

Liz told the students that one year her son and her daughter each decided to make her a card describing several gifts she would receive from them. She went on to explain that the gifts were not gifts they bought but instead were promises of how they were going to help her out at home. Tommy, her son, promised her to clean his room without being

told to and to throw out the trash for a month. Her daughter Patricia promised to set the table for dinner and to wash the dishes for a month. The third promise was one they made together, which was to wash the van on the weekend.

The students were all smiles while Liz shared that special memory. Liz could not help herself, she cried as she told that story to the students. By this point, she had gotten everyone's attention, including mine, and Liz had to explain why she was tearful. The students who were sitting with her asked her more questions about the promises and wanted more details. Liz did not hesitate to share this part of her life with them. It made her and the students happy. This story sparked the children to tell their own ideas for Mother's Day gifts and they shared them with each other. Some of the students read what they wrote on the flowers they were decorating, which were promises to their own mothers. Liz was careful to listen to each one of their promises and the stories they shared. She would smile at them and tell them that she knew their mothers were going to love the promises they were writing on the flowers.

The conversations at the different tables continued with the children sharing what they were going to do for their own mothers and grandmothers. The two students that were sitting with me asked me what I was going to do for my mother. I told them that I was going to take her a corsage on Saturday evening so she could wear it to church on Sunday morning, along with a Mother's Day card. They did not know what a corsage was so we spent a little time talking about it. This moved the conversation to my mother. They wanted to know more about her. I shared more about my mother and helped them see how important she is in my life. They also shared their own stories telling me about special things their mothers would do for them.

As our time came to an end, they asked me to come back on another day to eat with them. I told them I would try and immediately I was surrounded with a group hug. I took that as a "thank you" for talking and listening to them. What I learned from these twenty minutes of conversation with the students was that they were eager to hear who I was beyond their principal and they wanted me to know more about them too. What also happened after this time of eating and sharing together was that these two students would go the extra mile to talk with me whenever they saw me in their classroom or on the campus. They wanted me to know more about them and their lives. These short minutes together seemed to create a stronger bond between the students and me. In a way I already knew this because I used to have many conversations with my own students when I was a classroom teacher and I know that the dialogue made our relationships even stronger.

Noddings (1992) explains, "Dialogue is a common search for understanding, empathy, or appreciation. It can be playful or serious, logical or imaginative, goal or process oriented, but it is always a genuine quest for something underdetermined at the beginning" (p. 23). The third theme that was identified for research question one was conversations. The conversations that the teachers had with their students were important to the teacher-student relationship. The sub-themes for this category were: teachers talked with the students about their lives and the teachers shared stories about their own lives. The story "conversations" illustrates these findings and shows how Liz and I were able to foster social competence for the students. Through the conversations that we had with the students on that day the students were able to know us at deeper, personal level, which fostered our relationships with them. By sharing our stories with the students, both Liz

and I modeled for the children how to have conversations. Often children need to be taught skills to build their social competence and having conversations with peers is one way to do this.

Teachers talked with the students about the students' lives inside and outside of school. The student participants explained that their teacher would talk with the students whenever they had problems, whether the problems related to school or home. Delpit (2006) and Ladson-Billings & Henry (1990) agree that culturally responsive teachers know who their students are and what strengths they bring to the classroom, which helps to improve each child's academic achievement. One of the students from Belle's class said, "Ms. Garcia always talks with us about problems we are having or other things that we are interested in. She talks to us as a friend. Ms. Garcia listens to everybody and is fair with everybody." Another student said something similar about Belle; "Ms. Garcia would talk with me whenever I had problems with my friends. Ms. Garcia would tell me how I could talk with my friends or ask them for forgiveness."

Teachers' listening to the students' stories about their lives outside of school was also important to the students, as was evident in the party in Liz's classroom. Brown's (2004) study on culturally responsive teachers found that listening was one of the most powerful ways of establishing positive teacher-student relationships. One student participant explained his thoughts about how his teacher, Mike, listened to him.

> Mr. Cantú knew what my life was like at home and how I treated my parents and how they treated me. He knew me. He helped me with what I needed to do at home to do good in school.

Belle explained that taking an interest in the students' lives outside of school was helpful in nurturing the teacher-student relationship.

> One time one of the girls in my class mentioned to me that she had a cheerleading performance on the weekend and it happened to be near my home. I attended the event. Not only did I make the child happy but I also felt that the parent understood that I not only cared about her daughter during school time but in all aspects of her life.

The parent participants also spoke about the way the teachers talked with and listened to the students. A parent of one of Belle's students said, "Ms. Garcia always listens to my child's problems, and talks to her and gives her advice. She makes my child feel comfortable and helps her focus on her learning no matter what might be happening outside of school."

Interest in the students' lives outside of school was not always about academic learning but had more to do with the child's interests, well being or emotional state. Brown (2004) discussed, "the importance of and value of providing individualized attention by developing a personal relationship with each student. Culturally responsive teachers take the time out of each day to communicate individually with many students on nonacademic matters." The teacher participants in my study took the time to get to know their students and demonstrated a genuine interest in each child's life, not just as teacher and student, but also as teacher and friend. A parent of one of Liz's students said,

> I do think Ms. Smith is interested in my child's life outside of school. She is always concerned about my son and the neighbor, who are always feuding. She

would ask if something happened whether it was the weekend or during the week.

Ms. Smith would ask what was going on with him [the parent's son].

The conversations the teacher had with students helped strengthen the teacher-student relationship. These teachers were able to recognize when the students needed someone to listen. A parent of a student in Mike's class said,

> Mr. Cantú would take the time to listen to my son if he had a problem. He learned really quick to recognize if something was going on with my son, in his life. Mr. Cantú would take the time to find out why he looked upset.

This dialogue was also important to the three teachers. They understood that as culturally responsive teachers they needed to listen to their students. Gay (2000) explains this idea further,

> The students feel a need to have a personal connection with teachers. This happens when teachers acknowledge their presence, honor their intellect, respect them as human beings, and make them feel like they are important. In other words, they empower students by legitimizing their "voice" and visibility. (p. 49)

In Liz's story, both she and I allowed the students' voices to be heard. We both respected what they had to say and added our own stories to go with their ideas. I made sure that their stories were as important as mine. Similarly, Belle explained that talking with the students was very important to her because many times there were situations that needed to be explained or resolved for the child. She clarified,

> The students know that they can talk to me. For example, if they didn't bring their homework and something happened, they explain it to me. They tell me the situation and I can give them another opportunity to bring it on another day. I try

to help them see that situations happen and that I am not perfect either. We work

on a solution together.

Belle also felt that it was very important for the teacher to find out what the students'

interests were. She said,

During my lunch bunch times, on field trips or during recess, I talk with them

about what they like and try to find out who they are. I ask them about their

weekends. I also try to keep up with what is popular at the time like music groups

or movies. I want them to know that I like some of the same things they like.

Ladson-Billings (1994) found that "culturally relevant teaching involved cultivation of

the relationship beyond the boundaries of the classroom" (p. 65). The teachers in Ladson-

Billings' study also made time to eat with small groups of children as a way to get to

know the students. The teachers wanted to know what the students liked and didn't like,

and wanted to give the students opportunities to know each other too. The lunchtime

gatherings were a perfect opportunity outside of the pace of the classroom to get to know

the children.

Mike also felt that teachers need to acknowledge a student's voice by listening.

He felt knowing how to listen to the students was as important as knowing the subject

matter. Mike commented, "The teacher has to have the capacity to listen. The teacher has

to have the willingness to listen to successes and failures and then know how to guide the

student." Howard (2002) explains, "Attempts to convey concern for students outside of

the context of the classroom may help improve the nature of the teacher-student

relationship in the classroom and potentially may translate into the achievement area as

well" (p. 436).

Teachers shared stories about their own lives. In Liz's story, both she and I shared with the students our own Mother's Day stories, giving them a small lens into our personal lives. All three teachers shared their own personal stories with their students. According to Gay (2000), "Any good story has a setting and context, and develops around some topic, issue, event, theme, or situation of felt importance to the storyteller. Sometimes this is accomplished by using smaller events or experiences to launch larger ones" (p. 4). Mike, Liz and Belle used the power of the story to allow the students into their own worlds outside of the classroom. By sharing their own stories, the three teachers opened the door for the students to share their own lives with them.

There were numerous ministories told by the participating teachers that the students shared with me. One of Belle's students said, "Ms. Garcia would tell us stories about her family and then she would ask us about our own families. She even shared a video from her birthday of her skydiving and told us all about it. She said it was scary."

One of Mike's students also recalled a story that Mike had shared with his class on different occasions. The student felt that this ministory helped him learn more about his teacher. The student remembered, "Mr. Cantú would tell us stories about when he was a boy and how he always wanted to be a teacher. He even told us what he had to do to become a teacher." In the same way, Liz's students remembered many stories that she had shared with them and how these times made them feel special. One student from Liz's class said, "Ms. Smith told us stories about her life and her family. Ms. Smith told us about her dog and when he died. She was very sad when she told us that story."

The research on culturally responsive teaching describes teachers using a variety of ways to interact with their students outside of the classroom. For example, one teacher

in a study by Ladson-Billings (1994) attended the same church as her students and also taught Sunday school classes there. Another teacher led the local Girls Scout Troop and recruited her students to be a part of the troop. This same teacher would also invite her students to her house to partake in a meal and play with her children. Mike, Liz, and Belle all shared that their students and the students' families had invited them to family celebrations such as weddings, *quinceaneras*, birthday parties, dinners, graduations, and sports events. All three teachers attended these events in order to extend their relationships with their students beyond the classroom.

Summary. According to the students, parents and teachers who participated in this study, teachers talking to the students about their lives inside and outside of school and sharing their personal stories helped shape and foster supportive teacher-student relationships. Noddings (1992) explains the value of these types of conversations in shaping the teacher-student relationship, "dialogue is… essential in learning how to create and maintain caring relations with intimate others. There must be time in every child's day for sustained conversation and mutual exploration with an adult" (p. 53).

In Liz's story at the beginning of this section, it was not our mere presence that made this a special moment for the students; it was the time we took out of our day to listen to their stories. We acknowledged their importance by listening to them and in return we learned more about each one of them and their families. It was the sharing of our own personal stories that gave many students the confidence they needed to share their own stories with us, thus further developing the teacher-student relationship. Slaughter-Defoe & Carlson (1996) found that first and third grade African American and Latino students felt that the teachers who made a difference in their schooling experience

were those who were concerned with both their school and home lives. The conversations that were shared between the teachers and students established a connection with the students' lives beyond academics that at the same time became a basis for future learning.

Open and Honest Communication

Belle is standing at the front of the classroom speaking to a room full of parents and students. A new school year has just begun and it is back to school night at United. The classroom is organized and impeccable. There are students' names on the desks and the room has information hanging in different places written in both English and Spanish. The classroom feels warm and welcoming. Parents look for their child's name and sit at their child's desk. They look like they are the learners tonight.

Belle shares her story of becoming a teacher and her background so that the parents know her a little better. Even though many of them have seen her at United, not all of them have had children in her class so they do not know much about her. She talks to them about the curriculum and expectations for the school year. As she talks to them about the different aspects of the curriculum, she shows them a slide show of some of the projects and activities that she and her previous students accomplished. While viewing the slideshow, I noticed that there were parents present in the different pictures. I thought to myself, "what a clever way of showing the parents that they are important in this equation of learning." Belle demonstrates enthusiasm and passion for her work. Her face lights up when she talks about the subject areas and concepts they will learn throughout the year.

Belle talks to the parents about the different after-school programs that are available and encourages them to have their children participate in these so they

experience learning in different ways and with different people. She tells the parents that it is important for their children to discover their talents and gifts so that they are able to utilize them when they are working on their projects and assignments.

Belle gives the parents time to ask questions. When the parents are speaking she looks at them and then repeats their questions in an effort to show them that she was listening to them. Before the evening ends, Belle makes one last request of the parents. She tells them that in order for their children to be successful they have to be part of the team and communicate with her. Belle says,

> *In order for your child to be successful, it involves all three: the child, the parents, and the teacher. The student and I cannot do it alone and I can't do it by myself. The student can't do it by himself or herself. Just the parent wanting it, it's just not going to happen. We all have to work together.*

I see many parents' heads nodding in agreement when she makes this statement. She reminds them to stop by the classroom as often as they want and to call her if they ever have any questions or concerns. She says that she needs them to work along side her and their child to make this a successful year. She stresses that it is important for them to communicate with her and that they should expect that she will communicate closely with their children and with them.

She explains to the parents that her communication will be open and honest. She also tells them that it is her goal to communicate the learning expectations clearly to the students so that they can go home and share these expectations with their parents. Belle explains that they should ask their child daily what the learning expectations were for the day and ask the students to share their learning with them. For Belle, the notion of

success is grounded in the idea of collaboration and communication among the student, the parent, and the teacher. After she finishes speaking to parents, Belle stands at the doorway shaking hands with all of the parents as they leave the classroom, which is another way of communicating to the parents and the students that they are important to her.

The last theme for research question one was open and honest communication. Teachers, students and parents participating in the study all mentioned that communication among them was important to the formation and sustainability of relationships. This communication enhanced the environment-person relationship by reducing isolation and fostering social competence. As in Belle's previous story, the participants understood that they needed each other and that the children's success might depend on how well they communicated. Open and honest communication is one way of showing socially skillful behavior. The parents, students and teachers understood that communication was vital to the quality and helpfulness of their relationships. Teacher communications with students and with parents were two sub-themes that were identified under the theme of open and honest communication.

Teacher communication with students. Communication with the students was shown in two ways. One was in the way that the teachers talked directly with the students and the other was in the expectations the teachers had for the students. According to the student participants, the messages the teachers sent to them were important. The students' explanations of teacher communication were simple but profound. One of Liz's students said,

> Ms. Smith would say thank you to all of us. Sometimes she would say sorry if she had yelled at us for something we did wrong or when we misbehaved. Ms. Smith talked with me alone and gave me chances to do better on my work and my behavior.

The students referred to positive statements the teacher had made to them. For example, another of Liz's students noted, "Ms. Smith would tell me good things to put a "good" spirit in me and then I could do the work. She would make me feel like I could do it and I would do it."

> Delpit (2006) also described two teachers who told their students "you can and will do well; you will achieve" as a means to motivate them to meet the high standards the teachers had set for their students (p. 158). The teacher participants in this study were like the teachers that Delpit described who had a vision for their students that showed that they believed in their students and insisted on their students' success. Mike, Liz, and Belle had different styles and approaches for communicating expectations to students, but all of their students were expected to be learners. One of Mike's students said,

> Mr. Cantú always had what we needed to learn on the board. He would talk to us about how long we had on an assignment and when we had to turn it in. He would also check with us on assignments to see how much we had done and what we needed help with.

Liz also insisted that her students learn while in her classroom.

> I don't give them a choice and they know that as soon as they walk in my class. I think even though it [the work] is challenging, basically, they [the students] have no choice. They are going to work. They are going to produce something in some

way and once they know that I expect that from them and they try to show me,

then they start to feel more comfortable and they want to show me that they can

work and produce. I guess they know that failure is not an option.

Howard (2004) explains, "A teacher practice that is essential to culturally responsive

teaching is creating a learning environment that helps students reach their highest

academic achievement. In culturally responsive teaching, a teacher demands for students'

efforts and academic production." (p. 273). Several studies have confirmed that African

American and Latino students know teachers are concerned when they demand students

complete assignments, pay attention, and perform better academically (Brown, 1999;

Howard, 2001; Wilson & Corbett, 2001).

　　　　Along with high learning expectations, Liz also felt that effective communication

with her students was about making each individual student feel special. She always

shared their accomplishments with the other students and their parents. One of Liz's

students said, "Ms. Smith would tell the class whenever someone did something really

good. The class would clap for them. Then we could ring the bell."

　　　　During the classroom observations, Mike, Liz, and Belle made eye contact with

their students when they spoke or when the students spoke, acknowledging their words.

All three participating teachers also used different hand gestures and movements to

communicate with students. Brown (2004) notes, "Students recognize nonverbal

language more than verbal responses to their behaviors and comments. They notice

teachers' facial expressions and other body movements especially when they believe

teachers should be listening to them" (p. 271). A parent of a student in Belle's class

recognized the nonverbal language Belle shared with her daughter. The parent said, "I have seen Ms. Garcia give my child hugs and hugs tell you many things."

Teacher-student proximity was also another form of communication between the teacher and the student. Whether the three teachers were standing while teaching a lesson or sitting with the students in small groups, they each used certain movements to communicate with their students. I observed Belle, for instance, reaching over and putting her hand on the student's hand to get him to focus. I saw Mike and Liz both modeling the work in small groups to communicate the learning expectations.

During the observations, Mike, Liz, and Belle were clear in explaining their expectations and sharing some examples of assignments and activities the students were expected to complete. All three classrooms had a variety of "anchors of support" that the children could reference as they worked independently. For example, Mike provided his students with a rubric stating the expectations for the learning activity. These anchors had already been shared with the students so they knew how to use them as references as they worked. The students transitioned from one activity to another following very clear expectations and directions from the teacher.

Teacher communication with parents. The parent participants all felt that the teachers did not hesitate to communicate with them whenever their child was not meeting learning expectations, when their child needed extra assistance or when they wanted to share their child's accomplishments. One of Liz's parents said,

> Ms. Smith calls me by my first name and looks me in the eye when she is talking
>
> to me. When Ms. Smith is concerned about my son, like when he does not
>
> complete his work in a timely manner, she will let me know; or if she feels that he

is having any problems in school, Ms. Smith will let me know directly. She doesn't hesitate in what she has to tell me, she just gives it to me directly. Ms. Smith even calls me to tell me when my child has progressed in his reading level or when he did something nice for another student.

Another parent from Liz's class also felt that Liz did not hesitate to make contact with her whenever she felt it was necessary. The parent also said that Liz would call her or find her after school to tell her the good things her son was doing. For this parent, Liz's communication certainly made a difference in her son's achievement.

I had a really good relationship with Ms. Smith. If she felt that something was going on with my child she would communicate with me. If my child was dropping down in his grades, Ms. Smith was really quick to address it. Ms. Smith would let me know so that I could talk with him and help him improve his grades.

The parents reported that the teacher participants would always communicate with them openly and honestly. A parent from Mike's class stressed how important this type of communication was for her and her child's success.

Mr. Cantú would tell me the truth. He would tell me the good and the bad. Mr. Cantú always made time to talk with me about my son. Many teachers prior to Mr. Cantú would hold conferences with me but there had not been one that would talk with me the way Mr. Cantú did.

Another parent of a student in Belle's class stated that Belle was very prompt in responding to her questions and concerns about her daughter. The parent said that any time she would stop by the classroom to visit, Belle would make the time to talk with her and to give any information that she was requesting. This same parent said, "Ms. Garcia

listens to my worries and gives me solutions to my concerns. She also is quick to inform me about any help my child needs." Delpit (1994) found that culturally responsive teachers maintained open lines of communication with their students' parents. The parents wanted "teachers who were willing to include parents as active partners in the educative process without being patronizing and condescending" (p. 148).

During the parent-teacher conferences that I observed as part of this study the three teachers communicated openly with the parents and provided them with specific feedback on their child's progress. Many of the conversations were in Spanish because that is the first language of many of the parents. The students attending the parent-teacher conferences also gave input and asked questions. Mike, Liz, and Belle praised the students for their good work and participation. All three teachers explained the students' progress to the parents by sharing specific work samples and assessments. The teachers also explained the areas of improvement and specifically named ways that improvement could happen.

At one of Mike's conferences, he had Carmen's grades out on the table for Carmen and her mother to see as soon as they sat down. Carmen's reaction when she saw her grades was "Wow!" Mike told Carmen "You should be proud of your grades and your accomplishments." Mike explained, "Carmen has taken ownership and has become a leader helping others with the work. The other students are looking to her leadership skills." Carmen's mother asked Mike what they could do to keep increasing her reading level. Mike gave Carmen's mother specific suggestions on how Carmen could improve. Mike also reminded Carmen to continue using the strategies that worked best for her.

Carmen spoke up," I prefer to use a small card to track where I am reading. That is working for me right now."

In one of Belle's teacher-parent conferences, I observed similar comments and suggestions from her. Belle had a laptop readily available and shared a short video of Isabel's social studies project and presentation to the class. Isabel's mother smiled in acknowledgement of her daughter's good work. Belle also gave the parent specific feedback on Isabel's reading progress. Belle explained "Isabel has increased in her vocabulary knowledge and is using her reading strategies on all of her assessments. Isabel always has good grades because she uses her strategies and her prior knowledge." At the end of the conference, Isabel's mother hugged Belle and said, "Thank you for everything you do for my daughter."

Summary. Mike, Liz, and Belle's communication with their students and their students' parents was key to forming and sustaining the teacher-student relationships and to student success. The verbal and nonverbal communication that three teacher-participants used with the students and their parents demonstrated sharing, caring, and connecting.

Research Question 2: How Do Supportive Teacher-Student Relationships Interact with the Contexts in Which They Develop?

Findings for question two are presented somewhat differently than those for question one. For question two, themes are presented within three broad categories: interaction with classroom context, interaction with school context, and interaction with community context. In this section, the discussion of each of the three categories begins with a story illustrating the findings for that category.

Interaction with the Classroom Context

At the beginning of every school year, most teachers work long hours cutting, laminating, hanging up new posters, and decorating bulletin boards so that their classrooms look inviting and cool. Every teacher wants his or her classroom to look its best when the students arrive on the first day. Liz is no exception. Every year she works carefully to set up the classroom for her students. She does her best to utilize all of her space so that the room does not look cluttered and to make everything available that she thinks her students might need.

In Liz's classroom student desks are set up in small tables in order for the students to work together. The student desks do not have names on them because Liz allows the students to come in on the first day and choose their own desk. She lets them sit there until she and the child feel that he or she would work better in a different group. After the students are settled in their desks, she places a student nameplate on each one so that the students take ownership of their space. Her teacher desk is not in the same area as the students' desks. She has strategically placed it out of the learning area. She has a table that she uses to meet with small groups of students with many different materials and resources nearby. Liz has also allowed for space in which she and her students can move around freely and not distract the learning in motion.

