STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER SUPPORT: EFFECT ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 2006

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ABSTRACT

Patrick Pauken, Advisor

The primary purpose of this study was to add empirical validity to Starratt’s (2004) model of the ethics of responsibility, authenticity, and presence. This qualitative study, through a collective case study methodology, sought to operationalize Starratt’s model by seeking the actual presence of this model in the interactions and support among three teachers and six students in one northwest Ohio high school. Of particular interest is the effect the application of these ethics has on student perceptions of teacher support, student engagement, and student academic performance. More specifically, the purpose of this study was to explore student perceptions of teacher support among lower performing students and higher performing students and teachers’ perceptions of providing support to their students. Important questions that must be answered are whether high-performing students differ from low-performing students in their perceptions of teacher support and how teacher perceptions of delivering support to their students compare to student perceptions of teacher support.

A synthesis of the data identified five common components of teacher support. Both high-performing and low-performing students identified supportive teachers as those teachers who (1) provide additional help outside normal classroom hours, (2) maintain high behavioral and academic standards, (3) provide relevant lessons tied to real world applications, (4) get involved in students’ personal lives, especially when personal issues jeopardize academic achievement or overall well being, and (5) present lessons that are designed to take into account individual learning styles or unique circumstances. Taken in the context of their inter-dependent
relationship with the ethics of responsibility, authenticity, and presence, a clear paradigm emerged that provides meaningful support for students and, ultimately, enhanced student academic performance.

Three high school teachers from one northwest Ohio school were selected on a non-random, purposive basis. Two students were selected on a stratified-random basis from each teacher’s classroom for a total of six student participants. The first grouping consisted of those students with a grade point average of 3.0 or above; the second grouping consisted of students with grade point averages of 2.0 or below. All averages were based on a 4.0 scale. One student was drawn, at random, from each grouping for each teacher—totaling two students per teacher.

This study explored the interactions between teachers and students within the classroom with particular attention given to the strategies utilized by teachers to engage, support, and encourage their students in a learning environment consistent with Starratt’s (2004) model of the ethics of responsibility, authenticity, and presence. Similar attention was given to the students with respect to their perceptions of support provided by their teachers.

The study is significant in its exploration of the necessary, mutual, and meaningful connections made between teachers and students in an era of district and educator accountability and high numbers of students at risk of failure and dropout.
This dissertation is dedicated to teachers everywhere who come into the presence of their
students fully conscious of the opportunities available in a single moment to inspire, to lead, to
praise, to encourage, and to support each student—one student at a time. By embracing all that
it means to be a teacher, you have altered the lives of your students forever. Thank you for
making a real difference in the lives of countless others. Because of your presence, the world is
a brighter place; without you the world is left longing for what might have been.

“Have you ever really had a teacher? One who saw you as a raw but precious thing, a
jewel that, with wisdom, could be polished to a proud shine? If you are lucky enough to find your
way to such teachers, you will always find your way back.”

Mitch Albom
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is difficult to imagine realizing my dreams, my hopes, my aspirations throughout life would have been possible without the unqualified support and unconditional love of my wife, Patricia. I look forward to all the possibilities yet to come during our life journey together. To my adult children, Erin, Michael, Kevin, and Megan, thank you for the outstanding job you have done raising me. You have tolerated the intolerable. Words fail to capture how proud I am; you will always be my heroes. My family represents blessings beyond measure and I will never be able to repay you for not giving up on me. I am humbled in your presence.

My brothers, Tom and Dennis, have left indelible marks on my heart. Thank you for always being there for me. And to my sister-in-law, Carol, thank you for showing all of us how to overcome adversity through faith, hope, and optimism.

My mother, Jane O’Shea, through her unwavering support of her children in good times and bad, selfless service to others, and her uncompromising standards, taught me all I would ever need to know about moral leadership. Thanks, Toots!

Few individuals have inspired me more than Dr. Cynthia Beekley and even fewer have provided the type of support and direction required to achieve success in an ever-increasing competitive and complex educational environment. Thank you for taking a chance on me. I will always be grateful for your faith and confidence in me.

My dissertation committee has been supportive and encouraging beyond all expectations and without exception. Dr. Patrick Pauken lives the spiritual axiom that your treasure in life grows in direct proportion to the treasure you unselfishly give away. You are indeed a wealthy man. I have benefited greatly through his generous gift of time and constant encouragement. I am grateful to Dr. Rachel Vannatta for providing the very best model of teacher support of
students. Unknowingly, she provided the inspiration for this study. Her gentle, but ever so persuasive, direction allowed me to explore this topic in ways that otherwise would not have been possible. Dr. Judith Zimmerman, through her high expectations and skillfully applied encouragement, set the tone of excellence for our cohort as we began this odyssey in that first class so many semesters ago. Dr. Patricia Buchanan’s genuine interest in my project, her willingness to help in anyway possible, and her personal sacrifice of time to make this happen will always be remembered and appreciated. I have also expanded my personal repertoire of verbs of attribution because of her. Over the years, Dr. Bradley Rieger has been an outstanding mentor and an even better friend. He remains the standard to which I aspire. Thank you, Dr. Rieger, for the swagger. All of you have contributed to my understanding of caring, supportive relationships and the limitless possibilities contained within. You are true teachers in every good sense of the word.