Throughout Liz's years of teaching, she has learned to set up areas where students can enjoy playing games or reading quietly. This year in particular Liz has gone the extra mile to set up a new classroom library that looks inviting and appealing. The books span a variety of genres and cultures that the students' can relate to and learn more about. Near the classroom library is a small wicker loveseat that sits on a large

carpet. Liz creates a home-like atmosphere with different items like a small wicker seat and green plants. She also prepares a place to hang the children's photos on the first day of school as a way to show them that this is their place.

I notice Liz has many motivational posters hanging in the classroom and different decorations that would catch any young child's eye. There is a welcome poem on the door along with the class list. She has created a class schedule on the board. The emergency exit route is posted near the door too. On the different shelves, Liz has math manipulatives and games. There are also some school supplies that are out on the shelves for the students to get if they need them: pencils, paper, scissors and crayons. She has a small science center with interesting materials for the students to explore.

As I visit classrooms at the start of the school year, I immediately see how the students in Liz's class have learned to utilize the different spaces in the classroom. Some are working on the carpet, others at their desks. There are a few students on the computers and a couple of girls reading to each other on the wicker loveseat. There is also a small group of students playing math games on the tables.

Liz keeps the classroom organized to meet the needs of her students and allows for student input when changes need to be made. She is intentional with the overall organization of the room. Liz wants the classroom to be a place that is exciting and challenging for all of her students, but that also reminds students of their own homes.

Classroom environments can be set up as a powerful setting for providing students with effective instruction and facilitating positive teacher-student interactions. Supportive teacher-student relationships are affected by the context in which they are developed, especially the classroom context. The classroom environment should be an

exciting place where students are encouraged to explore, challenge themselves, and grow both academically and socially. According to Hussein (2009), "every classroom has an interpersonal atmosphere that can hinder or promote a student's learning and development. This atmosphere includes the student's relationship with the teacher, with other students, with academics and with rules" (p. 1). Mary Harvey (1996) defines the *context* in an ecological fit as the interventions that reduce isolation, foster social competence, support positive coping and/or promote belongingness. In Liz's story, she created a classroom environment that supported students working in small groups in which the students had to demonstrate social competence and be inclusive. Liz's classroom environment provided many interventions that enhanced the environment-person relationships. From the category classroom context, three themes were identified: organized, collaborative, and relevant.

Organized. The participating teachers' classrooms were organized as child-centered environments. For these three teachers, organization was about the "best" set up of the room to maximize learning. Mike, Liz, and Belle provided their students with classroom libraries, materials, and supplies, but it was the way these items were organized that allowed the students to move freely and to have ownership of the classroom. Routman (1991) states, "The way we organize our classrooms affects children's views of themselves as readers and writers and has an impact on their attitudes toward school and learning" (p. 423).

During the classroom observations I noticed that all three teachers provided an area for students to read and work independently. While observing Belle, I saw students sitting on large pillows on the floor reading with friends. One of Belle's students noted,

"Ms. Garcia has some of her favorite pillows that she lets us use in the room, like the dog pillow and two others."

In all three classrooms, the student work areas were set up with tables or in a table format. Mike's classroom had tables for the students to work on rather than individual student desks. His students had a shelf that they used to keep their books and supplies. In Belle and Liz's classrooms, the students had individual desks set up in a table format with four to six in a group. In all three classrooms there was a horseshoe table for use during guided instruction.

Mike, Liz, and Belle provided their students with a schedule of learning activities that they continuously referred to as they worked through the daily lessons. These routines and procedures were all part of the classroom organization that provided fluidity for the students. I also noticed students at the computers working independently, and moving freely to use them. One student would be on one computer, and as that student finished, another one took his or her place. There was a variety of learning stations that were utilized to reinforce concepts and for discovery. There was a rhythm of movement as the students worked through the learning centers.

For the parents, the manner in which the classroom was organized was seen as a vital part of the learning. They unanimously stated that Mike, Liz, and Belle provided all of the materials and resources necessary for their children to learn, and whenever they visited the classrooms the students appeared comfortable and looked busy. A parent in Liz's class explained, "When I would drop by the classroom it felt a little busy to me, but I think Ms. Smith had all of the books and posters and things for all of the kids to keep their attention." One of the students in Liz's class also described the classroom

environment. "I knew where to find my materials and supplies like pencils, markers, books, notebooks, and highlighter."

One of Mike's students described the classroom in a similar way, "The atmosphere is great. Mr. Cantú' has posters up that are encouraging. He has books and maps available for us to read." One of the parents of a student in Mike's class said,

The room was very inviting and the things on the wall were very positive. Mr. Cantú had a recliner that added some coziness to the area with the books. You just wanted to sit down and read the books and have some time to enjoy. I had never seen that in any other classroom and I thought "that's cool." The pictures and the different sayings that were up made you think, "Wow this stuff is interesting." All of these things combined made it very inviting.

A parent of a student in Belle's classroom recognized how Belle kept the room organized and how this allowed the students to have freedom and yet kept them focused on learning. The parent said, "Ms. Garcia has designated spaces for each section of the room—a reading area, computer area, and a writing center."

Collaborative. The three teachers created a collaborative learning atmosphere. The collaborative classroom environment was developed with the expectations that the students would teach and learn from each other. This classroom atmosphere went beyond the posters hanging on the wall and the colorful bulletin boards. Ladson-Billings (1994) explains, "As members of an extended family, the students assist, support, and encourage one another. The entire group rises and falls together (p. 76)." African American and Latino students' learning is enhanced when they learn in collaborative settings rather than

in isolated or competitive environments (Brown, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995; and

Valenzuela 1999). Liz clarified,

> The classroom environment should be loving. They [the children] need to know
> that the classroom environment is set up as a family and as a family we can make
> mistakes and that we have a chance to recuperate. I guide the children to have
> strategies to work with other students that may be challenging or have an "off"
> day. As a class we work together and try other strategies to help that student get
> back to the learning with the rest of the class and at the same time keep focused
> on the learning. I think that when the teacher is accepting of everybody, this
> shapes the environment.

Liz's community-family like classroom is inclusive, promotes belongingness, and

fosters social competence. The elementary and secondary students' in Howard's (2002)

study assessed their teachers' effectiveness by "their teachers' ability to structure their

classrooms in a manner that mirrored family and community practices, beliefs, and values

or, in one student's words, to "make school seem like home" (p. 431). Mike stated, "The

environment has to be owned by everyone. They have to be able to be a part of it. This is

not the teacher's classroom. It's the students' classroom. This belongs to everyone who

enters."

Liz and Belle set up the student desks in their classrooms to form tables so that

the students could work collaboratively rather than in isolation. One of Liz's students

said, "I need to be able to work with Ms. Smith and with the other kids. I need the kids to

work together. We did this with Ms. Smith." The student participants from Belle's class

explained that she worked with them in different groupings. They said that Belle would

sometimes teach the whole class and at other times she would call them to work with her in a small group or individually. One of Belle's students said, "Ms. Garcia assigns us to groups so that we can help each other learn. We work in groups so that we can learn from each other." Another of Belle's students reported, "We work in groups because sometimes individually we have problems. Ms. Garcia puts us in groups to see if we can learn from the other students' strategies and learn more." Ladson Billings (1995) found the teachers in her study

> Created a bond with all of the students, rather than an idiosyncratic, individualistic connection that might foster an unhealthy competitiveness. This bond was nurtured by the teachers' insistence on creating a community of learners as a priority. They encouraged the students to learn collaboratively, teach each other, and be responsible for each other's learning. They encouraged the students to learn collaboratively. (p. 163)

One of Mike's students said, "I liked working in groups more than by myself because all of the members of the group helped each other complete the work." In all three teachers' classrooms each group member had a responsibility and role in completing assignments.

In Belle and Mike's classrooms, for example, the students worked on group and individual projects to show their understanding of a larger concept they had learned. Some of the students in Mike and Belle's classrooms commented that working on projects added a higher dimension to the learning. The students explained the projects with great enthusiasm and knowledge. In Belle's class the students said that they appreciated the choices the teacher gave them to complete a project. One of Belle's students explained,

> We do all kinds of projects with Ms. Garcia. Like in Social Studies, we are doing
>
> a project on an African American and I chose Jackie Joyner-Kersey. Ms. Garcia
>
> said we could dress up as our person, do a poem, sing a song, and all that stuff. I
>
> am doing a model of Jackie to explain about her. It is just more interesting to me
>
> so I can learn better about this person.

For another student in Belle's class the options to present material mastered by the

students made the learning exciting. One student felt that the teacher challenged them

with the learning opportunities she gave them; "With Ms. Garcia, we do projects or we

write biographies and then present them in front of all of the class." The teachers in

Ladson-Billings' (1995) study, "kept the relations between themselves and their students

fluid and equitable. They encouraged the students to act as the teachers, and they,

themselves, often functioned as the learners in the classroom" (p. 163).

> Some of the parents from both Belle and Mike's classrooms acknowledged how

working through the projects helped their children learn in a different way with lasting

effects. A parent from Belle's class commented,

> My daughter has been motivated to learn by the projects and experiments; the
>
> work that is more physical or creative influences the students in a different
>
> way—it helps them see what connects or relates to them. This helped my daughter
>
> stay motivated.

Another parent in Belle's class mentioned that a teacher has to have the capacity to

provide different learning opportunities to the children. This parent said, "Ms. Garcia has

the capacity to educate. She does not rely on just one teaching method; no, she looks for

options. These opportunities have helped my daughter feel confident about her learning."

These comments reflect one of Wlodkowski and Ginsberg's (1995) four motivational conditions for culturally responsive teaching; "developing attitude—creating a favorable disposition toward the learning experience through personal relevance and choice" (p. 19). A parent of a student in Mike's class mentioned,

> There are a lot of experiments and projects in Mr. Cantú' class. I think every experiment and project that they do is a learning experience for them. They have to show their learning in lots of different ways, not just on paper and pencil. They even went on field trips as learning experiences.

Belle's students felt that she, as their teacher, not only kept them informed of their progress but also gave them opportunities to improve. One of her students said, "Ms. Garcia would call me over to her table to talk with me about my work. Together we would talk and we would write goals for me to know how I could progress."

Mike and Liz both explained that an important aspect to a collaborative environment was that it needed to be a safe place to learn and share. The classroom environment needed to be a safe place for students to share ideas without being ridiculed or laughed at and a place that allowed for mistakes and forgiveness. Mike explained, "The classroom is a safe place to learn and think. It's a safe place to be open. No one is going to put you down. This is a place where everyone will be considerate of everyone else's thoughts." According to Sullo (1999)

> In a positive environment, we naturally want to learn more, share more, make new connections, and continue the exciting process of discovery. In contrast, when students feel threatened, their motivation, productivity, and achievement decline

dramatically. The threat need not be physical. The psychological threat that

accompanies sarcasm, criticism, and ridicule is equally damaging. (p. 94)

In all three teachers' classrooms, the students had the freedom to move around the

room, go to the restroom, use materials in the room, and to collaborate with fellow

students. For example, during one of the observations in Mike's class, I saw two boys

talking. One boy asked the other, "Can you tell me what setting means?" The second

student gave him an explanation. The first boy still looked puzzled so the second student

then proceeded with another explanation and said, "Did that help you? Do you get it

man?" The first student said, "Ya, I get it now. Thanks." Neither student hesitated to seek

or lend a hand. Ladson-Billings (1994) explains, "Culturally relevant teaching advocates

the kind of cooperation that leads students to believe they cannot be successful without

getting help from others or without being helpful to others" (p. 70).

Relevant. Liz's classroom library was filled with a variety of books that covered

multiple genres, experiences, and cultures. Liz had considered the different cultures that

would be present and alive in her class. Liz said, "I try acknowledging the different

cultures and incorporating these into learning new concepts and helping the students

make connections. I do believe that we [Liz and her students] try to recognize and

acknowledge our differences." Mike believes that the content of the curriculum would be

meaningless to him and to his students if they do not find a way to make it real. He

explains,

Yes, I bring in the curriculum. I bring in the standards and with that I need to

allow the students to bring the curriculum and the standards along too so that they

can take ownership. We are here together. We are going on this journey together.

We compare the literature we read to something that has happened in their lives. I try to bring the world into the context of the school classroom, which then bridges the ideas of how they relate to their world around them using the space and freedom of the learning environment.

Ladson-Billings (1994) states, "Culturally relevant teaching involves students in the knowledge-construction process, so that they can ask significant questions about the nature of the curriculum. The ultimate goal is to ensure that they have a sense of ownership of their knowledge" (p. 77).

Belle also expressed the importance of relating the work to her students.

Whenever I read aloud, I choose a book that will teach them a life lesson—about being a good person, helping others and to empathize. My goal is to teach them about times or events that led people to being oppressed and what we can do about this. We try to make connections. We read about diverse cultures. I try to expose them to as many different cultures and/or people so that they are aware that our world is made up of many. When we are writing, I tell them to write from their heart; write about your experiences; tell your story.

Delpit (2006) found "Good teachers are not bound to books and instructional materials, but connect all learning to 'real life'" (p. 118). Mike, Liz, and Belle understood that the content would be meaningless if they did not find a way to connect it to their students' lives and environments.

Summary. The classroom context in this study encompassed a classroom that was organized, collaborative, and relevant. The three teachers in the study provided their students with a classroom atmosphere that promoted belongingness, collaboration and

success. The classroom context had a direct, positive affect on the teacher-student relationships.

Interaction with the School Context

Belle caught me in the hallway one afternoon and asked for a few minutes of my time to discuss an idea. We went to my office to avoid any interruptions. She began to explain to me how she wanted to discuss with her colleagues some ways to recognize the intermediate students. Belle was concerned that we were not meeting their needs. She explained that she had recently spoke to her students and they had recommended we reinstate the "United Important Persons" program we had a few years back. Belle and her students felt that this program permitted the students to develop self-responsibility academically, behaviorally, and socially and at the same time recognize them for their efforts and successes.

I highly encouraged Belle to take this idea to the other intermediate teachers. I felt that this was a great opportunity for team collaboration in the interests of our students. We discussed the pros and cons of the program as it was previously run and came up with some new ideas to enhance the program. Belle and I devised a strategy that she would implement when she met with her colleagues. We also decided that I would not be at the meeting so that she could present this idea on her own and allow her teammates to share any concerns openly and honestly. I told Belle that I would find funds to support the program and that they could count on me. I was very excited that Belle was showing her leadership skills and that she wanted to make changes centered on our students' success.

That same afternoon, Belle talked with each intermediate teacher personally and invited him or her to a meeting the next day, which was to be held in Belle's classroom. Belle came to the meeting with a plan that showed how the previous program was implemented and the proposed changes she and her students were suggesting. All of the intermediate teachers attended the meeting the next day. The teachers unanimously agreed with Belle that the United Important Persons program would be a positive change for our students and our staff. At the same meeting, the teachers created the criteria for becoming a United Important Person and decided on the rewards and recognitions that would be given to the students. Belle inspired her colleagues to take action for the betterment of our students.

After the meeting with the teachers, Belle came to see me again. This time she presented the work she and her colleagues had created. I was very impressed with the plan of action and the notion that all of the intermediate teachers were taking responsibility for all of the students in these grades and not just their own class. Reinstatement of the United Important Persons program would give the children additional opportunities for leadership roles and responsibilities that would affect the entire school culture.

Belle's story describes one way that she developed an ecological fit—a community that responds in helpful ways. Belle promoted belongingness within the school context and at the same time provided the students with opportunities to build their social competence. The themes that were identified under the category of interaction with school context were team players, commitment to all students, and collaboration with other staff members. The three teachers in this study identified strongly not just with

their class but with the whole school. This commitment was to all students, parents, colleagues, and other staff members who directly impacted teacher-student relationships and student success.

Team players. Mike, Liz, and Belle all demonstrated a passion for teaching and learning at United. The three teachers shared a strong connection to United that led them to be teacher leaders and seekers of a better learning environment for all students. All three teachers are team leaders and work with others, focusing their work around success for all students. These teachers are not afraid to share their ideas with other teachers or to ask for help. As in Belle's previous story, she recognized a need and organized her colleagues to help her come up with a solution. Belle created a space and an opportunity for her colleagues to work together.

During the observations for this study, I noticed Mike and Belle conducted collaborative teacher-parent conferences with their respective teammates. Neither Belle nor Mike dominated the conversation with the parents. In some instances, they allowed the other team member to initiate the conference with the parent. At other times, they would purposefully begin the conversation but then ask the other team member to share their thoughts with the parent while acknowledging and supporting what the other shared. For example, I heard Mike say in one conference, "I agree with Ms. Cantu [the other teacher]. Together we will be able to help Robert meet his goals. We will monitor Robert's progress together."

For this research, I also observed the three teachers during team planning meetings and faculty meetings. During one team meeting, Belle worked with her teammates disaggregating student data. They each gave their input on the best way to

meet their students' needs. Belle offered to tutor students after school, including those from the other classes. The other teachers followed her lead; they formed new learning groups based on Belle's suggestion and all four teachers agreed to tutor a group.

I also observed Liz working with her team. On her team, Liz was the most experienced; therefore, her teammates relied on her expertise as they studied the curriculum and planned lessons. Liz was not only a leader with her team, she was their teacher too. She allowed them to give input, and she incorporated their ideas into her lessons. Liz's team was successful because they shared their ideas equally and each member was an important part of the team. Liz was a strong contributor to the success of her team. These practices reflect one of the findings in Valenzuela's (1999) study. Valenzuela found teachers working with Latino students who took a team-building approach in their work were part of the stronger academic teams. I saw all three teachers working as collectivists regardless of the issue or the content that they were discussing.

Commitment to all students. Mike, Liz, and Belle exhibited a commitment beyond their "normal" workday and their own classroom. The three teachers each taught some type of after school enrichment class that was open to any student whether or not they were in their current class. They also tried to reach all students by being open and friendly with any student they encountered on a daily basis and they participated in school-sponsored events. Through the after school classes, the open lines of communication, and school sponsored events, the three teachers were able to reach other United students and build relationships with them. According to Brown (2004), relationship building requires personal attention not only in the academic areas but also in nonacademic affairs.

As part of the school's after school enrichment program, Liz taught a scrapbooking class with different age-group children including some of her own students. Liz said, "This class really helped me make connections with current kids in my class, students I taught in the past, and those I didn't really know. I brought in my own albums, which helped me share my personal history with them." As part of the class, each student was given a disposable camera and Liz taught them how to go around the school and their homes taking pictures of their favorite people and objects. Liz would develop the pictures and then teach the students how to organize the photos based on themes. Then the students were taught to write captions for their pictures. In the end, the students would create their own scrapbook of their favorite things, places, and events.

Belle also taught enrichment classes to different age-group students after school. She led a running club, a dance class, and a yoga class that included a few of her own students and those from other classes. By introducing students to different types of enrichment classes, Belle tried to reach out to as many United children as possible. Belle explained,

> I think something I do is to make myself present with all students. I've been a cheerleader at the different pep rallies, reading celebrations, and other special events. I try to learn the students' names so that it becomes more personal when I greet them. I show them that I care by learning their names and acknowledging them.

Mike explained his commitment to all United students in a different way, although he had taught after school classes to many students ranging from chess, geography, art, and drama. Mike said,

My commitment to all students takes place at every available moment. In the morning wishing the students a good morning, asking them "how is your day going?" or simply making a connection to their siblings who have been through United. When I look at all of the students, I think, "they are me and I am them." The brief moments that we share with our students are not to be taken as a task but rather as an understanding of this is part of the whole that is called life. Every encounter is of importance, whether brief or not.

Through the different relational experiences that Mike, Liz, and Belle created for the United students, the three teachers showed the unique power of the teacher-student relationship. Gay (2000) believes that caring teachers and administrators do not limit their interactions with students to just academic work. In the same way, Noddings (2003) says that students' expressed needs —pleasure, play and fun—should be addressed by teachers too because "students will do things for teachers whose care is regularly demonstrated, and caring involves responding to the expressed needs of the cared for" (p. 242).

Collaboration with other staff members. The three teachers recognized that their work could not be accomplished without the help of other campus experts. All three teachers sought the assistance of other teachers and staff members, collaborating with them to meet the needs of their students. One of Liz's students' parents said,

Ms. Smith always looked for others to help my child with his learning. She collaborated with the principal and the social workers that helped meet his personal needs, which allowed him to be a better learner. Ms. Smith worked with others on the campus to help my child learn.

A parent in Mike's class also noted that a teacher may not be able to do the work all by herself or himself and that he or she may need to seek the assistance of others on the campus to help meet the needs of students. This parent said,

> The teacher-student relationship depends on other parts of the school to help it grow and to help the child be successful. I think the whole school needs to be involved with each child in order for them to have success. Mr. Cantú always looks for others on the campus to help with my child's learning and personal needs. He works with others to help my child.

A student in Mike's class described how Mike collaborated with other staff members, which helped him be successful. "Sometimes it wouldn't just be Mr. Cantú teaching us. He would let other teachers, such as the reading coach or math coach, come in the room and teach with him. This would help us and Mr. Cantú."

During the teacher observations for this study, I saw the teachers collaboratively teaching with the campus-reading specialist, math coach, and special education teachers. When I walked into Belle's classroom, I saw two teachers teaching the lesson. If I would not have known who each teacher was, I would not have been able to tell which one of the teachers was the classroom teacher and which one was the support staff member. Both teachers were fully engaged with the whole class teaching the lesson. They both contributed parts of the lesson, each in their own way and with fluidity. Then after the whole group lesson, each teacher took a small group to a table and worked with the children on specific skills. The work they did was like clock work. The students moved from one group to another without any loss of instructional time. After the lesson, I spoke with Belle about this collaborative teaching approach. Belle responded,

I have to utilize all of the resources on the campus to help meet the needs of my students. I work with the reading specialist, the math coach, the counselor, and the social workers. This lesson in particular was taught collaboratively with a special education teacher. I plan with the special education teacher that comes into my room everyday so that she and I are meeting the needs of all of the students. She is only here for a short period of time so I make the most of it. I have learned so much from the other teacher and I am implementing many of the techniques I have learned from her. The students see both of us as their teachers. Any adult that comes to visit my class needs to be prepared to teach. I jump on the chance to get extra support for my students.

I also observed Liz working collaboratively with the campus reading specialist. Liz had a few students that needed extra reading support so she asked the reading specialist to help her plan some lessons to meet students' specific needs. When asked about this collaborative effort, Liz replied,

Although I have more teaching experience than the reading specialist, I don't know everything and reading is her area of expertise. I went to her to help me plan some specific lessons to meet some of my students' needs. I would teach a lesson and then talk to the reading specialist about the outcomes. I have learned that I don't have to do this by myself. There are others on the campus that want my students and all of our students to succeed as much as I do.

The collaborative nature of Mike, Liz, and Belle's work coincides with Valenzuela's (1999) findings that teachers who collaborated and demonstrated healthy professional relationships exemplified success. These same teachers also "created space and

opportunity for other faculty to advance beyond the aesthetic, or technical, toward a more authentic pedagogy; helping build a framework for institutionalized caring" (p. 101).

Summary. The teacher-student relationships in this study were affected by their interaction with school context. The collaborative, team approach that Mike, Liz, and Belle took in all of their work affected the way the three teachers communicated, planned, and taught their students. The three teachers depended on the other teachers and members of the learning community to help them be effective teachers for all of the children at United.

Interaction with the Community Context

One afternoon in July, I received a phone call from an old colleague, Pablo, whom I had worked with at a different elementary school. He was not a classroom teacher anymore but was working with children in a different way. Pablo was working on a drama collaborative with one of the local universities and wanted to talk to me about an opportunity for our students. I told him that I would be happy to hear his proposal but that I wanted to invite one of the teacher leaders on our campus to the meeting too. I invited Mike to meet with us.

Mike, Pablo, and I met to discuss the drama collaborative and how this project could work at our school. I could see Mike deep in thought as he heard Pablo's presentation. Mike was so excited that he could not wait to get started. We discussed the time commitment and different ways of motivating our students to be full participants in this project. Mike and Pablo worked out the details and a new school-community partnership was formed that afternoon. The partnership's goal was to provide our students with opportunities to enhance their speaking, listening, and literacy skills

through a different media. For me, the principal of the school, the partnership was about opening doors for our children and helping them bridge their lives to the daily lives of the larger learning community in and out of our school. Both Mike and I felt that this partnership was another way to help our students see their potential to academic success.

Mike was very committed to the drama project, he presented it to his students with total enthusiasm and excitement. Mike was able to get full buy-in from his students and they did not waste any time studying the assigned play, and learning about the characters, setting, and language. Pablo came to United once a week to work with Mike and his students. They learned about dramatic plays and how voice and movement could bring a story to life. During their weekly practice, I saw that Mike's relationships with his students was growing stronger because the students were not afraid to express their feelings and their learning in different ways. They were vulnerable and yet they looked comfortable doing this with Mike. They trusted him. The students had many questions and were not afraid to share their own thoughts and connections. The students relied on Mike and Pablo to help them understand the language and the meaning of the play. As the weeks and the months went by, Mike's students showed a deep commitment to this project. They devoted hours of practice during the school day and after school. At times Pablo brought other actors and actresses to work with the students. Mike's students were honored to be working with others that could help them be better at this work. The guest teachers would often tell me how impressed they were with the students and Mike.

While the practicing and the learning was taking place for Mike's students, the curiosity from the rest of the student body began to increase. I would see other students, parents, and teachers standing in the back of the auditorium watching Mike's students

practice. I would hear oohs and aahs and sometimes even some giggles from the spectators but all were impressed with the students' work. Finally the day for the big performance arrived and the students were ready to perform their play for their parents and other school community members.

That evening, I stood at the front doors welcoming our parents, students, teachers, and guests as they arrived for the students' performance. This was a new event for us at United and I could see the excitement in the faces of all of our community members as they entered the school building. The auditorium was filled with spectators holding video cameras ready to record the play. The students were pacing anxiously behind the curtains as Mike tried to calm their nerves. It was time to begin so I welcomed everyone and gave a brief introduction of the project and of Mike and Pablo. There was a roar of applause and the play started. The play lasted about forty-five minutes with simple costume and scene changes. The audience was captivated for the duration of the play. I noticed some mothers wiping away tears of pride and joy as they watched their children perform.

When the play ended the students came out on stage to take a bow and they received a standing ovation from their families, peers, and community members. There was a deep sense of pride flowing in the auditorium that evening that I will never forget. The United learning community had once again come together to celebrate with our students and to recognize them for their hard work and commitment.

The support that Mike provided his students through this drama collaborative helped achieve an ecological fit between his students and the community. This partnership helped enhance the students' social competence, reduced isolation and

promoted belongingness among the students and the community. Within the category interaction with community context, two themes were identified: external partnerships and opening school doors. These two themes are examples of how the three teachers involved the larger community in making a difference in the lives of our students at United.

External partnerships. The community relationships that Mike, Liz, and Belle nurtured were all in the best interest of their students. These community relationships support the teacher-student relationships inside and outside of the classroom and contributed to the students' learning and success. Generally speaking, "good" teachers form partnerships with community members or organizations; however, Mike, Liz, and Belle went beyond the surface connections. These three teachers found ways to integrate these relationships into their students' learning and into their lives. The teachers' bonds with the community affected the teacher-student relationships as they developed throughout the school year.

In Mike's introductory story, he found ways to make the drama project partnership part of the required curriculum, integrating basic skills into rich, meaningful content. At the same time, Mike was providing his students with learning opportunities that went beyond the classroom walls and conventional teaching and learning. Mike explained,

> Education is everything around us. Education gives us a sense of who we are as
> human beings. As the teacher, I have to help my students understand each other
> and look at each other's pasts, present, and what the future holds for us as

individuals and as a community. I have to provide opportunities and showcase the

students. I'll do whatever it takes to help them achieve.

This is consistent with Ladson-Billings (1994) conclusion that culturally responsive

teachers "help students make connections between their local, national, racial, cultural

and global identities…. They believe that knowledge is continuously re-created, and

shared by teachers and students alike" (p. 25).

Liz and Belle also were strategic in the partnerships they formed with community

members. They found ways to use community resources to enhance classroom learning.

For example, Liz collaborated with one of our fine arts teachers to form a partnership

with one of the local art museums. Through this partnership, Liz was able to take her

students to the museum throughout the school year and consistently connected her

students' learning to their community. Liz also invited parents to join her and her

students in their learning with the art museum visits.

Belle formed a partnership with a graduate student who was conducting research

on technology and learning in the elementary classroom. Through this partnership, Belle

was able to utilize different technologies to highly motivate her students. In doing so,

Belle's students have learned to explore learning beyond their classroom environment

and to present their learning through use of these varied technologies. Belle's students

depend on her to guide them through this learning. They know they can count on her to

help them use the equipment and maximize their learning even though she herself is still

learning how to use this technology. Belle's students are not afraid to share their learning

with other students and adults. They are excited that Belle consistently seeks different

methods for them to learn and grow.

Belle, Mike, and Liz recognize their responsibilities in helping all children learn by finding ways to meet their students' learning styles and needs. Through the external partnerships that they established, the three teachers provided their students with learning opportunities both inside and outside of their classrooms that went beyond basic skills. The three teachers purposely formed partnerships to help their students become critical and innovative thinkers. Delpit (2006) found that culturally responsive teachers expand children's basic knowledge and skills as well as develop their critical and creative thinking.

Opening school doors. The three teachers found ways to include parents and other community members in their classrooms and in the school. Working alongside the campus parent support specialist, the three teachers were able to involve parents and other interested adults in ways that positively impacted the teacher-student relationship. Mike used a strategy that he learned many years ago from a community organizer that has led to his open door policy for all parents. Throughout the study, he held individual meetings with his students' parents. The meetings were sometimes separate from his parent conferences others were not. For Mike, the meetings were opportunities for him to learn more about his student and his or her family. The atmosphere that Mike created for any meeting with his students' parents was informal and relaxed.

> As long as you provide an open door from the beginning, you will be able to talk freely with the parents. I make sure to convey to the parents that what they have to say is important, because it is. I tell them, "I want to hear from you. I want to have conversations with you," explains Mike.

These individual meetings that Mike conducted with his students' parents were primarily about listening to the parents' ideas and suggestions about their child's learning. Mike allowed the parents to do most of the talking while he listened intently to what they had to say. Mike was listening for their "story." Mike encouraged, and ultimately influenced other teachers and staff members to hold these same types of meetings with their students' parents so that all parents felt welcomed at all times.

Like Mike, Belle also opened her classroom doors and encouraged parents and community members to participate at United. She believed that her work as a teacher could not be accomplished to its greatest degree without the help of her students' parents and the community. During a study of different cultures, Belle invited her students' parents to the classroom to share stories about the cultures in which they grew up. Belle said, "I want to get to know the parents, which helps me as I plan lessons for my class. I use their backgrounds and their stories to connect and teach our children. Bringing parents into the classroom helps build stronger relationships with the students." By involving parents in the classroom, Ladson-Billings (1995) believes "culturally relevant teachers utilize students' culture as a vehicle for learning. The students learn from each other's parents and affirm cultural knowledge."

Liz opened her classroom door to local community members and encouraged others to do the same. She did not hesitate to find community members that could help enrich her classroom lessons, as well as the curriculum. During the United Annual Career Day, Liz looked for local community members and staff members who were of interest to her students and invited them to come share with her class. Liz said, "Although I know

how important it is for our children to know about the world, I also like to highlight what is right here in their community, the United community."

Summary. Mike, Liz and Belle modeled collaborative learning through the external partnerships they developed and through their interactions with parents, and this directly contributed to the students' overall success. All three teachers were willing to learn alongside their students. In some instances, the learning content was outside their primary area of expertise, but all three teachers felt that the external partnerships would allow their students to grow in different ways by opening those doors for them. These community partnerships have allowed students to engage in learning beyond the classroom and beyond the district and state curriculum. The three teachers also emphasize the importance of opening their classroom doors and the school's doors to the students' parents. This inclusiveness, they believe, has added to their students' increased learning and overall success.

Research Question 3: What is the Impact of Supportive Teacher-Student Relationships?

The findings for research question one described how supportive teacher-student relationships are formed and what they look like. The results for research question two described how those relationships interact with their classroom, school and community contexts. But what is the long-term impact of these relationships on students? The themes identified under this question are classified into three broad categories: personal, social, and academic development.

Personal Development

> *"Good Morning United students and staff. We are your daily morning news team and we are here to bring you this week's school news." This is what we saw and heard on the big screen in the auditorium. It caught everyone's attention. There was silence in the auditorium. It was the news team of girls that Belle had been working with for about a month. The girls were learning to use technology and at the same time developing their public speaking and critical thinking skills. There were five girls on the team and each one reported on some facet of the school's news.*

> *The five girls who Belle invited to work with her on this news project were in her language arts class. Belle hand selected the students because she felt the need to make a stronger connection with each of them. She also felt that the girls would be learning some useful skills including confidence building and a stronger self-esteem.*

> *Belle met with the girls twice a week after school, but only after she finished with her tutoring groups. This meant that the girls waited for her for up to an hour after the regular dismissal bell had rung and they made the most of it. During the time Belle was working with her tutoring groups, these five students researched the area of the news that they would be covering. Belle taught them how to find the information for their story and how to write a first draft. Belle would then sit with them to edit their work and to practice their presentation. They even watched actual news coverage to get a better understanding of how they should do their own reporting.*

> *One day Belle came with her laptop to present her news teams' prerecorded news to the entire student body during morning assembly. As the audience watched the United News coverage for that week, they were all amazed with the girls' work. After each news*

segment, the audience would go into a round of applause for the news reporter that had

just presented. It was incredible to see the self-confidence the girls were showing on the

screen. Their high level of work and their presentation skills moved me personally. I was

once again very proud of the role model that Belle was to her students, and her

perseverance in developing strong teacher-student relationships. As the news team

continued to present the weekly news to the school body, the other staff members and I

recognized the self-confidence the girls showed in other areas at school. These students

greeted other staff members with self-assurance and were always looking for the next

exciting story to share with the student body.

The relationships the teacher participants developed and nurtured with their

students impacted the students' personal development. Belle developed her news team's

confidence by giving them extra time and attention after school. The learning that Belle

and the girls did together after school helped the students gain higher self-esteem while

learning more about their world and the school. Belle provided her students opportunities

to build their individual social competence, continued nurturing the teacher-student

relationship and creating an ecologically fit classroom environment. Throughout the

study, the student and parent participants referenced the ways that the teacher-student

relationships helped the children grow personally. Three themes, self-confidence,

increased motivation, and developing ones talents, were identified under the category of

personal development.

Self-confidence. The students in this study described the personal impact the

teacher-student relationship had on their self-confidence. One of Liz's students said, "Ms.

Smith gave me confidence. She helped me see that I could do the work." A student in

Belle's class stated,

> Ms. Garcia teaches us differently than other teachers. She gives me self-
> confidence. She is always happy to see me and is nice to me… Ms. Garcia helps
> me understand what I need to improve on and what I need to correct even when it
> is not for her class.

A student in Mike's class said, "Mr. Cantú helped me keep going when it was not easy.

He gave me confidence to come out ahead." Valenzuela (1999) and Wilson & Corbett

(2001) found youth were willing to take risks in their learning with teachers that

implemented an inclusive pedagogy and connected with them because the teachers gave

them the self-confidence to succeed.

The parents in this study also acknowledged the confidence their children

acquired with Mike, Liz and Belle. A parent of a child in Liz's class reported, "Ms. Smith

impacted my son's personal development by focusing on his barriers to reading. She got

him the help he needed and in turn, boosted his self-esteem and gave him the confidence

he lacked." A parent of a student in Mike's class explained, "During one of our parent-

teacher conferences, I noticed that Mr. Cantú showed confidence in my son by the way

he talked with him. Aside from being his teacher, Mr. Cantú talked with my son like a

friend." One of Belle's students' parents said,

> We have a lot of confidence in Ms. Garcia. We have confidence asking her
> questions about our daughter's progress and any recommendations she feels could
> help our daughter reach her goals. Also, our daughter's confidence has grown
> with Ms. Garcia.

While doing classroom observations for this study, I noted that the students showed pride in the work they were doing. During one of the observations in Mike's class, he and the students were discussing a story and were making some writing connections. Throughout the discussion, Mike would ask the students to share their thoughts and he would applaud them in recognition of their answers. This sign of acknowledgement pushed the students to share more without any hesitation or doubt. The students showed confidence in themselves and in Mike. In Belle's classroom, I observed her reading with a small group of students and continuously giving them confidence to share their work with their peers. The students displayed satisfaction and pride in each other's work. In the three classrooms that I observed for this study, Mike, Liz and Belle's presence and demeanor seemed to put the children at ease, which gave them the confidence to take risks in their learning. Mike, Liz and Belle also displayed self-assurance and excitement in the content they were teaching and in their own work. Culturally responsive teachers exhibit passion and confidence in what is being taught and learned (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Increased motivation. The students in this study reported increased motivation to learn and succeed, and attributed their increased motivation to the learning experiences they had with Mike, Liz, and Belle. Mike started the school day with his students by reflecting on and discussing a quote that he would write on the board. The students copied the quote in their journals and wrote down their own thoughts about the quote. Mike would then encourage open dialogue about their thoughts. Ladson-Billings and Henry (1990) searched for successful approaches for teaching African American students found, "The pedagogical choices of successful teachers involved linking the subject

matter to the students' experiences and drawing on cultural roots. These successful teachers implemented the use of proverbs in their teaching" (p. 77). One of Mike's students said,

> Mr. Cantú wrote these morning thoughts for us [his students] to believe in ourselves and make us think about our actions and our future. These morning thoughts made me want to know more and share more, and sparked curiosity and conversation. I know some by memory and I share them with other friends.

A student in Belle's class also stated that Belle impacted her learning by motivating her to do her best. The student said, "Ms. Garcia inspires me. She makes me want to do better. Ms. Garcia just keeps pushing us." In the same manner, a parent of a student in Belle's class said, "Ms. Garcia has given our daughter a solid foundation that has motivated our daughter to put in extra effort in the different aspects of learning. This has helped our daughter be successful."

A parent of a student in Ms. Smith's class talked about how Ms. Smith motivated her son more than any other teacher he had thus far. The parent said, "Ms. Smith had a special connection with my son that made him want to come to school and learn every day. He really loved coming to school and being in Ms. Smith's class. This was different than with his previous teachers." The three teachers in this study, Mike, Liz and Belle, inspired their students in such a way that their students wanted to be in school and be successful.

Developing one's talents. The three teacher participants impacted their students' personal development by opening doors to learning opportunities for them that helped them discover hidden talents. For example, a parent of a student in Mike's class said,

Mr. Cantú provided his students with many different learning experiences. One was a play that they were involved in. This play helped the students see that they could do this kind of work. The kids played the parts so well. Mr. Cantú would also let me know of other opportunities aside from the things happening at school that my child would benefit from and perhaps do well in.

In Belle's class, the students were not only learning the required curriculum; she provided the students with other experiences that allowed the students to showcase their other talents. Belle encouraged her students to participate in enrichment classes that were offered after school or in the different school clubs. Belle commented,

I encourage my students to get involved in different aspects of the school. I see them being more outgoing. They are not afraid to participate in different events or whatever is going on like student council and talent shows. I try to help them expand their talents.

One of Belle's students said, "Ms. Garcia taught me not to be afraid to show what I could do. Because of her, I was chosen to be on the student council for my grade. Ms. Garcia kept telling me that I was a good speaker and I should do this and I did!"

Liz also encouraged her students to show their talents. She recognized her students' strengths and helped them build on these. Liz explained,

I pay close attention to each of my students to try and learn what each of them is good at. Then, I try to let them be leaders of an activity or lesson that I know they can lead. If they are good at something outside of the classroom learning, then I encourage them to teach the rest of us how to do whatever that might be, like

throwing a football or performing a dance. The students like when I do this. They

learn so much from each other.

This is consistent with Ladson-Billings' (1994) conclusion that "culturally relevant

teachers extend students' thinking and abilities. They move their students to newer

learning after establishing what they know and are able to do" (p. 125). Furthermore,

culturally relevant teachers "provide support for the students to "be themselves" and

choose academic excellence" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 318).

Summary. Self-confidence, increased motivation and developing ones' talents

were the themes identified under the category of personal development. The teachers,

students and parents who participated in this study felt that the relationship the teacher

established with the students helped the students build their self-confidence, motivated

them to do better, and allowed them to develop their own talents. This in turn facilitated

the students' success in many different areas.

Social Development

At United, a common practice that is implemented to enhance students' social

development is "Reading Buddies." At the beginning of the school year, teachers pair

themselves up with another teacher from a different grade level and arrange time for

their classes to come together to develop social skills and build stronger student-to-

student relationships through literacy. Usually, the older students are paired with a class

of younger students to be their role models and mentors.

Mike's students are paired with reading buddies that are four years younger than

his students. Mike and his reading buddy-teacher take turns visiting each other's

classroom every week. They plan lessons and activities that allow both the younger and

the older students to be the teachers. Mike and his colleague provide baskets of books for the students to read together and then complete an activity that includes both classes. It is incredible to hear the students call each other "reading buddies" and to see them give each other high fives and hugs. The students, as well as the teachers, form friendships and relationships that they know they can count on.

One Friday afternoon in Mike's classroom, I saw the younger students sitting with their reading buddies. There was a buzz in the room from the reading that was being shared along with laughter and smiles. All of the students were happy spending time with their buddies, but it was more than just friendship time; the students were teaching each other as they read.

Mike was intentional in providing his students with the knowledge and social skills necessary to work with younger children. They discussed appropriate topics to talk about and the language they would use with their younger classmates. Mike and his students also discussed how they should respect and treat the younger students. Mike was careful to discuss the big learning ideas they would cover week to week with their buddies. As Mike set the stage with his class for their work with their buddies, he allowed his students to come up with the learning and behavior expectations necessary to accomplish their weekly goals. He expected his students to take responsibility for the younger students' learning and social development. Mike provided non-traditional learning opportunities for his students to grow academically and socially.

The environment-person relationships were enhanced through the opportunities that Mike provided for his students to be leaders and friends. The lessons and activities that Mike's students engaged in when working with the younger children helped them

increase their own social abilities and skills and promoted belongingness in the school environment for both his students and their buddies.

The teacher-student relationships in this study impacted the students' social development. Foster (1995) found that caring teachers "concern themselves with the complete development of children…. they are explicit about teaching and modeling personal values that they view as foundations of learning and living. These include patience, persistence and responsibility to self and others" (p. 576). As in the "Reading Buddies" story, the relationships that Mike nurtured aided in the development of his students' social skills, which in turn positively affected other areas of their learning environment. Within the category of social development, three themes were identified: social skills, developing positive relationships and collaborative learning.

Social skills. The teachers, students and parents in this study believed that the teacher-student relationships positively impacted the social development of the children. The students said that the teachers helped them learn social skills that made a difference on how they got along with their peers. Students in Liz's classroom said, "Ms. Smith taught us rules. Rules to get along with each other and how to work together." A student in Belle's class explained, "Ms. Garcia taught us how to get along. She taught us how to help each other especially when another kid didn't understand something. Ms. Garcia taught us to treat each other the way we wanted to be treated." These comments reflect the social relations that Ladson-Billings (1992) found in the classrooms of culturally responsive teachers: "The classroom relations are "humanely equitable" fostering positive student-to-student and student-to-teacher interactions" (p. 317-18).