My cherished friends in Cohort #6 will always be that—cherished friends. Having been the beneficiary of your unqualified support and encouragement, my life has been enriched. My memories of our long evening classes together and the countless projects on which we have collaborated will last a lifetime. I am looking forward to creating many more memories with you in the years ahead.

As you read this dissertation, it is my hope that each one of you will find bits and pieces of your direct and positive influence on my life scattered among the pages.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION
- Problem Statement ................................................................. 1
- Purpose of the Study ............................................................... 4
- Research Questions ................................................................. 5
- Definition of Terms ................................................................. 5
- Theoretical Framework ............................................................ 8
- Significance of the Study ........................................................ 10
- Limitations ............................................................................. 13
- Delimitations ......................................................................... 13
- Organization of Remaining Chapters ......................................... 14

## CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW ......................................................... 15
- At-Risk Students ..................................................................... 16
  - Defining At-Risk Students ..................................................... 16
  - Dropouts .............................................................................. 18
- Self-Efficacy ........................................................................... 19
- Motivational Strategies .......................................................... 21
- Student Perceptions of Teacher Support ..................................... 27
- Ethic of Care .......................................................................... 32
- Ethic of Responsibility ............................................................ 35
- Ethic of Authenticity ............................................................... 38
- Ethic of Presence .................................................................... 41
- Summary ................................................................................. 42
CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY .................................................................................................................. 45

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 45

Participants ........................................................................................................................................ 45

Data Collection Process ...................................................................................................................... 48

Interviews and Journals ...................................................................................................................... 48

Observations ....................................................................................................................................... 50

Reactions .......................................................................................................................................... 51

Data Analysis ...................................................................................................................................... 51

Trustworthiness ................................................................................................................................... 52

Prolonged Engagement and Persistent Observation .......................................................................... 52

Triangulation .................................................................................................................................... 53

Discrepant Data / Negative Case Analysis ...................................................................................... 54

Member Checks .................................................................................................................................. 55

Feedback ........................................................................................................................................... 55

Subjectivities ....................................................................................................................................... 56

Summary ............................................................................................................................................ 57

CHAPTER IV. CONTEXT .......................................................................................................................... 58

Setting ................................................................................................................................................. 59

Participant Composite ....................................................................................................................... 61

The Principal, Lakeview High School ................................................................................................. 61

Denise Everly, Mathematics Teacher ................................................................................................. 62

Sharon Myers, Physics Teacher ........................................................................................................... 63

Michael Kennedy, English Teacher ................................................................................................... 65
Anna Deusan, Mathematics Student of Mrs. Everly................................. 66
Krystal Leight, Mathematics Student of Mrs. Everly ................................. 67
Paul Ankenbrandt, Physics Student of Mrs. Myers ...................................... 68
Joe Brown, Physics Student of Mrs. Myers .............................................. 69
Brittney Osborn, English Student of Mr. Kennedy ................................ 71
Michelle Sullivan, English Student of Mr. Kennedy ................................ 71
Summary .................................................................................................. 72

CHAPTER V. CASE STUDIES ........................................................................... 74

Mrs. Everly’s Classroom ........................................................................... 74

Anna Deusan’s Perspective ........................................................................ 83
Krystal Leight’s Perspective ....................................................................... 87

Mrs. Myers’ Classroom ............................................................................. 91

Paul Ankenbrandt’s Perspective ............................................................... 96
Joe Brown’s Perspective ........................................................................... 100

Mr. Kennedy’s Classroom ......................................................................... 105

Michelle Sullivan’s Perspective ............................................................... 109
Brittney Osborn’s Perspective ................................................................. 113

CHAPTER VI. ANALYSIS ................................................................................. 117

Introduction ............................................................................................ 117

Mrs. Everly .............................................................................................. 117
Mrs. Myers ............................................................................................... 118
Mr. Kennedy ............................................................................................ 119
Anna Deusan ........................................................................................... 120
CHAPTER VII. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION .............................................................. 154

Introduction ................................................................................................................. 154

Meaning Making ............................................................................................................. 155

Ethic of Care ................................................................................................................. 158

Ethic of Responsibility ................................................................................................. 162

Ethic of Authenticity ..................................................................................................... 165

Ethic of Presence ........................................................................................................... 168

Theory Implications ....................................................................................................... 172

Teacher Support of Students ....................................................................................... 172

Recommendations for Future Study ........................................................................... 175

Practical Implications .................................................................................................... 178

Limitations .................................................................................................................... 180

Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 181

REFERENCES ................................................................................................................. 183