The parents' perspective on the social impact the teacher-student relationship had on their children centered on the way the teacher helped their children be friends with others. A parent of one of Belle's student's explained, "Ms. Garcia has helped my child learn to socialize and to be friendly with others." A parent of a student in Mike's class said, "Mr. Cantú impacted my son's social development by holding him accountable and responsible whenever he was disrespectful or mean to others. Mr. Cantú taught him how to communicate with others and get along." A parent of a student in Liz's class explained further,

> Ms. Smith would talk with my son about how he should treat others. She would take him aside and tell him to be nice and to use his words to explain what he was feeling. Ms. Smith taught him how to speak and get along with others.

The three teachers' viewpoints on the impact of the teacher-student relationship on the students' social development differed slightly from the parents and the students. For example, Belle felt her relationships with her students impacted them socially because she noticed an increase in their participation in different school activities. Belle explained,

> My students are not afraid to work with different people. I believe my relationship with them has helped them learn to get along and work with others no matter what the situation. I teach and model compassion for others. This is something very important for me to instill in my students.

Liz said,

> Through the structure and the high expectations that I have for my students, I believe they have learned to work with others academically and socially. I teach

my students to honor their classmates and to be compassionate towards each

other. My students know that I expect them to treat each other kindly.

Mike explained that he modeled and taught social skills such as responsibility to his

students. "I believe their responsibility as whole is what leads them to be socially

responsible. I am constantly asking them to reflect on their thoughts and actions. I want

to them to have self-awareness and get along."

Mike, Liz and Belle also taught their students the social skills of the school

culture so they would be successful in school. This type of teaching reflects Delpit's

(2006) findings that culturally responsive teachers recognize that low socioeconomic and

racial/ethnic minority students need to learn the code of the dominant culture to be

successful.

Developing positive relationships. The three teachers all felt that modeling and

teaching the development of positive relationships was very important in the social

development of their students. The three teachers modeled positive relationships with the

students in their class, and with other students and adults alike. Liz explained,

I think the teacher must accept everybody and this sets the stage for building

relationships and for the learning environment. I tell novice teachers that the

teacher must take the lead and that if they [the students] see a teacher picking on a

student or if they see that the teacher doesn't like a student and that student starts

acting up, then the other students may start to follow too. But if they see the

teacher love that student and the teacher is trying to make them a happy student,

then the other students try to follow the teacher's actions. Through my actions, I

am modeling how to build positive relationships. I may not be perfect, but they do

see how we should treat others by the way I treat them.

Liz's shared her belief that in the classrooms of responsive teachers students feel they are

part of a family. The teacher cares for the students and the students are taught to care for

each other (Brown, 2004; Howard, 2002).

Developing positive relationships was something Belle and Mike modeled for

their students. One of Belle's students said, "Ms. Garcia is friends with all students and

teachers. She talks with them and laughs with them. Ms. Garcia shows us how we should

treat each other." A parent of a student in Belle's class said, "My daughter has made

friends with all of the new students in her class and Ms. Garcia was very important in

helping her have good relationships with them." A parent in Mike's class expressed

similar thoughts:

Mr. Cantú was always friendly with everyone. He always talked with everybody.

My son would see how positive Mr. Cantú was with others and this helped my

son be like Mr. Cantú with the other students and teachers. My son had positive

relationships because of Mr. Cantú' example.

Collaborative learning. The supportive teacher-student relationships that Mike,

Liz and Belle developed with their students helped the students become collaborative

learners. The collaborative techniques that the three teachers implemented in their

classrooms created the space for their students to work in this manner. One example of

this was when Mike encouraged his students to participate in the campus science fair by

allowing them to work in collaborative teams. Mike said, "I wanted the students to

participate in the campus science fair and I knew that working in teams would be less

intimidating. I laid out the expectations for the collaborative projects and the students flourished. The students pushed each other to higher levels." A characteristic of a culturally responsive classroom is a caring and collaborative atmosphere. As described by Ladson-Billings (1995): "To solidify the social relationships in their classes, the teachers encouraged the students to learn collaboratively, teach each other, and be responsible for the academic success of others. The teachers used a combination of formal and informal peer collaborations" (p. 481).

The students that participated in this project also explained the concept of collaborative learning. A student in Liz's class said, "Ms. Smith lets us work with a buddy or in groups. She says this is one way to help each other learn. I learn from my friends." A student from Mike's class explained, "The learning was not always easy but Mr. Cantú would let us work in groups. Mr. Cantú would remind members of their part in the group. This helped us teach each other and learn from each other." One of Belle's students said, "When we were studying history, Ms. Garcia would put us in groups. Each group had to present their learning through acting. We had to pretend we were from that time period. That was fun."

Summary. The social skills that Mike, Liz and Belle taught and modeled for their students were important to the students' academic success and social development. The students learned to work with peers and to be role models for other students in the school. They became skilled at getting along, developing positive relationships, and learning collaboratively, which increased the students' participation in school activities outside of the classroom.

Academic Development

  It is the evening of literacy night and the auditorium is filled with excited students, parents and teachers. As the principal of the school, I was to set the scene for the night's events. The theme for the evening was "Around the World with Reading." I had on my pilot's jacket, hat and wings to show that we were ready to take flight. I explained how the students and their parents would visit a different part of the world according to the passport they had received at the door.

  One of the stops for some of the parents and students would be Washington, D.C. This was the setting for Liz's story on the upcoming presidential elections. Liz was going to read two short articles about the presidential candidates and their platforms. Along with these informative readings, the students and their parents would be able to vote for the next president of the U.S. in a mock election in her classroom. Liz's classroom was fully decorated with the candidates' pictures, streamers, and election paraphernalia. This setting seemed to add to the excitement of current times in our world and in our own community as the elections were only a week away.

  Although this was an evening event, it was clear that Liz had once again planned an exciting lesson for the students and their parents. This was no different than the way she plans all of her lessons! Liz wanted her lesson this evening to be informative and exciting, and for it to be one to which the students and parents could make a real life connection.

  At the end of the night we counted the number of students who attended the event by teacher, and it was Liz who had the highest number of students who attended that evening. This was the same for her daily class attendance. Not only did Liz have

consistently good attendance ratings from year to year, but she also had high numbers of students that passed the state accountability tests in her class. High student achievement was also noted in the high number of Liz's students that met their monthly reading goals and the high number that received recognition for their academic progress.

Liz and the other two participating teachers' commitment to teaching lessons that would add to their students' real world knowledge motivated and intrigued their students to reach higher levels of achievement. This motivation was also part of the teachers' strategy to get their students to school every day and to meet high expectations for learning. The quality of teacher-student relationships that Liz formed with her students helped her establish an ecologically fit learning environment for all of her students. She provided her students with multiple opportunities that reduced isolation, fostered social competence and promoted belongingness. In this study, the impact that teacher-student relationships had on students' academic development included two themes: higher student attendance and higher student achievement.

Higher Attendance. Valenzuela (1999) found compelling evidence "among the great number of students who skip most classes chronically, these same students regularly attend one class that is meaningful to them" (p. 102). The same is true for the students that are in Mike, Liz and Belle's classrooms; in these three classrooms, students' attendance rates are some of the highest at United. Evidence also showed that attendance rates for students who participated in this study was better during the academic year that the students were with Mike, Liz, or Belle, in comparison to previous years with other teachers. Table 1 compares two years of attendance rates in Mike, Liz, and Belle's classrooms with equivalent groups in their respective grade levels.

Table 1

Comparison of Attendance Rates

		Attendance Rate	
Grade	Class	1st Year	2nd Year
6	Mike's Class	98.6	97.3
	Comparison Class	95.2	95.4
5	Belle's Class	97.3	98.1
	Comparison Class	95.4	96.1
3	Liz's Class	98.2	97.2
	Comparison Class	96.0	96.3

Mike, Liz and Belle stay in close contact with the students and their parents. Whenever a child is absent from school, the teachers make every effort to find out why the student was not present, especially if the child has been absent for more than one day. The three teachers in this study make phone calls, ask the students' siblings and friends about them, and work with other school personnel to make home visits to check on students. This close contact is an example of the open and honest communication that the participants described under research question one: "what do supportive teacher-student relationships look like and how are they shaped?" This close communication is an example of the cultural responsiveness findings that yielded higher attendance rates in Mike, Liz, and Belle's classrooms.

I hypothesize that the care the three teachers demonstrated as described in the findings for research question one impacted attendance for the students in these three teachers' classrooms. Mike, Liz and Belle demonstrated care in different ways, which motivated the students to attend school. The three teachers also took time to talk to and listen to their students, which also motivated the students to come to school everyday.

Student achievement. In this study, Mike, Liz and Belle measured student achievement in many different ways. Liz, for example, explained,

> I want all of them to learn. I show them that I want them to grow and improve. I look at each child individually and see the individual's growth. I recognize their personal achievements and show them how that affects the whole class.

These comments reflect one of Gay's (2002) discussions of a culturally responsive teacher.

> Teachers are diligent and creative in their efforts to do everything possible to ensure that students achieve to the best of their ability. They keep raising the bar of achievement standards, within reasonable and reachable levels. They reach and teach toward success for all students without imposing identical indicators of success onto everyone. (p. 621)

A parent of a student in Liz's class said, "My son has been the most productive with Ms. Smith than with any of the other teachers he had. I believe he has learned more with her. He had better grades with Ms. Smith." Another parent of a student in Liz's class explained, "Ms. Smith looked at my child's strengths and weaknesses. She knew what he needed and was consistent with him. My child reaped the rewards of the seeds Ms. Smith sowed." A parent of a student in Belle's class said, "Ms. Garcia has helped my child

reach her learning goals and be successful." One of Liz's students explained his achievement, "Before Ms. Smith, I used to get C's and low grades on my report card. But with Ms. Smith, I got a few A's and B's. I got better grades with Ms. Smith." When I compared this particular student's grades from one year to the next, major improvement was noted.

> The parents of Mike's students also commented that Mike had helped their children be successful. A student in Mike's class said,
> I struggled in my classes before Mr. Cantú. I didn't even like school anymore. He showed me how to be a better student. Mr. Cantú changed me. He helped me learn and I passed all my subjects. I passed the TAKS tests with Mr. Cantú but the years before I didn't.

This student from Mike's class, like the one in Liz's class quoted above, made major improvements in reading grades when Mike was his teacher.

Wilson & Corbett (2001) and Valenzuela (1999) found that students valued teachers who helped them catch up on their work and pushed them to complete their assignments. The students discussed by these authors also felt that these teachers nurtured in their students a belief that they could be successful learners. I hypothesize that the improved grades found in my study were a result of the culturally responsive themes reported in the findings for research questions one and two. Mike, Liz and Belle provided the students with care through individualized academic assistance, support and encouragement. These three teachers also helped the students gain higher achievement by implementing collaborative learning and relevant content. The interactions of teacher-student relationships with the classroom, school, and the community contexts provided

the three teachers' students additional resources and opportunities that help with their academic progress.

All of the students in this study passed the state reading and math assessments (TAKS) when they were with Mike, Liz, or Belle, which was not the case for all of them in previous testing years. All three teachers' classes had high percentages of students passing the state assessment. For example, Table 2 shows that Liz's class scored higher on the reading and math TAKS tests in comparison to an equivalent group from the same grade level in the same year.

Table 2

Comparison of Liz's TAKS Scores

Class	Passing Percentages by Subject Area	
	Reading	Math
Liz's Class	92%	83%
Equivalent Group	83%	71%

The findings for research questions one and two described the supportive teacher-student relationships that Liz formed with her students, relationships that I hypothesize, helped her students succeed academically. Among many findings, Liz showed care for her students that was student-centered and encouraging. She provided an organized classroom that allowed the students to take ownership of their learning and that was culturally relevant. She provided collaborative opportunities for the students to work as a family and to succeed.

On average, Belle's students scored higher than the overall grade-level average during the school year in which this study was carried out. Although the scores are not as

high as Liz or Mike's classes, Table 3 does show that Belle's class scored higher in reading and math in comparison to the overall grade level.

Table 3

Comparison of Belle's TAKS Scores

	Passing Percentages by Subject Area	
Class	Reading	Math
Belle's Class	67%	64%
Equivalent Group	58%	55%

I hypothesize that Belle's supportive teacher-student relationships positively impacted her students' achievement. Some of the culturally responsive themes that Belle demonstrated included providing individualized academic assistance during the school day and after-school tutoring and enrichment classes. Belle consistently talked with her students and showed a genuine interest in their lives. She continuously provided lessons that were relevant and engaging for all of her students. The supportive teacher-student relationships that Belle established and nourished allowed her students to be academically successful.

In Mike's grade level, the team is departmentalized and Mike teaches reading and social studies. There are only two teachers in Mike's grade level and they both teach different content areas. For this reason, I could not compare Mike's class with another class in the same grade level. I compared TAKS reading scores of the cohort of students in Mike's class (Cohort M) with the same cohort of students' scores from the previous year (Cohort P).

Table 4

Comparison of Mike's TAKS Scores

	Reading TAKS Scores
Class	Passing Rates
Cohort M	92%
Cohort P	55%

Indications of positive effects of a supportive teacher-student relationship can be seen in Table 4. Mike was culturally responsive by consistently providing his students with care, trust, respect and open-mindedness. He also shared his personal stories with his students and he listened to his students' stories with genuine concern and interest. Through the supportive-teacher student relationships that Mike established with his students, he was able to provide lessons that went beyond the curriculum and that were meaningful to his students and were relevant to their lives.

Summary. The findings indicated that the teacher-student relationship positively impacted the students' daily attendance and academic achievement. The students and the parents in the study described how the teachers had contributed to the children's successes. It is my hypothesis that the bonds that the three teachers established with their students were instrumental in improving student achievement.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Teacher-student relationships are an integral part of teaching and learning. This case study was about the teacher-student relationship and the teacher's craft in creating an "ecologically fit" classroom for all students. The knowledge developed during the study hopefully will lead to participation by other teachers at United Elementary in efforts to transform our school, classrooms, and teacher-student relationships. Although the results of this study cannot be generalized, practitioners and scholars may wish to refer to the study's design and findings as they develop their school improvement programs and research projects.

In talking with selected teachers, students, and parents and by observing teacher-student interactions, I was able to gain a better understanding of the strategies that culturally responsive elementary teachers have implemented to maximize student learning. Through interviews and observations, I was able to identify how teachers were able to successfully create an "ecological fit" in their classrooms to help children learn.

The following questions were explored in this study: What do supportive teacher-student relationships look like and how are they shaped? How do they interact with the contexts in which they develop? What is the impact of supportive teacher-student relationships? The research questions were investigated based on Mary Harvey's

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constructs of an "ecological fit. The participants of the study were three elementary teachers, students and parents. The teachers were selected through an extreme sampling process. The teacher participants were considered by teachers, support staff (counselor, social worker, and parent support specialist), parents, and community members to be successful with students from diverse cultures. The teachers nominated three students from their classes who they felt would be able to contribute to the study. The ethnic backgrounds of the students selected were either Hispanic or African American, since this is the make-up of the school in which the study was conducted. Of the nominated students and parents, only one child that was nominated chose not to participate; therefore, the teacher that nominated this child only had two student participants and two parents. One other teacher participant also had only two student participants after the first round of interviews. I was unable to contact one student and her parent for participation in the rest of the study so their initial data were excluded.

Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the seventeen participants. Observations were conducted and videotaped in each teacher participants' classroom and parent-teacher conferences were observed and videotaped. I analyzed transcripts of interviews, identifying categories and themes relative to the three research questions. After each phase of data collection, all participants—teachers, students, and parents—were given the opportunity to review the interview transcripts and observation summaries and any emerging themes or patterns prior to their participation in the next phase of the data collection process.

The findings of the study were organized under each research question. Each theme was explained in the context of a real-life story illustrating the findings. After each

story, themes and sub-themes were reported and related to the literature. Four themes were identified for the first research question, "What do supportive teacher-student relationships look like and how are they shaped?" These themes were care, mutual regard, conversations, and open and honest communication. The participants all agreed that care was necessary in the shaping of teacher-student relationships. The participants described care as being helpful, supportive and encouraging as well as using humor and being student-centered. When describing mutual regard, the participants discussed trust, respect and open-mindedness as important in the shaping of such regard. According to the participants, the conversations that the teacher had with students also were critical to shaping the teacher-student relationship. Finally, for all of the participants, open and honest communication was necessary for establishing and maintaining the teacher-student relationship.

For the second research question, "How do supportive teacher-student relationships interact with the contexts in which they develop?" three major categories were identified, with multiple themes within each category. The three categories were interaction with classroom context, school context, and community context. The first category, interaction with classroom context, included five themes: organized, fun, collaborative, safe and relevant. These themes described the classroom context that the participants discussed most often as affecting the teacher-student relationship.

The second category for this question was interaction with school context. In this category, the study identified the following themes: team players, commitment to all students and collaboration with other staff members. The participants reported that the relationship between the teacher and the student was affected by and affected the way the

teacher interacted with other adults and students in the school and by the different opportunities that the teacher and the student had to work together. Interaction with community context was the third category for research question two. Themes within this category were concerned with the way the teacher collaborated with external partners, parents and community members. This collaboration added to the teacher-student relationship.

For the third research question, "What is the impact of supportive teacher-student relationships?" three categories identified were: personal development, social development, and academic development. The student and the parent participants reported that the teacher-student relationship impacted the student's personal development in three ways: increased self-confidence, increased motivation and the development of the child's talents. Under the category of social development, the participants reported that the relationship between the teacher and the student helped the student develop social skills and positive relationships and fostered collaborative learning. Finally, under the category of academic development themes included higher student attendance and higher student achievement.

The remainder of this chapter includes five sections. In the interpretation section, the findings of the study will be interpreted in relation to the study's conceptual framework, which incorporates Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, Nodding's theory on care, Spindler and Spindler's cultural therapy and Palmer's selfhood. The second section is a discussion of what I learned from the study. In the third section, I will discuss the implications for future professional development at United Elementary. Next, I will make recommendations for practice, for teacher and leadership preparation

programs, and for future research. The chapter ends with my closing thoughts on the study.

<div align="center">Interpretations</div>

Here I will interpret the findings in relation to the study's conceptual framework, which includes Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, Noddings work on care, Spindler and Spindler's work on cultural therapy and Palmer's ideas on selfhood (see Chapter 1). Figure 3 illustrates the conceptual framework. This framework was the basis for understanding the teacher-student relationship and how supportive relationships can lead to the creation of "ecologically fit" classrooms.
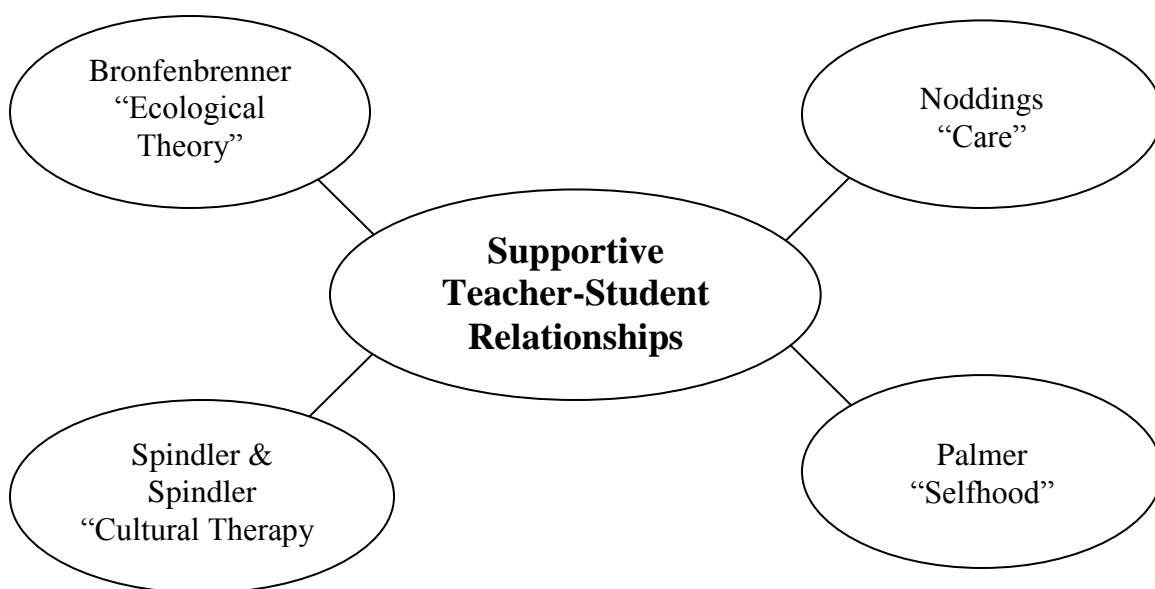
Figure 3: The Study's Conceptual Framework

Bronfenbrenner's Microsystem

Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that everything in a child, and in the child's environment, affects how a child grows and develops. The forces and interactions of environments shape a child's development. He described different aspects or levels of the

environment that influence children's development, including the microsystem, the

mesosystem, the exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. To review, the

microsystem is the family, peers, school, or classroom in the child's immediate

environment. A mesosystem is two or more interacting microsystems, such as the

interaction of home and school. The exosystem is an environment in which the child is

indirectly involved and is external to his or her experience, yet it affects him or her. The

macrosystem describes the culture in which the child lives, including socioeconomic

status, culture, ethnicity, and so on. The last system, the chronosystem, involves the

events and transitions in a child's life.

Based on my review of the model, the teacher-student relationship, the classroom,

and the school are all microsystems. Interaction between any two of these or all three is a

mesosystem, and the community is an exosystem. The microsystem is the aspect of

Bronfenbrenner's theory in which I placed the teacher-student relationship because it is

the immediate environment that the child lives in while at school. I viewed the teacher-

student relationship as the microsystem that most directly influences the individual.

A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations

experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical

and material characteristics. The factors of activity, role, and interpersonal

relation constitute the elements, or building blocks of the microsystem.

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22)

There is a clear relationship between the findings of this study and

Bronfenbrenner's idea of how an ecological system affects a child's development. The

themes that emerged from the data on research questions one and two can be considered

the building blocks of this microsystem that I refer to as the supportive teacher-student relationship. The data revealed different activities, roles, and interpersonal communications that influenced the teacher-student relationship. The classroom and school were the other microsystems that this study examined. Interactions between the teacher-student relationship and the classroom as well as between the teacher-student relationship and the school were parts of the mesosystem that were explored. Finally, interactions between the teacher-student relationship and the community—part of the exosystem in Bronfrenbrenner's theory —also were explored in this research.

The study identified themes relative to the classroom, school and community contexts as some of the building blocks of the microsystem. These influences were found under question two of this study: "How do teacher-student relationships interact with the contexts in which they develop?" These interactions are directly related to an "ecological fit." Harvey explained that an "ecological fit" was achieved through the interventions that enhanced the environment-person relationship.

Noddings Care Perspective

Another area that is directly connected to supportive teacher-student relationships is Noddings idea of care in education. Noddings (1992) argues, "The first job of schools is to care for our children. We should educate all our children not only for competence but also for caring" (p. xiv). She also feels "teachers must thoroughly understand their own and their students' perspectives and experiences" (p. 19). In this study, participants believed that care was essential to the teacher-student relationship and to the creation of an "ecological fit." It is important to point out here that caring in schools is not enough. Caring and loving the children we work with is very important but care alone cannot be

substituted for learning. Learning must continue to happen for all children and the care that is given must be more along the lines of authentic care and not aesthetic care. Both are needed in schools but the focus cannot be on aesthetic caring. Authentic caring is student-centered caring, focused on the individual and collective needs, interests, capacities, and cultures of students and teachers. Authentic caring develops through the social interactions and curriculum that respond to students' needs, interests, and cultures. Aesthetic caring focuses more on the institutional forces such as systems, rules, policies, and accountability, which are important in the smooth operation of schools. However, showing only aesthetic caring can lead to deficit teaching rather than teaching that cultivates the funds of knowledge and assets of every child.

My findings link to three out of the four components of Noddings' ethic of caring. Modeling, the first component, is vital in the scheme of caring. Noddings argues "we are not trying to teach students principles and ways of applying them to problems through chains of mathematical reasoning. Rather, we have to show how to care in our own relations with cared-fors" (p. 22). In other words, Noddings feels that responsive teachers do not simply tell their students to care; instead they show them how to care by creating relations with them.

Teachers in the study modeled care in a variety of ways. Participants described the responsive teachers as those demonstrating care through hugs, smiles, and the questions they asked their children about their lives outside of the classroom. Parents noted these caring actions when they discussed parent-teacher conferences; the teachers shared handshakes, hugs, smiles and laughter with the parents. Most importantly, care is modeled through the establishment of reciprocal relations that begin with trust and

respect. Noddings' (1992) believes that good teaching begins with the construction of trusting relationships and works continually to build on the foundation of trust. The theme of mutual regard in this study parallels Noddings' trusting relations. When the teachers in the study were asked to describe a supportive teacher-student relationship, they specifically mentioned mutual trust, respect, and open mindedness.

According to Noddings, the second component of moral education from a perspective of care is dialogue. In this study two forms of dialogue between teacher and student—conversations and communication—were central to the formation and sustainability of supportive teacher-student relationships. Noddings explains, "Dialogue is a common search for understanding, empathy, or appreciation. It can be playful or serious, logical or imaginative, goal or process oriented, but it is always a genuine quest for something underdetermined at the beginning" (p. 23). Dialogue in the perspective of caring creates connections with others and helps maintain caring relations.

The students and parents in this study believed that the conversations the teachers had with the students or the parents were very important. These conversations involved the teacher listening and talking with their child about school and other things, the teacher taking an interest in the child and the teacher sharing personal stories with the child. These conversations provided a connection between the teacher and the students and helped maintain caring relations.

Communication was the second form of dialogue that the data pointed to as important to supportive teacher-student relationships. Although students, parents, and teachers described communication differently, it was essential nonetheless to the teacher-student relationship. For the students, it was about the way the teacher talked with them

and listened to them. For the parents, it was about the way the teachers informed them of their child's progress and the areas they needed to continue to make improvements. And for the teachers, communication was about being willing to listen to the students and their parents and to be able to talk with them openly and honestly.

The last component of Noddings' concept of care is the idea of confirmation. Noddings (1992) explains that confirmation is "built from a knowledge of a particular other and by listening carefully to what she or he tells us. Confirmation cannot be done by formula; instead a relation of trust must ground it" (p. 25). The teachers' use of encouragement, support and praise throughout the study mirrors Noddings' concept of confirmation. At some point in the study, all of the participants discussed the importance of trust, respect, encouragement, and support as aspects of the teacher-student relationship. Care in its many different forms was essential to the formation and sustainability of supportive teacher-student relationships. The results of this study confirm Nodding's observation that dialogue

> Provides us with the knowledge of each other that forms a foundation for
> response in caring. We respond most effectively as carers when we understand
> what the other needs and the history of this need. Continuing dialogue builds
> up a substantial knowledge of one another that serves to guide our responses.
> (p. 23)

Spindler and Spindler's Cultural Therapy

> Louise and George Spindler (2000) describe cultural therapy as
> A process of bringing one's own culture, in its manifold forms-assumptions,
> goals, values, beliefs, and communicative modes—to a level of awareness that

permits one to perceive it as a potential bias in social interaction and in the acquisition or transmission of skills and knowledge. For teachers, cultural therapy can be used to increase awareness of the cultural assumptions they bring to the classroom that affect their behavior and their interactions with students—particularly students of color (if they are white). (p. 367)

The second form of cultural knowledge that Spindler (1999) refers to in the cultural therapy process is self-other cultural knowledge. This is "something we use constantly to place ourselves in relation to others and it directly affects our self-expression, as well as our feelings about ourselves" (p. 467).

My thoughts going into this study were that teachers' awareness and acknowledgement of their own culture and its potential bias in social interactions and in the transmission of skills and knowledge would be gleaned from the data I gathered. However, the exploration of these skills and knowledge were not investigated in an in-depth way, which is a limitation of the study. The only aspects of this study that relate to Spindler and Spindler's work are the different communicative modes that the teachers used with their students, and the reciprocal personal values that the teachers reported as important to the teacher-student relationship. These findings agree with Spindler's ideas on how we place ourselves in relation to others.

There were a variety of communicative modes that were identified in the data relative to all three-research questions. The different modes of communication that were mentioned most often by the participants were one-to-one conversations and assistance, talking with the students about their interests and their lives, connecting with the students, humor, and positive interactions. These forms of communication placed the

teacher and the student in direct contact with each other and made the teachers accessible to the students. The data also showed that the teachers were open to their children's needs and opinions and believed in the power of conversations and dialogue. This was evident in the responses the teachers gave to the questions that related to motivation, assessment, and classroom control. All of these areas were shared and balanced between the teacher and the students.

The reciprocal values that the teachers mentioned throughout the study were trust and respect. These values were found to be extremely important in relation to the first research question: "What do supportive teacher-student relationships look like and how are they shaped?" The three teachers talked about the trust that needed to be built with the students and the respect that would develop through this trust. They felt that it was imperative for the students and the teachers to share this trust and respect.

Although these communicative modes and values were not studied in-depth, they could be considered as the beginning stages of cultural therapy. The next steps for this type of work will be discussed further in my recommendations for future research.

Palmer's Selfhood

Parker Palmer, like Spindler, believes that we teach who we are. "Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my student, my subject, and our way of being together" (Palmer, 1998, p. 2). He also believes "Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness" (Palmer, 1998, p. 11). Such connectedness was what I looked for throughout this study.

Teachers, students, and parents all believed that the connections the teachers made with their students were important to the creation and sustainability of a supportive teacher-student relationship. The teachers connected with their students during one-on-one and group conversations. The teachers did this by sharing their personal stories with the students. The data also showed that the interest the teachers took in the students' lives inside and outside of school were important to the teacher-student relationship. These different modes of conversations with the students allowed the teachers to understand their students more fully and teach them well, as Palmer (1998) describes in his work.

Another theme from the study that connects to Palmer's work on selfhood is teachers presenting the content in relevant and meaningful ways that go beyond the classroom. Palmer (1998) points out a truth about teaching that relates to this study: "What we teach will never 'take' unless it connects with the inward, living core of our students' lives, with our students' inward teachers" (p. 31). The teacher, student, and parent participants all shared learning experiences that pointed to Palmer's truth about teaching. The teachers not only allowed the students to present their learning in different modalities but also allowed the students to teach others. The teachers gave students the space to share their inner teacher.

The findings of this study show that learning environments characterized as "ecological fits" can be created through supportive teacher-student relationships. The findings also reveal that the creation of these environments requires a deeper understanding of oneself as teachers and of their students. The conceptual framework discussed here includes four theoretical models that are essential in the development of supportive teacher-student relationships that can yield "ecologically fit" learning

environments. These four components are grounded in research and can be combined to meet the needs of the teacher and the student as their relationship develops. The three teachers in this study created an interdependent community of learners. They were just as dependent on their students as the students were on them. They created ecologically fit learning environments where they shared mutuality and meaning that allowed for learning to happen for everyone in surprising ways.

What I Have Learned

One purpose of this case study was to help inform teachers and myself, United Elementary's principal, how to develop high quality relationships with students, especially with students from diverse cultures. This is important to all of us at United because, like many schools today, at United there is a gap between the backgrounds of many teachers and the students for whom they are responsible.

Because my own personal values and beliefs as a school administrator and former teacher revolve around caring relationships, the themes that were identified regarding what a positive teacher-student relationship looks like and how it is shaped did not surprise me. However, I was amazed that the students consistently reminded me that talking with their teachers was such an important aspect to their teacher-student relationship. Because of the many demands put on teachers, it is so easy for teachers to stop listening to and talking with students. I was also reminded how important our parents are in the process of shaping the teacher-student relationship. School administrators, teachers, and other school personnel need to make time to talk with the students' parents to learn more about their children and what they bring to school everyday. Parents and families must be included by school personnel in all aspects of

their children's learning, most especially in the formation of the teacher-student relationship.

I also learned that the context that affects the development of the teacher-student relationships goes beyond the classroom walls. As a former teacher, I learned early on during that period that the classroom environment affected my students and their learning and how we related to one another. However, through this study, I learned that the school and community contexts were also vital in the development of supportive teacher-student relationships. The whole school is responsible for all of the children that come through our doors everyday. The teacher participants were good examples of how to meet this responsibility. The three teachers showed their commitment to all students in United Elementary in a variety of ways. As the principal of the school, I need to provide time and space for teachers to be able to expand their commitments beyond their classroom walls and into our school as a whole.

The community context was also a big factor in the development of the teacher-student relationship. Prior to this study, I had not put time and effort into improving school-community communication and collaboration. All of the participants alluded to the fact that the community's involvement made a difference in teacher-student relationships. The teachers in this study were not afraid to open their doors and allow others to come in and work with them or to go out and seek resources within the community that would enhance their students' everyday learning. The teacher participants opened their classroom doors and expanded their students' learning beyond the classroom and the mandated curriculum.

One of the biggest areas of learning for me was the inclusion of our students'

parents. Throughout this study, I was reminded that as a school we need to include our

students and parents not just in the academic parts of our school but also in all other

aspects and areas of learning and growing. Although we do include them in some ways, I

learned that what we have been doing is not enough. I feel that we are going to have to

try new ways of including our students and parents in the day-to-day work of our school.

Here I am talking about deeper involvement in the work that we do everyday in the

school that extends beyond teaching. I feel that in order to create a true school

community and connect the school with the larger community, we will need to develop

relationships not only with our students but also with their families. We will need to

make time to talk with our families and to hear their stories in order to create an

interdependent community of learners.

This study also caused me to me to reflect on my own work as a leader. I was able

to look at mistakes that I have made and think about new ways to approach similar

situations in the future so that I am not making the same errors again. For example, in

Chapter Four I explained that after my first year as United principal the United Young

Scientist (UYS) program was discontinued as a one class magnet program. I told this

story in Chapter Four to give some context to United Elementary and my relationships

with all stakeholders. As I sated previously, through this study I learned that our parents

are a vital part of the learning community and that as the school leader I need to find

ways to include parents more in our learning processes. In retrospect, I feel that I should

have handled the parent meetings that I held to discuss the United Young Scientist

program in a different way. Now I believe I should have included the parents' ideas and

suggestions to further this type of program for all children in the school. In the end what happened was that the UYS concept faded out of existence after a couple of years. Perhaps if I had included the parents in some different discussions and in the learning process, the UYS program would be flourishing on our campus now. What I learned is that I need to re-examine my behaviors in this type of situation and keep the whole community as a focus. In this way, I believe we could make our school a successful school for all children.

I was surprised about how the parents felt about the impact the teacher-student relationship has made on their children personally, socially, and academically. The parents felt that these supportive relationships allowed their children to develop and grow and to succeed in school. They compared the teacher participants to their children's previous teachers who did not have supportive relationships with their children and felt that the participating teachers had made a much more positive impact on their child's learning and personal and social development.

There were several other things that I learned through this research project. I learned more about each of the three participating teachers. I especially learned to recognize that they were not perfect even though they are what I call culturally responsive "master" teachers and they have developed strong, supportive teacher-student relationships. They are human beings and as humans they had days during which their imperfections were evident. I recall having individual conversations with each of the participating teachers about their craft and the negative feelings that sometimes crept into their work.

I spent about two and a half hours with one of the participants as she explained to me the difficulties she was having with her class and how she was not sure if she could make a difference anymore. When I heard her say these things, my heart sank with anguish and apprehension. However, I did not let me own feelings show or take over the conversation. I just listened and let her talk through her disappointments and struggles. In the end, she said she knew what she needed to do to make this better and be the teacher her students needed her to be. She left my office and I was uncertain if she would return. Fortunately, for her class and United, she returned the next day with a renewed spirit and passion for her work. I saw this immediately when she gave me a hug and smile.

When I was conducting the observations and reviewing the videos, I was reminded of the many personalities that are in a classroom. Along with this, I was reminded that the classroom is a dynamic environment that is ever changing. There are also many personalities and demands that the teachers and students encounter outside of their classrooms everyday. It was not that I had forgotten completely about this part of teaching, I was just seeing this through different eyes than I ever had before. Normally, when I visit the classrooms, I am looking for particular teaching strategies or implementation of initiatives, not just seeing the class and the teacher for who they really are. During the study, I was observing with different eyes—as if I had never seen the teacher and the children before. This way of viewing the class helped me recognize my own perspectives and biases that needed to be checked. Through this research process, I have learned to visit classrooms with an open mind and fresh eyes and, by doing this; I am now able to give different kinds of feedback to teachers and students.

One final learning point for me that I feel was an important aspect of this study was the power relationships that existed throughout. What I learned as the researcher was that this power cannot be ignored and must be checked from the beginning. Although power did not seem to interfere in the relationships that I studied, I do feel that this is an important feature of relationships that needs to be examined and discussed as part of any research on this topic. In retrospect I recognize that the teacher participants and I had some unspoken power over the student and parent participants simply because of the positions we hold. However, I also believe that because we have established supportive relationships with the students and the parents our power (the teachers' and mine) was much less of a concern for the participants than in a more conventional school. I also realize that the teacher participants may be viewed as having more power over their colleagues because they were a part of this work. These power relationships will need to be examined prior to any sharing that the teacher participants do with the rest of the staff.

Through this study, I also found that the teacher-student relationship required some other components that I did not find in the culturally responsive teaching literature. First, the students continuously described their teachers as funny and humorous. The students felt that the teachers made the learning fun, which to them was what made the learning easier. The literature that I reviewed did talk about the teachers having passion for their craft but did not specifically describe this as the teacher having fun or being funny.

Another discovery that I made about the three culturally responsive teachers that I did not find in the literature was the idea of the teachers connecting with the whole school, not just with their classes. The teachers in this study found ways to include other

children in their daily interactions. They felt it was important to make connections with all children and not just their own students. Through these relationships, the teacher participants were able to build school wide trust at United.

One last area not in the literature on cultural responsiveness that I felt was an important finding was how the organization of the classroom impacted the students' learning. The organization of the responsive teachers' classrooms created a learning environment that was positive and supportive for all children. The three teacher participants made it a common practice to promote student autonomy by allowing the students to participate in the set up of the classroom. This helped in the development of the teacher-student relationships and it gave the students ownership of their classroom. From this the students and the teachers were able to establish family-community like environments.

<div style="text-align:center">Future Professional Development at United Elementary</div>

Based on the findings of this study, I am recommending that culturally relevant teaching be explored in a professional development program at United. The purpose of this professional development program will be to develop in other United teachers the characteristics and behaviors that I found in the participating teachers; these culturally responsive teachers will lead to the development of "ecologically fit" classrooms for all students.

The plan consists of six goals:

1. increase awareness of the need for culturally responsive teaching

2. develop a vision for culturally responsive classrooms

3. evaluate readiness and identify differentiated professional development

4. investigate our own cultural identity and that of our students and families

5. increase community cultural knowledge

6. challenge, reframe beliefs and change practice

The United professional development plan will be an eighteen-month plan that will be implemented within a two-year academic calendar. During most of the process, the staff will be divided into two groups and work simultaneously. During the seventeenth and eighteenth months of the plan, the United staff will come together as a whole to complete the plan.

Ladson-Billings (1995) argues, "culturally relevant teaching is central in the academic success of African American and other children who have not been well served by our nation's public schools" (p. 159). The professional development for culturally relevant teaching that I am recommending for United Elementary will need to begin with determining whether our beliefs at United are additive or subtractive. "Individuals with an additive view see diversity as a rich resource that can be tapped to bridge cultural differences and maximize learning for all children" (Guerra & Nelson, 2009, p. 355). The professional development program for culturally responsive teaching is based on the four-stage process outlined by Guerra and Nelson.

The first stage in this process will be to raise understanding. Guerra & Nelson (2008) propose, "raising awareness, educators examine a variety of school data to recognize how a lack of cultural understanding impacts more than student test scores" (p. 55). Book studies will be used to enhance teachers' awareness and understanding. Guerra & Nelson (2008) state, "book studies are among the simplest activities to implement because the planning, preparation, and time involved are relatively limited. They are easy

to coordinate, and the discussions build interest and knowledge among participants fairly quickly" (p. 43). For close examination of teachers' interpersonal qualities and behaviors and how these help in the development of cultural proficiency, we will begin with a book study on *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* by Gloria Ladson-Billings (Jossey-Bass, 1997). This part of the professional development program will help us analyze our own behaviors compared to the stories and practices highlighted in this book. "These success stories help staff see that a teacher does not have to be a person of color to successfully work with culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students" (Guerra & Nelson, 2009, p. 357). After the book study, the staff will be able to identify classroom assets and additive beliefs and practices. From these assets and additive beliefs, the United staff will develop a vision for culturally responsive classrooms. The three teachers who participated in this study and the school's administrators will facilitate the development of the vision.

The second stage in the process is to "use cultural assimilations to assess teacher readiness to engage in further professional development" (Guerra & Nelson, 2008, p. 55). This stage will help the facilitators understand which teachers are ready to move to stages three and four and which teachers still need to further their readiness in culturally proficiency. As part of the United professional development plan, an outside consultant will be invited to facilitate stage two of the plan. It may be easier for an outside consultant to assist in the debriefing of the simulations and help teachers feel more comfortable sharing their experiences and feelings of these types of activities.

In stage three of the United professional development plan, teachers will learn about themselves and their students. Guerra & Nelson (2008) explain,

Teachers expand their cultural knowledge and examine their own personal beliefs. During this stage, facilitators use a variety of activities such as book studies, film analysis, cultural simulations, and community events to guide teacher in learning about their own cultural identity and its influence on teaching. Additionally, teachers learn about the cultural backgrounds of their students and families and how these identities shape their behavior and interactions at home. The readings and activities serve as a mechanism for examining and discussing classroom practices and surfacing deficit beliefs. (p. 56)

As part of stage three, teachers will complete a survey that will help them identify teaching practices, beliefs, and attitudes. From this survey, United's teachers will be able to develop their own teacher platform and identify the practices that are shaped by their beliefs. During this stage, the teachers will also identify community events that they will participate in, along with questions and behaviors they will focus on during the events they attend. One event that can help teachers expand their cultural knowledge is participation in a neighborhood walk. This part of the plan focuses on relationship building that can help increase the interactions between the United educators and the families of our students from different racial/ethnic minority groups. Delpit (2006) states,

We have created in most schools institutions of isolation. Nowhere do we foster inquiry into what our students really are or encourage teachers to develop links to the often rich home lives of students, yet teachers cannot hope to understand who sits before them unless they can connect with the families and communities from which their students come. (p. 179)

Another activity in stage three that will help with relationship building is to provide

house meetings with teachers, parents, and community members to share their

school/learning experiences and beliefs. Collegial support groups led by the three

teachers who participated in this study will support teachers during stage three.

Stage four of the professional development process will include teachers

exploring personal data disaggregated by student ethnicity, SES, and teacher. The

purpose of this stage, according to Guerra & Nelson (2008), is to:

Explore teachers' personal practice and to challenge and reframe their deficit

thinking. The group will examine the same data that are further disaggregated by

teacher and program for the purpose of revealing patterns of inequity within

individual classrooms, departments, and grade levels. (p. 56)

During this last stage of the professional development program, the United teachers will

gather data through teacher-developed parent and student surveys. The focus of the

surveys will be on teacher-student relationships and teacher-parent relationships. The

survey data will be used to guide individual teachers in making changes in their personal

practice. Another activity that the United teachers will participate in during stage four

will be viewing films and documentaries that will lead to discussions on cultural

perspectives and personal beliefs that affect behaviors and practice. Outside consultants

will be invited to facilitate these activities so that all teachers feel comfortable sharing

their perspectives and beliefs through this process. Through this reflection and sharing

teachers will identify practices that they intend to change and then will be able to create

an individual culturally responsive plan that they will implement in the next school year.

Culturally relevant teaching will not be found in every classroom until professional development opportunities are provided to the staff. This process can be facilitated through Guerra and Nelson's four-stage process that will help teachers gain a better understanding of cultural proficiency. In this way, teachers, administrators, and other school personnel can begin to move forward in building a culturally responsive school. A detailed United Professional Development Plan is included as Appendix L.

<div align="center">Recommendations</div>

Recommendations for Practice

I have five general recommendations for practice. My first recommendation is for teachers to establish family-community-like classroom environments where all students are responsible for their learning and the learning of all of their peers. In this type of classroom, the teacher and the students push each other to succeed and do not accept failure from anyone. It is a one-for-all and all-for-one mentality. Ladson-Billings (1994) and Howard (2002) both found that culturally relevant teaching fosters collective efforts among the students and a sense of belonging. "Strategies that can used to encourage kindred relationships among students would be more cooperative learning situations, elimination of homogenous ability grouping, establishment of democratic principles, and the promotion of interdependence" (Howard, 2002, p. 441).

Second, I recommend that teachers establish caring relationships with all of their students and the students' families. A caring teacher will show care for his or her students in multiple ways. The caring teacher will show genuine concern and commitment. He or she will encourage and support students in positive ways and will hold high expectations

for all the students. The teacher will hold true to a "no excuses" attitude. Howard (2002), for example, explains African American students' perceptions on caring:

> One of the more essential manifestations of care is through commitment to action on the part of the teacher who refuses to accept anything less than the students' personal best. A sincere commitment to student academic and social development may be the most important expression of concern and care. (p. 441)

Wilson & Corbett (2001) also found that students from diverse cultures believed that the most caring and effective teachers were those that did not give up on any student.

> Regardless of how teachers specifically went about pushing students to do their work, the key for students was that there was someone who cared enough to make sure the work was being done and, through that caring, communicated that they were valued as learners. (p. 73)

The caring teacher will also know and understand the student's world outside of school and know how to integrate this into their learning. Ladson-Billings (1994) states, "As a matter of course, culturally relevant teaching makes a link between classroom experiences and the students' everyday lives. These connections are made in spirited discussions and classroom interactions" (p. 94).

My third recommendation for practice is for classroom teachers to vary classroom activities. Wilson & Corbett (2001) found that for students from diverse cultures "projects, lectures, real-world connections groups, creative acting, individual work, games and discussions were all preferred ways of learning. Thus, varying activities appealed to more students and, therefore, kept more students interested" (p. 86). The teacher needs to know and understand his or her students' learning styles and needs and

vary the learning activities to motivate and engage the students. The classroom activities must also be relevant to the students' interests and lives. Valenzuela (1999) agrees that learning needs to be meaningful and pertinent. "He [the student] needs someone to care enough to take the time to help him see the connections between what he learns in school and what he wants to do with his life" (p. 103).

Another recommendation for practice is for teachers to engage in dialogue with students, families and community members about the kind of instruction that their children need. Delpit (2006) suggests:

Appropriate education for poor children and children of color can only be devised in consultation with adults who share their culture. Black parents, teachers of color, and members of poor communities must be allowed to participate fully in the discussion of what kind of instruction is in their children's best interest. (p. 45)

The teacher must advocate for his or her students by seeking out information and knowledge from those that are raising their students. The teacher will need to be open to those whose perspectives differ from his or hers and know how to make the most of information provided by parents to help all children succeed. Through dialogue, the teacher will be able to build on students' assets and incorporate these assets into their daily learning.

My final recommendation for practice is the establishment of a professional development program that will help teachers develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to be able to implement all of the recommendations for practice I have delineated. The professional development program that I am referring to must be ongoing

and allow teachers to work through a collegial coaching format to practice new skills and receive feedback. I also recommend that the professional development program build in opportunities for teachers to share their experiences.

Recommendations for Teacher and Leadership Preparation Programs

Teaching requires much more than mere knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Pre-service teachers also need to learn about the dynamics of supportive teacher-student relationships and the constructs of "ecologically fit" classrooms. This knowledge will impact instructional pedagogy as well as classroom management styles and approaches. One recommendation is that teacher preparation programs teach specific courses that will help pre-service teachers recognize and respect a broad range of cultures, languages, belief structures, and economic differences in their communities.

With the ever-changing dynamics of schools, it is imperative for teacher preparation programs to provide learning that will allow pre-service teachers to study culture beyond the celebrations, foods, and holidays of different cultures. Teacher preparation programs must allow pre-service teachers to examine their own beliefs, assumptions, and biases and understand how these play a part in their teaching. Pre-service teachers must be able to develop multiple perspectives and commit to work with all children. Through this learning, pre-service teachers will also be able to develop their own educational platforms and begin to reflect on the different ways to establish supportive teacher-student relationships.

One additional recommendation for teacher preparation programs I am proposing is for pre-service teachers to be matched with culturally relevant teachers for their clinical experiences and to be given multiple opportunities to observe culturally relevant

teaching. Teacher preparation programs should give incentives to those teachers that are identified as culturally responsive teachers and are willing to work with pre-service teachers for extended periods of time.

Culturally relevant teaching needs to be supported at the campus level; therefore, I recommend that school leadership preparation programs also prepare principals who are culturally responsive. School leaders need to understand and value the demographic realities of the children they serve. School leaders must also search for ways to work more successfully with students, teachers, and parents from diverse cultures and backgrounds. Culturally relevant teachers and culturally responsive leaders cannot be separated. Sergiovanni (1995) states,

> The net effect of the cultural force of leadership is to bond students, teachers, and
> others together and to bind them to the work of the school as believers. School
> culture includes values, symbols, beliefs, and shared meanings of parents,
> students, teachers, and others conceived as a group or community. (p. 88-89)

Research suggests educators' professional practices are determined by their personal beliefs (Valencia, 1997). Transforming practice will only occur if beliefs and assumptions are brought to the forefront. I recommend that leadership preparation programs include coursework that will enable future leaders to look deep inside of themselves through "cultural therapy" and integrate social justice and cultural responsiveness concepts throughout the program. I believe that the road to cultural responsiveness will need to include cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, and cultural competency. Cultural awareness is developing sensitivity and understanding of another ethnic group. It also refers to the openness and flexibility that people develop in relation

to each other. Cultural knowledge is familiarization with selected cultural characteristics, histories, values, belief systems, and behaviors of another cultural group. Cultural competency refers to a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system or among professionals that enables them to work effectively in cross cultural environments. Culturally competent leaders work to understand their own biases as well as patterns of discrimination (Spindler & Spindler, 2000).

Along with cultural awareness, cultural knowledge and cultural competence, future leaders must also learn to recognize power relationships. As these areas are being examined and developed, power must also be scrutinized so that future leaders understand their roles and the roles of those they work with. The understanding of power in relationships will help future leaders work with all stakeholders as equals and build strong supportive relationships that will aid in the development of becoming a culturally responsive leader.

> The more frequent, extensive, intimate, and enduring our interactions are with others; the more likely it is that they well become patterned by relatively stable expectations. As we engage in ongoing exchanges with other people, we establish shared ideas about the identities we will occupy, the goals we will pursue and the roles we will perform. We also build a shared future. This allows for mutual commitment, planning, and coordination. It also enables us to establish a relationship, or an association with others that consists of shared expectations about identities, values and meanings, goals, roles, and a future. (Sandstrom, Martin & Fine, 2003, p. 139)

I recommend that leadership preparation programs include models such as Guerra & Nelson's (2009) four-stage process for developing culturally proficient educators. A related recommendation for leadership preparation programs is to provide in-depth analysis and study of school data disaggregated by race/ethnicity, poverty, and language group. Future culturally responsive leaders will need to understand how the achievement gap is created in order to facilitate this teacher growth in this area. Guerra & Nelson (2009) argue "seeing these data helps teachers understand that the achievement gap is not created by deficiencies in students and families but by a system that serves some groups better than others" (p. 356). With this type of understanding, a culturally responsive leader will be better prepared to help dispel teachers' deficit thinking and beliefs. The culturally responsive leader will be able to "address deficit beliefs by offering alternative explanations of inequities in the data" (Guerra & Nelson, 2009, p. 357).

I also recommend that leadership preparation programs include as part of their coursework book studies and/or research on successful educators working with diverse students and parents. From this type of learning, future leaders will begin to form a better understanding of the factors that contribute to the success of students who learn with these culturally responsive teachers. The culturally responsive leader will then be able to help teachers recognize the "additive beliefs and practices culturally responsive teachers and schools exhibit and assist staff in identifying assets in the school and identifying the knowledge, skills, and structures to be developed" (Guerra & Nelson, 2009, p. 357). The depth of understanding that is needed to become culturally proficient requires a particular type of leader; therefore, leader preparation programs must find ways to take future leaders through "a transformative journey beyond cultural awareness and knowledge to a

safe space where deficit beliefs and practices can be explored, challenged, and changed" (Guerra & Nelson, 2007, p. 60).

Recommendations for Future Research

One of the first discoveries I made as I was comparing the findings of this study to its conceptual framework was that a deeper examination and use of cultural therapy needed to occur. My work only explored this strategy at a surface level. Further study of cultural therapy and the implementation of this practice with teachers would develop deeper knowledge of individual teachers and their practices. This self-knowledge could lead to a more comprehensive perception of teachers' relations with their students and add further to the interventions and supports provided in "ecologically fit" classrooms.

Since this study only examined successful teachers at one elementary school, comparative studies could be conducted at other urban elementary schools similar to United. This type of study would help practitioners and researchers alike further develop the knowledge base on the practices of teachers who are successful with African American and Latino students. These teachers' successful practices need to be examined and re-examined because "good" practices do not happen in every classroom every day.

Children and parents' voices were important to this study; therefore, I recommend that this study be conducted with children in the primary grades. I conducted my study with students in third through sixth grade but the perspectives from younger children and their parents may be different than those presented through this study. Also, it would be interesting to conduct variations of this study at the middle school and high school levels in order to ascertain whether the same principles of culturally responsive teaching apply at those levels.

I also recommend that researchers work in collaboration with teachers as co-researchers to investigate students' funds of knowledge and other assets they bring to schools from their homes and communities. In my research, it became evident that understanding the students' lives outside of the school was important to the teacher-student relationship and classroom learning. It also became evident that an assets-based approach to teaching and learning was a critical aspect of culturally responsive teaching. Additional research on funds of knowledge and assets-based teaching needs to be done in order to extend the knowledge base on these two aspects of culturally responsive teaching.

Conclusion

I currently serve as the principal of United Elementary. This is my eighth year as principal. I chose to conduct this case study in the school where I am the principal because I was aware that not all teachers at the school had developed supportive teacher-student relationships with all of their students. This type of research allowed me to uncover the conditions, strategies, and practices of successful teachers on my campus who have developed those relationships. I will share the findings with the rest of the campus in the hope that supportive teacher-student relationships can be duplicated throughout United and high quality teaching in all classrooms for all students can happen everyday.

Teaching comes from the heart, and according to Parker Palmer "we teach who we are." While teachers are expected to teach with rigor, they are also expected to see their students for who they are and to teach them wisely. However, culturally responsive teaching is not easy to accomplish and the skills to do it are not innate within every

teacher. Therefore, it is important that teachers be given the time, space, and knowledge to develop and sustain supportive teacher-student relationships. This study clearly found that supportive teaching requires teachers to develop their self-awareness, understand where they stand in their relation with their students, and create caring environments. With this knowledge and with help from leaders and peers, teachers should be able to create "ecologically fit" classrooms for all children to learn and be successful.

The persistent underachievement of many African American and Latino students proves that learning conditions in our public schools need to improve dramatically. This type of improvement will take concerted efforts from all educators at all different levels. Teacher attitudes, expectations, and behaviors toward racial and ethnic minority students are a determining factor in the quality of education they receive. Research has proven that culturally responsive teaching yields school achievement of students of color. If teachers become more culturally conscious and competent and create ecologically fit classrooms for all students, then the achievement gaps between white students and students of color will be closed, and we will finally have educational equity and social justice for all students.

PORTRAIT OF A "SUCCESSFUL" TEACHER
Creator of supportive teacher-student relationships and "ecologically fit" classrooms

The "successful" teacher for this study is one that creates and maintains

meaningful teacher-student relationships in a safe and supportive environment. Specific

behaviors that promote positive relationships with students include but are not limited to:

listening to students' concerns, responding to transgressions gently and with explanations

rather than sharply and with punishment, and showing positive emotions such as smiling,

being playful, respectful, fair and honest.

Moreover, the teacher grants students some autonomy and opportunities for

decision-making; for example, by giving students choices in assignments, engaging them

in developing classroom rules, and encouraging them to express their opinions in

classroom discussions. This type of teacher also communicates directly and regularly

with the students about their academic progress, provides a variety of activities through

which to learn, and makes sure they understand what has been taught.

For this study, the "successful" teacher will also be culturally proficient. The

culturally proficient teacher is one that has a broad cultural lens that allows him/her to see

students for what they bring and use student knowledge and contributions as a bridge for

teaching and learning. A culturally proficient teacher knows and understands students and families from backgrounds different than their own. Additionally, culturally proficient teachers make accommodations in their practice and interactions to better serve the thinking, learning, communication, and relational styles of diverse students and families.

The "successful" teacher is able to recognize and accept students for who they are and for their differences. This teacher understands students' situations, and factors this knowledge into their lessons. The successful teacher is attentive and addresses students' nonacademic needs, expressing interest in their personal lives outside of school.

This teacher nurtures his/her students through high expectations and by holding students accountable for their learning, accepting no excuses. The teacher provides the students with constructive feedback and assistance when students need it, refuses to accept halfhearted efforts, and does not give up on students. The teacher goes out of his/her way to provide assistance.

The "successful" teacher continuously monitors students' academic progress and achievement, and assesses the learning in multiple ways. The teacher uses selected-response formats, constructed-response formats, performance-based assessments, and process-focused assessments. Some examples of these could be: student portfolios, individual conferences/meetings with students about their work, written feedback, student projects and oral presentations, construction or application of what was learned, research papers, science projects, models, videos, debates, and interviews. For this study, a successful student will be measured by showing at least one year's growth based on the different assessments that are implemented by the teacher.

El Papel de un profesor "exitoso":

El creador de las relaciones positivas del profesor y estudiante, y un

"ajuste ecológico" en las salas de clase

El profesor "exitoso" para este estudio es uno que crea y mantiene relaciones

significativas entre el profesor y estudiante en un ambiente de apoyo y seguro. Los

comportamientos específicos que promueven relaciones positivas con los estudiantes

incluyen, pero no se limitan: escuchando las preocupaciones de los estudiantes,

respondiendo a las transgresiones con delicadez y con explicaciones firmes en vez de

castigo, y demostrando emociones positivas tales como sonreír, siendo juguetón,

respetuoso, justo y honesto.

Por otra parte, el profesor concede autonomía y oportunidades a los estudiantes

para tomar decisión; por ejemplo, dando a los estudiantes opciones en tareas,

involucrándolos en el desarrollo de las reglas de clase, y animándoles a expresar sus

opiniones en discursos de la sala de clase. Este tipo de profesor también se comunica

directamente y regularmente con los estudiantes sobre su progreso académico,

proporciona una variedad de actividades para aprender, y que tengan comprensión de lo

que se les ha enseñado.

Para este estudio, el profesor "exitoso" también será sabio culturalmente. Este

profesor es uno que tiene un amplio lente cultural que permite que el/ella vea a los

estudiantes por lo que contribuyen y utiliza ese conocimiento como un enlace para

enseñar y aprender. Un profesor sabio culturalmente conoce y comprende a los

estudiantes, sus familias y antecedentes distintos a los suyos. Además, estos profesores

hacen ajustes en su práctica e interacciones para mejor servir la manera de pensar, el aprendizaje, la comunicación, y los estilos relacionales de diversos estudiantes y familias.

El profesor "exitoso" puede reconocer y aceptar a los estudiantes por quién son y por sus diferencias. Este profesor entiende las situaciones de los estudiantes y considera esto en sus lecciones. El profesor exitoso es atento a las necesidades que no son académicas, expresando interés en las vidas personales de los estudiantes fuera de la escuela.

Este profesor conciente a sus estudiantes con altas expectativas, los hace que tomen responsabilidad por su aprendizaje y no acepta excusas. El profesor les da comentarios positivos y ofrece ayuda cuando la necesitan, rechaza aceptar esfuerzos sin entusiasmo, y no se les da por vencido. El profesor hace lo más posible para dar ayuda.

El profesor "exitoso" constantemente monitorea el progreso académico y evalúa lo que se ha aprendido en varias maneras. El profesor utiliza formatos de selección y respuesta, formatos de construcción y respuesta, exámenes basados en ejecución, y exámenes enfocados en proceso. Algunos ejemplos de esto pueden ser: el trabajo del estudiante, conferencias individuales con los estudiantes sobre su trabajo, comentarios escritos, proyectos del estudiante y presentaciones orales, construcción o uso de lo aprendido, papeles de investigación, proyectos de la ciencia, modelos, videos, discursos, y entrevistas. Un estudiante exitoso será medido por el crecimiento que se lleva acabo basado en los exámenes diferentes que son administrados por el profesor durante un tiempo mínimo de un año.

APPENDIX B

NOMINATOR CONSENT FORMS

An "Ecological Fit" through Supportive Teacher-Student Relationships Study

Rosa M. Peña is the researcher of this project entitled "An 'Ecological Fit'

through Supportive Teacher-Student Relationships" and can be contacted at 512-762-

0856.

The purpose of this study is to document and describe the connections teachers

make with students, which will in turn capture the richness of their classroom

environments and explain the nature of the teacher-student relationship. In talking with

selected teachers and observing teacher-student interactions, the researcher will gain a

better understanding of the strategies that elementary teachers implement to maximize the

learning and minimize the behavioral difficulties that can result when students' needs go

unrecognized or ignored. Through this study, the researcher will uncover the make-up of

the teacher-student relationship. Through the analysis of the teacher-student relationships,

the researcher will be able to explain how teachers impact the teacher-student relationship

and student achievement. Successful teachers' stories will be collected to identify how

they are able to successfully create an "ecological fit" in their classrooms to help children

learn. From these stories, the strategy will be to develop and support this type of teacher.

I, _____, have been informed

about this study and agree to participate in this study with Rosa M. Peña by nominating

teachers that fit the "Successful Teacher Portrait." I understand that Rosa M. Peña is the

principal of Zavala Elementary and the researcher of this project. I understand that I will

review the "Successful Teacher Portrait" and will then nominate any teacher that I feel

best fits this description. I realize that no harm will come to me and that the information

will be used for educational purposes only. I understand that I am free to withdraw from

this part of the selection process at any point in time. With my signature, I acknowledge

that I agree to participate in this part of the teacher-participant nomination process, and

that I have received a copy of this consent form.

I understand that if I have questions regarding this study, the nomination process

and/or questions about the risks/benefits of the proposed research, I can contact Juanita

Juarez, Sanchez Elementary Bilingual Curriculum Specialist at (512) 414-4423, or I can

contact Rosa M. Peña or Dr. Stephen Gordon. If I would rather speak with someone other

than the researcher or for questions about rights of the participants, I can contact the

Texas State University Institutional Review Board at (512) 245-2102 and speak with Dr.

Lisa Lloyd or Ms. Becky Northcut.

_____   _____
Nominator Printed Name   Nominator's Title/Position

_____   _____
Nominator's Signature   Date

_____   _____
Researcher's Signature   Date

Forma de Consentimiento
del Nominador

Para Un "ajuste ecológico" con las relaciones del Profesor y Estudiante

Rosa M. Peña es la investigadora de este proyecto, "un ajuste ecológico" con las relaciones del Profesor y Estudiante," y se puede comunicar con ella al 512-762-0856.

El propósito de este estudio es documentar y describir como enlazan los profesores con los estudiantes en circunstancias difíciles, que en torno capturarán la riqueza de sus ambientes de la sala de clase y explican la relación entre profesor y estudiante. Durante la entrevista con los profesores y por medio de observando la relación entre el profesor y el estudiante, el investigador tendrá mejor comprensión de las estrategias que los profesores implementan para maximizar el aprendizaje y para reducir las dificultades de comportamiento. Por medio de este estudio, el investigador descubrirá el carácter de la relación del profesor y estudiante. Con el resultado del análisis, el investigador podrá explicar cómo los profesores afectan la relación del profesor y estudiante y los logros del estudiante. Las colecciones de historias de los profesores exitosos se usaran para identificar cómo pueden crear con éxito un "ajuste ecológico" en sus salas de clase para ayudar a los niños a aprender. Al final una estrategia será desarrollada para apoyar este tipo de profesor.

Yo, _____, he sido informado sobre este estudio y estoy de acuerdo a participar con Rosa M. Peña, nominando a los profesores que cumplimentan el "papel de profesores exitosos." Entiendo que Rosa M. Peña es la directora de la escuela primaria Zavala y la investigadora principal de este proyecto. Entiendo que revisaré el "papel de profesores

exitosos " y después nominaré a cualquier profesor que cumpla con esta descripción. Comprendo que ningún daño vendrá a mí y que la información será utilizada para los propósitos educativos solamente. Puedo descontinuar mi participación en esta parte del proceso de selección en cualquier momento. Con mi firma, reconozco que estoy de acuerdo a participar en esta parte del proceso del nombramiento del profesor como participante. He recibido una copia de esta forma.

Puedo comunicarme sobre preguntas del estudio, preguntas sobre el proceso de nominaciones, o de los beneficios/riesgos de este proyecto con Juanita Juarez, maestra en la escuela primaria Sanchez al (512) 414-4423, Rosa M. Peña al (512) 762-0856 o el Dr. Stephen Gordon. Si deseo hablar con alguien ademas del investigador sobre los derechos de los participantes, me comunicaré con el comité examinador institucional de la universidad Texas State al (512) 245-2102 y hablar con el Dr. Lisa Lloyd o Srta. Becky Northcut.

_____ _____
Nombre Impreso del Nominador   Titulo o Posición del Nominador

_____ _____
Firma del Nominador   Fecha

_____ _____
Firma de la Investigadora   Fecha

TEACHER PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

An "Ecological Fit" through Supportive Teacher-Student Relationships Study

Rosa M. Peña is the researcher of this project entitled "An 'Ecological Fit' through Teacher-Student Relationships" and can be contacted at 512-762-0856.

The purpose of this study is to document and describe the connections teachers make with students, which will in turn capture the richness of their classroom environments and explain the nature of the teacher-student relationship. In talking with selected teachers and observing teacher-student interactions, the researcher will gain a better understanding of the strategies that elementary teachers implement to maximize the learning and minimize the behavioral difficulties that can result when students' needs go unrecognized or ignored. Through this study, the researcher will uncover the make-up of the teacher-student relationship. Through the analysis of the teacher-student relationships, the researcher will be able to explain how teachers impact the teacher-student relationship and student achievement. Successful teachers' stories will be collected to identify how they are able to successfully create an "ecological fit" in their classrooms to help children learn. From these stories, the strategy will be to develop and support this type of teacher.

I, _____, have been

informed about this study and agree to participate in this study with Rosa M. Peña. I

understand that Rosa M. Peña is the principal of Zavala Elementary and the researcher of

this project. I understand that the researcher has asked me to participate based on a

nomination process. Participation may involve any or all of the following:

1. I may be asked to answer a series of questions about my classroom environment
   and the relationships that I have established with my students. The researcher will
   require one initial interview and two follow-up interviews for clarification. The
   interviews will be one hour in length and will be photographed, videotaped, and
   audio taped.

2. As a participant of this study, I agree to allow the researcher to observe me during
   classroom instruction and during school meetings. These observations will be
   audio taped and videotaped.

3. As a participant of this study, I agree to allow the researcher to observe, audiotape
   and videotape a parent-teacher-student conference.

4. I understand that the participants' identities will not be revealed to anyone. All
   research materials that might contain participants' real names will be kept secure,
   and will be destroyed approximately six months from the date of publishing this
   study. In written narratives developed by the researcher from these materials,
   participants' names will be replaced by pseudonyms and any particular
   distinguishing characteristics will be altered. The only person that will have
   access to the project data will be the researcher.

5. The researcher will be looking for themes and patterns in the data that is collected. The researcher will use direct quotes from the participants to highlight the patterns and themes that are identified and which are directly related to teacher-student relationships and lead to ecologically fit classrooms.

6. Risks or inconveniences related to this study could be discomfort that can occur from being interviewed, audio taped and videotaped. The researcher will do everything possible to minimize this discomfort and make the interviewing process stress free. The participant can decline to answer any question(s) and may stop the interviews at any time.

7. I understand that any information gathered during this study is strictly confidential. As a participant, I will be provided with a summary of the findings upon completion of the study.

8. I understand that there is space on this form for me to communicate any feedback or concerns that I may have about this study.

I realize no harm will come to me and that the information will be used for educational purposes only. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any point in time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

I understand that if I have any questions regarding this study, I can contact Rosa M. Peña or Dr. Stephen Gordon. If I would rather speak with someone other than the researcher or for questions about rights of the participants, I can contact the Texas State University Institutional Review Board at (512) 245-2102 and speak with Dr. Lisa Lloyd or Ms. Becky Northcut.

Participant's Printed Name

Participant's Signature   Date

Researcher's Signature   Date

Teacher Participant Feedback or Concerns:

APPENDIX D

SUPPORT STAFF CONSENT FORM

An "Ecological Fit" through Supportive Teacher-Student Relationships Study

Rosa M. Peña is the researcher of this project entitled "An 'Ecological Fit' through Supportive Teacher-Student Relationships" and can be contacted at 512-762-0856.

The purpose of this study is to document and describe the connections teachers make with students, which will in turn capture the richness of their classroom environments and explain the nature of the teacher-student relationship. In talking with selected teachers and observing teacher-student interactions, the researcher will gain a better understanding of the strategies that elementary teachers implement to maximize the learning and minimize the behavioral difficulties that can result when students' needs go unrecognized or ignored. Through this study, the researcher will uncover the make-up of the teacher-student relationship. Through the analysis of the teacher-student relationships, the researcher will be able to explain how teachers impact the teacher-student relationship and student achievement. Successful teachers' stories will be collected to identify how they are able to successfully create an "ecological fit" in their classrooms to help children learn. From these stories, the strategy will be to develop and support this type of teacher.

I, _____, have been informed about this study and agree to participate in this study with Rosa M. Peña. I understand that Rosa M. Peña is the principal of Zavala Elementary and the researcher of this project. I understand that I will review a list of volunteer teacher-participants that have been self-nominated or peer nominated. I will review this list with the researcher and identify the teacher or teachers that I feel form the most positive relationships with our students and parents. I understand that this information will not be shared with anyone and will be kept confidential. I realize no harm will come to me and that the information will be used for educational purposes only. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this part of the selection process at any point in time. With my signature, I acknowledge that I agree to participate in this part of the teacher-participant selection process and that I have received a copy of this consent form.

I understand that if I have any questions regarding this study, I can contact Rosa M. Peña or Dr. Stephen Gordon. If I would rather speak with someone other than the researcher or for questions about rights of the participants, I can contact the Texas State University Institutional Review Board at (512) 245-2102 and speak with Dr. Lisa Lloyd or Ms. Becky Northcut.

_____
Support Staff's Printed Name

_____   _____
Support Staff's Signature   Date

_____   _____
Researcher's Signature   Date

APPENDIX E

PARENT AND CHILD CONSENT FORMS

An "Ecological Fit" through Supportive Teacher-Student Relationships Study

Rosa M. Peña is the researcher of this project entitled "An 'Ecological Fit'
through Teacher-Student Relationships" and can be contacted at 512-762-0856.

The purpose of this study is to document and describe the connections teachers
make with students, which will in turn capture the richness of their classroom
environments and explain the nature of the teacher-student relationship. In talking with
selected teachers and observing teacher-student interactions, the researcher will gain a
better understanding of the strategies that elementary teachers implement to maximize the
learning and minimize the behavioral difficulties that can result when students' needs go
unrecognized or ignored. Through this study, the researcher will uncover the make-up of
the teacher-student relationship. Through the analysis of the teacher-student relationships,
the researcher will be able to explain how teachers impact the teacher-student relationship
and student achievement. Successful teachers' stories will be collected to identify how
they are able to successfully create an "ecological fit" in their classrooms to help children
learn. From these stories, the strategy will be to develop and support this type of teacher.

I, _____, have been informed about this study and agree to participate in this study with Rosa M. Peña. I understand that my child's teacher nominated my child to participate in this study. I also understand that the principal of the school, Rosa M. Peña, will be the person conducting this research project. I realize that no harm will come to my child and that the information will be used for educational purposes only. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any point in time. I also understand that any information gathered during this study is strictly confidential. As a participant, I will be provided with a summary of the findings upon completion of the study. I have received a copy of this consent form.

My signature below indicates that I have read the information provided and will give consent to my child's participation in the project titled, "Ecologically Fit Classrooms through Teacher-Student Relationships" to be conducted at my child's school. I agree to the conditions listed below with the understanding that my child and I may withdraw from the study at any time, and that we may choose not to answer any questions that we do not want to answer. Parent and Child Participation will include the following:

1. My child and I will be asked to answer a series of questions about my child's classroom environment and the relationship he/she has with their teacher. The researcher will require one initial interview and possibly one follow-up interview for clarification. The interviews will be one hour in length and will be photographed, videotaped and/or audio taped. The researcher will interview my child and myself separately.

2. As a participant of this study, I agree to allow the researcher to observe, audiotape and videotape a parent-teacher-student conference.

3. The participants' identities will not be revealed to anyone. Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym in order to protect his or her identity. The only person that will have access to the project data will be the researcher.

4. The researcher will be looking for themes and patterns in the data that is collected. The researcher will use direct quotes from the participants to highlight the patterns and themes that are identified and directly related to teacher-student relationships and lead to ecologically fit classrooms.

5. There are minimal risks or inconveniences related to this study. Risks or inconveniences related to this study could be discomfort that can occur from being interviewed, audio taped and videotaped. The researcher will do everything possible to minimize this discomfort and make the interviewing process stress free. The participant can decline to answer any question(s) and can choose to stop the interviews at any time.

My consent is optional. My decision whether or not to allow my child to participate will not jeopardize my present or future relations with Texas State University, AISD, my child's school, teacher or principal. If we decide to participate, we are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice. I can get information about the project and copies of any interview questions by contacting Rosa M. Peña at 512-762-0856.

I understand that if I have any questions regarding this study, I can contact Rosa M. Peña or Dr. Stephen Gordon. If I would rather speak with someone other than the researcher or for questions about rights of the participants, I can contact the Texas State

University Institutional Review Board at (512) 245-2102 and speak with Dr. Lisa Lloyd or Ms. Becky Northcut.

_____	_____
Parent's Printed Name	Child's Printed Name
_____	_____
Parent's Signature	Date
_____	_____
Researcher's Signature	Date

Parent-Participant's Feedback or Concerns:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Child-Participant's Feedback or Concerns:

_____

_____

_____

_____

FORMA DE CONSENTIMIENTO

PADRES Y ESTUDIANTES

Para Un "ajuste ecológico" con las relaciones del Profesor y Estudiante

Rosa M. Peña es la investigadora de este proyecto, "un ajuste ecológico" con las relaciones del Profesor y Estudiante," y se puede comunicar con ella al 512-762-0856.

El propósito de este estudio es documentar y describir como enlazan los profesores con los estudiantes en circunstancias difíciles, que en torno capturarán la riqueza de sus ambientes de la sala de clase y explican la relación entre profesor y estudiante. Durante la entrevista con los profesores y por medio de observando la relación entre el profesor y el estudiante, el investigador tendrá mejor comprensión de las estrategias que los profesores implementan para maximizar el aprendizaje y para reducir las dificultades de comportamiento. Por medio de este estudio, el investigador descubrirá el carácter de la relación del profesor y estudiante. Con el resultado del análisis de las relaciones del profesor y estudiante, el investigador podrá explicar cómo los profesores afectan la relación del profesor y estudiante, y el logro del estudiante. Las colecciones de historias de los profesores exitosos se usaran para identificar cómo pueden crear con éxito un "ajuste ecológico" en sus salas de clase para ayudar a los niños a aprender. Al final una estrategia será desarrollada para apoyar este tipo de profesor.

Yo, _____, he sido informado y estoy dispuesto a participar en este estudio con Rosa M. Peña. Entiendo que el profesor eligió a mi niño para participar en este estudio. También entiendo que la directora de la escuela, Rosa M. Peña será la investigadora principal de este proyecto. Comprendo que ningún daño vendrá a mi niño y que la información será utilizada para

los propósitos educativos solamente. Entiendo que puedo retirarme de este estudio a cualquier tiempo. También entiendo que cualquier información recopilada durante este estudio es confidencial. Como participante, me proporcionarán un resumen de los resultados del estudio. He recibido una copia de esta forma.

Mi firma indica que he leído la información proporcionada y permito que mi niño participe en el proyecto, "Un ajuste ecológico con las relaciones del Profesor y Estudiante" que se llevará acabo en la escuela de mi niño. Estoy de acuerdo con las condiciones enumeradas y comprendo que mi niño y yo podemos retirarnos del proyecto en cualquier momento, y que podemos elegir no contestar preguntas que no deseemos contestar. La participación del padre y del niño incluirá los siguientes:

1. Nos pedirán que contestemos una serie de preguntas sobre el ambiente de la sala de clase de mi niño y su relación con su profesor. El investigador requerirá una entrevista inicial y posiblemente una entrevista de seguimiento para cualquier clarificación. Las entrevistas duraran una hora y serán fotografiadas, grabadas en video y/o audio. La investigadora nos entrevistará por separado.

2. Como participante de este estudio, permito que la investigadora observe, grabe en audio y en video una conferencia del padre, profesor y estudiante.

3. Las identidades de los participantes no serán reveladas a nadie. Se asignará a cada participante un nombre ficticio para proteger su identidad. La única persona que tendrá acceso a los datos del proyecto será la investigadora.

4. La investigadora buscará temas y normas en los datos. La investigadora utilizará cotizaciones directas de los participantes para acentuar las normas y los temas que

tienen que ver con las relaciones del profesor y estudiante, y para conducir salas

ecológicas de clase.

5. Los riesgos o inconvenientes relacionados con este estudio son mínimos. Estos

pueden consistir de incomodidad, ya que la entrevista será grabada en video y

audio. La investigadora hará todo posible para reducir cualquier incomodidad. El

participante se puede negar a contestar cualquier pregunta(s) y puede parar las

entrevistas en cualquier momento.

Mi consentimiento es opcional. Mi decisión que mi niño participe o no participe no

perjudicará mis actuales o futuras relaciones con la universidad de Texas State, AISD, la

escuela, el profesor o directora de la escuela. Si decidimos participar, estamos libres de

discontinuar la participación en cualquier momento sin perjuicio. Puedo conseguir la

información sobre el proyecto y copias de cualquier entrevista o preguntas

comunicándome con Rosa M. Peña al 512-762-0856.

Puedo comunicarme con Rosa M. Peña o el Dr. Stephen Gordon sobre preguntas del

estudio. Si deseo hablar con alguien además del investigador sobre los derechos de los

participantes, me comunicaré con el comité examinador institucional de la universidad de

Texas State al (512) 245-2102 con la Dra. Lisa Lloyd o Srta. Becky Northcut.

_____   _____
Nombre Impreso del padre   Nombre Impreso del estudiante

_____   _____
Firma del padre   Fecha

_____   _____
Firma de la investigadora   Fecha

Comentarios o preocupaciones del participante-el padre:

Comentarios o preocupaciones del participante-el estudiante:

APPENDIX F

INITIAL TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the purpose of education?

2. What should be the relationship of the teacher and the students?

3. How do you assess student learning?

4. How do you let students know how they are doing in school?

5. How do you motivate students to learn?

6. How do you communicate with your students' parents?

7. Describe your classroom environment.

8. What are three words your students would use to describe you as their teacher?

9. What are three words your colleagues would use to describe you as a teacher?

10. Under what conditions is student learning most successful?

11. What strategies do you use to create a positive match between your teaching and the diverse cultures represented by your students?

12. How would you define culturally responsive teaching?

APPENDIX G

SECOND INTERVIEW TEACHER QUESTIONS

1.   What do supportive teacher-student relationships look like?

2.   How are these teacher-student relationships formed or shaped?

3.   How does the environment (the context) in which they develop affect them?

4.   What impact do you feel you have made on the students':

   a.   Personal development

   b.   Social development

   c.   Academic development

APPENDIX H

INITIAL STUDENT AND PARENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1.	Learning is not always easy and fun. Can you think of some things your

	teacher does to help you to learn?

2.	Think of a time that you had a good learning experience with this teacher.

	What made this a good learning experience?

3.	What are some things your teacher says or does that make you feel that you

	can do the work?

4.	Describe the feel/atmosphere of the classroom? What does it feel like to be in

	his/her classroom?

5.	Do you think your teacher cares about you? How do you know that he/she

	cares about you?

6.	Do you feel safe in your teacher's classroom? What makes you feel safe?

7.	How does your teacher let you know if you are doing well in school?

8.	Does your teacher show that he/she interested in your life outside of school?

	What makes you think this?

9.	Is there anything that makes this teacher special to you?

Preguntas de la Entrevista Inicial del Estudiante

1. El aprendizaje no es siempre fácil y divertido, ¿Puedes pensar en algunas cosas que tu maestro/maestra hace para ayudarte a aprender?

2. Piensa en una vez/época que tu tuviste una buena experiencia de aprendizaje con este maestro/maestro, ¿Qué hizo este maestro/a para darte una buena experiencia de aprendizaje?

3. ¿Que son algunas cosas que tu maestro/a hace que te hace pensar que tu puedes hacer el trabajo en la escuela?

4. ¿Describe el ambiente de la sala de clase? ¿Como se siente estar en tu sala de clase?

5. ¿En tu opinión, piensas que al maestro/a le importa de ti? ¿Qué te hace pensar así?

6. ¿Te sientes seguro en la sala de clase? ¿Qué te hace sentir con seguridad?

7. ¿Cómo te informa el maestro/a sobre tu progreso en la escuela?

8. ¿Tu maestro/a demuestra que el/ella esta interesado en tu vida fuera de la escuela? ¿Qué te hace pensar así?

9. ¿Hay algo que hace este maestro/a especial para ti?

Initial Parent Interview Questions

1. How would you describe the relationship between your child and your child's teacher? Can you give some specific examples of what makes up this relationship?

2. How would you describe the relationship between you and your child's teacher? Can you give some specific examples of what makes up this relationship?

3. Learning is not always easy and fun. Can you think of some things your child's teacher does to help your child learn?

4. Think of a time that your child had a good learning experience. What made this a good learning experience?

5. Can you describe the way your child's classroom feels?

6. Does your child's teacher show that he/she interested in your child's life outside of school? What makes you think this way?

7. Is there anything that makes this teacher special to you?

Preguntas de la Entrevista Inicial del Padre

1. Describa la relación entre su niño/a y su maestro/a. ¿Puede usted dar algunos ejemplos específicos de como se formó esta relación?

2. Describa la relación entre usted y el maestro/a de su niño/a. ¿Puede usted dar algunos ejemplos específicos de como se formó esta relación?

3. El aprendizaje no es siempre fácil y divertido. ¿Puede usted pensar en algunas cosas que el maestro/maestra hace para ayudarle a su hijo/a a aprender?

4. Piense en una vez/época que su niño/a tuvo una buena experiencia de aprendizaje, ¿Porque piensa que esta era una buena experiencia de aprendizaje?

5. ¿Puede usted describir el ambiente de la clase o como se siente la sala de clase de su niño/a?

6. ¿El maestro/a de su niño/a demuestra que el/ella esta interesado en la vida de su niño/a fuera de la escuela? ¿Qué es lo que hace el maestro/a para usted piense esto?

7. ¿Hay algo que hace que este maestro/a es especial para su niño/a o para usted?

APPENDIX I

SECOND INTERVIEW STUDENT AND PARENT QUESTIONS

1. How does the teacher motivate you to learn?

2. What three words can you use to describe your teacher?

3. Under what conditions is student learning most successful?

4. What impact has your relationship with your teacher had on you:

   a. Personally?

   b. Socially?

   c. Academically?

Preguntas para los alumnos

Segunda Entrevista

1. ¿Cómo te anima la maestra/o aprender?

2. ¿Qué tres palabras puedes usar para describir al maestro/a?

3. ¿Qué son las condiciones necesarias para tener éxito en el aprendizaje?

4. ¿Qué impacto ha tenido tú relación con tú maestra/o en tú desarrollo:

      a. Personalmente?

      b. Socialmente?

      c. Académicamente?

Parent Questions

Second Interview

1. How does the teacher motivate your child to learn?

2. What three words can you use to describe your child's teacher?

3. Under what conditions is student learning most successful?

4. What impact has your child's teacher-student relationship had on their:

    a. Personal development

    b. Social development

    c. Academic development

Preguntas para los Padres

Segunda Entrevista

1. ¿Comó anima la maestra a su niño/a aprender?

2. ¿Qué tres palabras puede usar para describir a la maestra/o?

3. ¿Qué son las condiciones necesarias para tener éxito en el aprendizaje?

4. ¿Qué impacto ha tenido la relación entre tú hijo/a y el maestro/a en su desarrollo:

       a. Personalmente?

       b. Socialmente?

       c. Académicamente?

APPENDIX J

FOCUS FOR OBSERVATIONS

Classroom-physical arrangement

- ❖ Student desk formation

- ❖ Posters, slogans, pictures, instructional materials on walls/bulletin boards

- ❖ Proximity of teacher's desk to students

- ❖ Organization of classroom

- ❖ Students working independently, in pairs, in groups

- ❖ Students working with teacher

Classroom-climate

- ❖ Amount of autonomy allowed students

- ❖ Sense of comfort, motivation, encouragement for students

- ❖ Student participation encouraged by raising hands, responding when called on

- ❖ Freedom to move around room, use materials in room, collaborate with fellow students, go to restroom

Students'-attitudes

- ❖ Positive/negative display towards materials, presentation, teacher, other students

- ❖ Curiosity, interest level, participation

- ❖ Amount of time on-task

❖ Response to teacher cooperative, belligerent, neutral, respectful

❖ Supportive of each other

❖ Ask for teacher's assistance without hesitation

Teacher's-attitude

❖ Engaged in positive, negative, neutral manner

❖ Displayed a sense of being relaxed, confident, unsure, or hurried

❖ Prepared for presentation

❖ Maintained a positive, negative, neutral attitude towards students

❖ Made eye-contact, gestures, other body language conveying messages to students

❖ Employed a variety of instructional methods

❖ Responded to students' answers or work in a supportive/non-supportive, neutral manner

❖ Manner encouraged/discouraged student full participation

❖ Reminded students (never, frequently, infrequently) about testing and possible content that will be on tests

❖ Interacted with students before/during/after class

❖ Interacted with colleagues/administration before/during/after class

❖ Humor used in the classroom

❖ Attempted to reduce student anxiety

❖ Redirected off-task behavior and/or distracting behaviors

❖ Proximity of the teacher to the students

❖ Direct Teach lesson/small guided lesson

APPENDIX K

ONGOING CONSENT FORMS

Teacher Participant

An "Ecological Fit" through Supportive Teacher-Student Relationships Study

Rosa M. Peña is the researcher of this project entitled "An 'Ecological Fit'

through Teacher-Student Relationships" and can be contacted at 512-762-0856.

I, _____, have previously

given consent to participate in this study with Rosa M. Peña, who I also know as the

principal of Zavala Elementary and the researcher of this project. I have been given

summaries that describe the emerging themes and patterns from previous interviews

and/or observations. I have been given the opportunity to review these preliminary

findings and give my interpretation, feedback and/or clarifications of the emerging

themes and patterns.

My signature below indicates that I have reviewed the emerging themes and

patterns and give ongoing consent to participate in the next phase of the project. The next

phase of the project will include the activities below which are checked:

1. I may be asked to answer a series of questions about my classroom environment

and the relationships that I have established with my students. The researcher will

require one initial interview and two follow-up interviews for clarification. The

2. interviews will be one hour in length and will be photographed, videotaped and audio taped.

3. As a participant of this study, I agree to allow the researcher to observe me during classroom instruction and during school meetings. These observations will be audio taped and videotaped.

4. As a participant of this study, I agree to allow the researcher to observe, audiotape and videotape a parent-teacher-student conference.

5. I understand that the participants' identities will not be revealed to anyone. All research materials that might contain participants' real names will be kept secure until they are destroyed approximately six months from the date of publishing this study. In written narratives developed by the researcher from these materials, participants' names will be replaced by pseudonyms and any particular distinguishing characteristics will be altered. The only person that will have access to the project data will be the researcher.

6. The researcher will be looking for themes and patterns in the data that is collected. The researcher will use direct quotes from the participants to highlight the patterns and themes that are identified and directly related to teacher-student relationships and lead to ecologically fit classrooms. I will be given summaries of emerging themes/patterns for each of the data collection phases. I will have the opportunity to provide feedback/clarification and/or my interpretation of the data that is collected.

7. Risks or inconveniences related to this study could be discomfort that can occur from being interviewed, audio taped and videotaped. The researcher will do

everything possible to minimize this discomfort and make the interviewing process stress free. The participant can decline to answer any question(s) and can choose to stop the interviews at any time.

8. I understand that any information gathered during this study is strictly confidential. As a participant, I will be provided with a summary of the findings upon completion of the study.

9. I understand that there is space on this form for me to communicate any feedback or concerns that I may have about this study.

I realize no harm will come to me and that the information will be used for educational purposes only. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any point in time. I have received a copy of this ongoing consent form.

I understand that if I have any questions regarding this study, I can contact Rosa M. Peña or Dr. Stephen Gordon. If I would rather speak with someone other than the researcher or for questions about rights of the participants, I can contact the Texas State University Institutional Review Board at (512) 245-2102 and speak with Dr. Lisa Lloyd or Ms. Becky Northcut.

_____

Participant's Printed Name

_____   _____

Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____

Researcher's Signature   Date

Teacher Participant feedback or concerns of emerging themes and patterns:

_____

_____

_____

_____

ONGOING CONSENT FORM

Parent and Child

An "Ecological Fit" through Supportive Teacher-Student Relationships Study

Rosa M. Peña is the researcher of this project entitled "An 'Ecological Fit'
through Teacher-Student Relationships" and can be contacted at 512-762-0856.

I, _____, have previously
given consent to participate in this study with Rosa M. Peña, who I also know as the
principal of Zavala Elementary and the researcher of this project. I have been given
summaries that describe the emerging themes and patterns from previous interviews
and/or observations. I have been given the opportunity to review these preliminary
findings and give my interpretation, feedback and/or clarification of the emerging themes
and patterns.

My signature below indicates that I have reviewed the emerging themes and
patterns and give ongoing consent to participate in the next phase of the project. The next
phase of the project will include the activities below that are checked:

1. My child and I will be asked to answer a series of questions about my child's
classroom environment and the relationship he/she has with their teacher. The
researcher will require one initial interview and possibly one follow-up interview
for clarification. The interviews will be one hour in length and will be
photographed, videotaped and/or audio taped. The researcher will interview my
child and myself separately.

2. As a participant of this study, I agree to allow the researcher to observe, audiotape and videotape a parent-teacher-student conference.

3. The participants' identities will not be revealed to anyone. Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym in order to protect his or her identity. The only person that will have access to the project data will be the researcher.

4. The researcher will be looking for themes and patterns in the data that is collected. The researcher will use direct quotes from the participants to highlight the patterns and themes that are identified and directly related to teacher-student relationships and lead to ecologically fit classrooms. I will be given summaries of emerging themes/patterns for each of the data collection phases. I will have the opportunity to provide feedback/clarification and/or my interpretations of the data that is collected.

5. There are minimal risks or inconveniences related to this study. Risks or inconveniences related to this study could be discomfort that can occur from being interviewed, audio taped and videotaped. The researcher will do everything possible to minimize this discomfort and make the interviewing process stress free. The participant can decline to answer any question(s) and can choose to stop the interviews at any time.

My ongoing consent is optional and we are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice. I can get information about the project and copies of any interview questions and summaries by contacting Rosa M. Peña at 512-762-0856.

I understand that if I have any questions regarding this study, I can contact Rosa M. Peña or Dr. Stephen Gordon. If I would rather speak with someone other than the

researcher or for questions about rights of the participants, I can contact the Texas State University Institutional Review Board at (512) 245-2102 and speak with Dr. Lisa Lloyd or Ms. Becky Northcut.

_____   _____
Parent's Printed Name   Child's Printed Name

_____   _____
Parent's Signature   Date

_____   _____
Researcher's Signature   Date

Parent-Participant's feedback or concerns with emerging themes/patterns:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Child-Participant's feedback or concerns with emerging themes/patterns:

_____

_____

_____

_____

FORMA EN CURSO DE CONSENTIMIENTO

Padre y Hijo/a

Un "ajuste ecológico" con las relaciones del Profesor y Estudiante

Rosa M. Peña es la investigadora de este proyecto, "un ajuste ecológico con relaciones del Profesor y Estudiante," y se puede comunicar con ella al 512-762-0856.

Yo, _____, he sido informado y he dado permiso previo para participar en este estudio con Rosa M. Peña, que también conozco como la directora de la escuela primaria Zavala y la investigadora principal de este proyecto.

Me han dado los resúmenes que describen los temas y las normas que han surgido de entrevistas y/o de observaciones anteriores. Me han dado la oportunidad de revisar estos resultados preliminares y de dar mi interpretación, comentarios y/o clarificaciones de los temas y de las normas que han surgido. Mi firma indica que he revisado los temas y las normas que han surgido y doy consentimiento en curso para participar en las fases próximas del proyecto. Las fases próximas del proyecto son las actividades indicadas:

1. Nos pedirán que contestemos una serie de preguntas sobre el ambiente de la sala de clase de mi niño y su relación con su profesor. La investigadora requerirá una entrevista inicial y posiblemente una entrevista de seguimiento para cualquier clarificación. Las entrevistas duraran una hora y serán fotografiadas, grabadas en video y/o audio. La investigadora nos entrevistará por separado.

2. Como participante de este estudio, permito que la investigadora observe, grabe en audio y en video una conferencia del padre, profesor y estudiante.

3. Las identidades de los participantes no serán reveladas a nadie. Se asignará a cada participante un nombre ficticio para proteger su identidad. La única persona que tendrá acceso a los datos del proyecto será la investigadora.

4. La investigadora buscará temas y normas en los datos. La investigadora utilizará cotizaciones directas de los participantes para acentuar las normas y los temas que tienen que ver con las relaciones del profesor y estudiante, y para conducir salas ecológicas de clase. Me darán los resúmenes de temas o normas que surgen para cada una de las fases de la colección de datos. Tendré la oportunidad de repasar estos resultados preliminares y de dar mi interpretación, comentarios y/o clarificaciones de los temas y de las normas que surgen.

5. Los riesgos o inconvenientes relacionados con este estudio son mínimos. Estos pueden consistir de incomodidad, ya que la entrevista será grabada en video y audio. El participante se puede negar a contestar cualquier pregunta(s) y puede parar las entrevistas en cualquier momento.

Mi consentimiento es opcional. Mi decisión que mi niño participe o no participe no perjudicará mis actuales o futuras relaciones con la universidad de Texas State, AISD, la escuela, el profesor o director de la escuela. Si decidimos participar, estamos libres de discontinuar la participación en cualquier momento sin perjuicio. Puedo conseguir la información sobre el proyecto y copias de cualquier entrevista o preguntas comunicándome con Rosa M. Peña al 512-762-0856.

Puedo comunicarme sobre preguntas del estudio con Rosa M. Peña o el Dr. Stephen Gordon. Si deseo hablar con alguien además del investigador sobre los derechos de los

participantes, me comunicaré con el comité examinador institucional de la universidad de

Texas State al (512) 245-2102 con la Dra. Lisa Lloyd o Srta. Becky Northcut.

Nombre Impreso del padre	Nombre Impreso del estudiante

Firma del padre	Fecha

Firma de la investigadora	Fecha

Comentarios o preocupaciones del participante- el padre-de las normas y los temas preliminares:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Comentarios o preocupaciones del participante-el estudiante-de las normas y los temas preliminares:

_____

_____

_____

RECOMMENDED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Purpose: To develop in all United teachers, the characteristics and behaviors of culturally responsive teachers, which in turn will lead to "ecologically fit" classrooms and culturally relevant teaching.

Timeline	Goal	Activity	Participants	Persons Responsible	Ongoing Assessment/ Verification
1st Month	Increase understanding (Stage 1-Guerra/ Nelson)	Disaggregate and analyze campus data including race/ethnicity, SES and achievement.	All staff: teachers, teacher assistants, librarian, parent support specialist, administrators	administrators; teacher leaders	Analysis forms completed by grade levels reviewed by teacher leaders and administrators. Written teacher reflections reviewed by teacher leaders and administrators and shared in debriefing sessions.
2nd Month	Increase understanding (Stage 1-Guerra/ Nelson)	Disaggregate and analyze campus data including special education, discipline, retentions, gifted education. and parent participation.	All staff: teachers, teacher assistants, librarian, parent support specialist, administrators	administrators; teacher leaders	Analysis forms completed by grade levels reviewed by teacher leaders and administrators. Written teacher reflections to be reviewed by teacher leaders and administrators and to be shared in small groups during debriefing sessions.

Timeline	Goal	Activity	Participants	Persons Responsible	Ongoing Assessment/ Verification
3rd Month	Develop a vision for culturally responsive classrooms (Stage 1-Guerra/ Nelson)	Book study- *The DreamKeepers* By G. Ladson-Billings; small groups share with large group after each session.	All staff: teachers, teacher assistants, librarian, parent support specialist, administrators	Led by CIS staff, the study's three-teacher participants	Book study questions and written reflections to be reviewed by CIS staff and the study's 3-teacher participants; teachers will share in small groups.
4th Month	Develop a vision for culturally responsive teaching and classrooms (Stage 1-Guerra/ Nelson)	Book study- *The DreamKeepers* By G. Ladson-Billings; small groups share with large group after each session	All staff: teachers, teacher assistants, librarian, parent support specialist, administrators	Led by CIS staff, the study's three-teacher participants	Book study questions and written reflections to be reviewed by CIS staff and the study's 3-teacher participants; teachers will share in small groups.
5th Month	Develop a vision for culturally responsive teaching and classrooms (Stage 1-Guerra/ Nelson)	Identify assets in classrooms, additive beliefs and practices	All staff: teachers, teacher assistants, librarian, parent support specialist, administrators	Led by CIS staff, the study's three-teacher participants	List of identified assets and additive beliefs for all teachers to use in classrooms. An outside consultant will review these lists with each teacher prior to using them in classrooms.

Timeline	Goal	Activity	Participants	Persons Responsible	Ongoing Assessment/ Verification
6th Month	Further evaluate readiness and identify differentiated professional development (Stage 2-Guerra/ Nelson)	Cross-cultural simulations (BARNGA, Bafa Bafa and Brief Encounters)	All staff: teachers, teacher assistants, librarian, parent support specialist, administrators	Outside consultants that are familiar with this type of work.	Identify teachers and volunteers (Group I) move to Stages 3 & 4 (Guerra/ Nelson's plan); Identify teachers (Group II will continue with awareness and readiness activities for the next 4-6 months); the groups will be identified by outside consultants and administrators
7th Month- Group I	Group I teachers investigate own cultural identity and that of students and families. (Stage 3-Guerra/ Nelson)	Group I teachers complete a survey that will identify teaching practices, teachers' beliefs and attitudes; create teachers' platforms.	Group I teachers, administrators	Outside consultants that are familiar with this type of work.	Completed teacher surveys will be reviewed and shared by consultants with individual teachers; completed teacher platforms that teachers will share in groups; the survey data will be aggregated by consultants and shared with staff.
7th Month- Group I- continued	Group I teachers implement additive beliefs and practices that make up the culturally responsive vision.	Group I teachers observed by campus peer coaches and receive feedback on practices through a collegial coaching model.	Identified Group I teachers	Study's three teacher participants, campus peer coaches	Peer coaches completed non-evaluative observation forms with written feedback; feedback shared with teacher and a copy given to administrators.

Timeline	Goal	Activity	Participants	Persons Responsible	Ongoing Assessment/ Verification
7th Month- Group II	Group II continue with awareness and readiness (stages 1 & 2- Guerra/Nelson)	Read other culturally relevant teachers success stories	Group II teachers, administrators	Administrators, teacher leaders	Book study questions and written reflections to be reviewed by administrators and teacher leaders; teachers will share in groups.
8th Month- Group I	Group I- develop an awareness of the United community we serve through cultural learning opportunities. (Stage 3-Guerra/ Nelson)	Identify community events; Group I will participate in during 9th month and/or summer. Identify participation levels, questions to ask, what to listen for and watch.	Group I teachers, administrators, identified parents/ families	Group I teachers, study's three-teacher participants, outside consultant familiar with this type of work	List of identified events and questions for participation to be reviewed by an outside consultant.
8th Month- Group II	Group II- awareness and readiness (stages 1 & 2-Guerra/ Nelson)	Read other culturally relevant teachers success stories	Group II teachers, administrators	Administrators, teacher leaders	Book study questions and written reflections to be reviewed by administrators and teacher leaders; teachers will share in groups.
9th Month- Group I	Group I- develop an awareness of the United community through cultural learning opportunities. (Stage 3-Guerra/ Nelson).	Attend a community event for Group I teachers' students.	Group I teachers, administrators	Group I teacher leaders, study's three-teacher participants	Teacher written reflections reviewed by Group I teacher leaders/study's three-teacher participants; teachers will share reflections during debriefing meetings; minutes and reflections will be reviewed by consultants and administrators.

Timeline	Goal	Activity	Participants	Persons Responsible	Ongoing Assessment/ Verification
9th Month- Group II	Group II continue awareness and readiness (stages 1 & 2 Guerra/ Nelson)	Read other culturally relevant teachers success stories	Group II teachers, administrators	Administrators, Group I or II teacher leaders	Book study questions and written reflections to be reviewed by administrators and teacher leaders; teachers will share in groups.
10th Month (beginning of 2nd Year)	Set the stage for new school year and begin professional development for new staff.	Review activities from stages 1 and 2; present culturally responsive vision	All staff: teachers, teacher assistants, librarian, parent support specialist, administrators	Study's three-teacher participants, Group I and II teacher leaders	Culturally relevant teaching vision written and posted in all classrooms; teachers' written reflections of activities reviewed by teacher leaders; teachers share reflections in small groups.
11th Month- Group I	Increase community cultural knowledge of Group I teachers.	Expand cultural knowledge through neighborhood walks focusing on Group I's students' families; Use specific questions to increase cultural knowledge and foster connections between home and school.	Group I teachers, administrators, parent support specialist.	Study's three-teacher participants; Group I teacher leaders; parent support specialist; administrators	Neighborhood walk focus questions to be reviewed by an outside consultant; neighborhood walk teacher written reflections to be shared in small groups; minutes from neighborhood walk debriefing meeting reviewed by administrators and disseminated to parents and staff; parent survey on neighborhood walk reviewed by parent support specialist, administrators and outside consultants; survey results will be disseminated to parents and staff.

Timeline	Goal	Activity	Participants	Persons Responsible	Ongoing Assessment/ Verification
11th Month- Group II	Group II continue awareness and readiness (stages 1 & 2-Guerra/ Nelson)	Read other culturally relevant teachers success stories	Group II teachers, administrators	Administrators, Group II teacher leaders, study's three teacher participants	Book study questions and written reflections to be reviewed by administrators and teacher leaders; teachers will share in groups.
12th Month- Group I	Increase community cultural knowledge of Group I teachers. (Stage 3-Guerra/ Nelson)	Expand cultural knowledge by conducting house meetings with Group I's students' parents; focus of house meetings: to build stronger communities.	Group I teachers, administrators, parents of Group I teachers' students	Study's three teacher participants, teacher leaders	House meeting focus questions reviewed by outside consultant; parent and teacher written reflections to be reviewed by administrators, parent support specialist and outside consultant; then share with staff; house meeting teacher and parent surveys to be reviewed by administrators, teacher leaders, parent specialist and outside consultant; survey results disseminated to parents and staff.
12th Month- Group II	Group II investigate own cultural identity and that of students and families.	Group II complete a survey that will identify teaching practices, teachers' beliefs and attitudes; create teachers' platforms.	Group II teachers, administrators	Administrators	Completed teacher surveys reviewed and shared by consultants with individual teachers; completed teacher platforms shared in groups; the survey data will be aggregated by consultants and shared with staff.

Timeline	Goal	Activity	Participants	Persons Responsible	Ongoing Assessment/ Verification
12th Month- Group II- continued	Group II teachers implement additive beliefs and practices that make up the culturally responsive vision.	Group II teachers observed by campus peer coaches and receive feedback on practices through a collegial coaching model.	Identified Group II teachers	Study's three teacher participants, campus peer coaches from Groups I and II	Peer coaches complete non-evaluative observation forms with written feedback; feedback to be shared with teacher and a copy given to administrators.
13th Month- Group I	Group I-challenge and reframe beliefs (Stage 4-Guerra/ Nelson)	Explore personal data disaggregated by student ethnicity, SES by teacher and program.	Group I teachers, administrators	Administrators, teacher leaders	Completed disaggregated data form by teacher reviewed by administrators and teacher leaders; Group I teachers' written reflections on findings of disaggregated data reviewed by administrators and teacher leaders; written reflections to be shared within Group I.
13th Month- Group II	Group II develop an awareness of the United community we serve through cultural learning opportunities. (Stage 3-Guerra/ Nelson)	Identify community events that Group II teachers can participate in during 13th-15 months; identify levels of participation including questions to ask, what to listen for and watch.	Group II teachers, administrators, identified parents/families	Group II teachers, study's three teacher participants	List of identified events/ questions for participation reviewed by an outside consultant; teacher written reflections on community event participation reviewed by Group II leaders; teachers share reflections; written minutes and reflections from Group II teachers meeting reviewed by consultants/administrators.

Timeline	Goal	Activity	Participants	Persons Responsible	Ongoing Assessment/ Verification
14th Month-Group I	Group I challenge and reframe beliefs (Stage 4-Guerra/ Nelson)	Develop, implement and gather survey data focused on building relationships with students and parents	Group I teachers, administrators	Group I teachers, study's three teacher participants	Survey data reviewed by outside consultant and administrators; disseminated to students/parents/staff; Group I plan for next steps based on survey data reviewed by outside consultant and shared with Group I members.
14th Month-Group II	Increase community cultural knowledge of Group II teachers. (Stage 3-Guerra/ Nelson)	Expand cultural knowledge by conducting house meetings with Group II's students' parents; focus of house meetings is to build stronger communities.	Group II teachers, administrators, parents of Group II teachers' students	Study's three teacher participants; teacher leaders	House meeting focus questions reviewed by outside consultant; parent/teacher written reflections reviewed by administrators, parent support specialist and outside consultant; shared with staff; house meeting surveys reviewed by administrators, teacher leaders, parent specialist and outside consultant; survey results disseminated to staff/parents.
15th Month	Group II challenge and reframe beliefs (Stage 4-Guerra/ Nelson)	Explore personal data disaggregated by student ethnicity, SES by teacher and program	Group II teachers, administrators	Group I teachers as collegial support group and leaders	Disaggregated teacher data form reviewed by teachers and administrators; Group II teachers' written reflections reviewed by teachers and administrator; written reflections shared.

Timeline	Goal	Activity	Participants	Persons Responsible	Ongoing Assessment/ Verification
16th Month	Group II challenge and reframe beliefs (Stage 4-Guerra/ Nelson)	Develop, implement and gather survey data focused on building relationships with students and parents	Group II teachers, administrators	Group I teachers, study's three teacher participants-collegial coaches/support to help analyze data	Survey data reviewed by outside consultant and administrators, disseminated to students, parents and staff; Group II plan based on data collected, reviewed by outside consultant and shared.
17th Month	Change practice to become more culturally responsive. (Stage 4-Guerra/Nelson)	View films and documentaries; discuss how cultural perspectives and personal beliefs affect behaviors and practice.	All staff: teachers, teacher assistants, librarian, parent support specialist, administrators	Outside consultants, Group I and Group II teacher leaders, study's three teacher participants	Teachers/staff written reflections on activities to be reviewed by teacher leaders and administrators.
17th Month	Change practice to be more culturally responsive. (Stage 4-Guerra/Nelson)	Implement new classroom practices; receive feedback from campus peer coaches.	All teachers	Group I and Group II peer coaches, study's three teacher participants	Non-evaluative written feedback on new practices; peer coaches will share with individual teachers during peer conferences.
18th Month	Change practice to be more culturally responsive. (Stage 4-Guerra/Nelson)	Identify practices to be changed; create individual culturally responsive teacher practice plans.	All staff: teachers, teacher assistants, librarian, parent support specialist, administrators	Outside consultants; Group I and Group II peer coaches, study's three teacher participants	Teachers' individual culturally responsive plans for new school year reviewed by peer coaches, outside consultant and administrators.
18th Month	Change practice to be more culturally responsive. (Stage 4-Guerra/Nelson)	Implement new classroom practices; receive feedback from peer coaches.	All teachers	Group I and Group II peer coaches, study's three teacher participants	Non-evaluative written feedback on implementation of new practices/individual plans; peer coaches share during peer conferences.

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