APPENDIX A. LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENT ............................................................. 192

APPENDIX B. LETTER TO PRINCIPAL ............................................................................ 195

APPENDIX C. INSTRUCTIONS TO PRINCIPAL .......................................................... 198

APPENDIX D. LETTER TO TEACHER-PARTICIPANT .................................................. 200

APPENDIX E. LETTER TO STUDENT-PARTICIPANT .................................................... 203

APPENDIX F. LETTER TO PARENT ................................................................................. 206

APPENDIX G. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – BECOMING MORAL ................................... 209

APPENDIX H. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – RESPONSIBILITY ......................................... 210

APPENDIX I. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – AUTHENTICITY ............................................ 211
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure

1  The Dynamics Among the Foundational Virtues of Educational Leadership ...................... 10
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

A significant percentage of students in secondary public schools fail to maintain minimum academic standards, placing them in academic jeopardy and increasing the likelihood that they will drop out of the very institutions designed to prepare them to fully participate in an ever-increasing competitive world (Land & Legters, 2002; LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991; McPartland, Balfanz, Jordan, & Legters, 2002). In many instances, failure to meet academic standards has little to do with inherent abilities. Rather, there are a number of other factors outside the control of the student, and schools for that matter, which negatively affect student academic performance. Minority status, low socio-economic conditions, lack of parental involvement, ineffective parenting skills, lowered expectations for academic performance, stressful home life, drug or alcohol abuse in the home, and low parental educational levels are just a few of the indicators that may place a student at risk of failing to meet minimum academic standards (DeBlois, 1989; Gibson, 1997; Goodlad, 1984). Even when those factors are mitigated through the assistance of social services or appropriate intervention strategies, there is a sense on the part of many students that the effort needed for success in school is simply not worth the perceived value of a diploma (MacLeod, 1987, 1995).

Lack of student effort and the unwanted impact it has on student achievement are widely viewed by educators as problems not within their control. Rather, lack of effort stems from a myriad of social problems or from deficiencies within the students themselves (Goodlad & Keating, 1994), which often times results in educators lowering expectations, making negative assumptions regarding capacity to learn, and offering little encouragement to engage in a rigorous curriculum (Jagers & Carroll, 2002).
There is considerable research available on student academic performance as it relates to at-risk identifiers even though it is difficult to limit a definition of these identifiers (Levin, 1990; Wang, 1990; Waxman, Walker de Felix, Anderson, & Baptiste, 1992). The ability to specifically identify at-risk students prior to the students dropping out is at best problematic (Hixson & Tinzmann, 1990; Fine, 1993). Nevertheless, there is one common thread that appears to run through the fabric of any attempt to define low-performing at-risk students. And that thread is a failure of students to make meaningful connections to adults in their lives—either at home or school—who will give them the support they need to be successful (Gibson, 1997; Scales, Sesma, & Bolstrom, 2004; Scales & Leffert, 2004; Sinclair & Ghory, 1992).

While the link between student academic achievement and teacher support is not clearly defined, the perception of support and care from teachers has been related to positive outcomes, including the pursuit of academic goals and mastery of skills (Wentzel, 1999). Additionally, Wentzel suggested that students who perceive low levels of teacher support develop negative orientations toward learning and social interactions. From a practitioner’s perspective, teacher support can be manifested in a number of ways. The extent to which teachers utilize effective motivational strategies to enhance academic outcomes for all students, regardless of their class ranking, is one manifestation of teacher support (Powell, 1997). Others include teachers who go out of their way to provide additional help, teachers who provide a variety of activities to present lessons based on individual needs, teachers who have high expectations for student academic performance (Wilson & Corbett, 2001), and teachers who create trusting relationships with their students and challenge students to higher levels of academic performance (Miller, 2000). The degree to which students of varying academic abilities perceive the efficacy of motivation and expectancy strategies is of particular interest to this researcher.
A closely related concept to providing support to students is the role teachers play in assisting students in developing a strong sense of personal academic efficacy and positive self-concept as they relate to student motivation and goal orientation (Bandura, 1994; Marjoribanks, 1990; Scales & Gibbons, 1996). Student perceptions of both components are inextricably linked to the development of a strong attachment to a significant adult in their lives—an adult who will provide them with the necessary support and direction they need to flourish academically (Gibson, 1997).

Starratt’s (1991) construct of the ethic of critique requires educators to closely examine their current realities within the context of their primary mission, which is to provide the necessary components within their control to adequately insure academic success for all their students. The underlying tenet of this principle means that educators will meet each child at the schoolhouse door prepared to address his or her unique needs so as to insure each child is equipped with the requisite skills to successfully participate in, and contribute to, a democratic society. This is the basic premise of public education. Unfortunately, when engaged in this ethic, we do not have to look very far for evidence that suggests that not all students are beneficiaries of this promise. Statewide proficiency examination scores in the State of Ohio, for example, consistently indicate that our minority populations (most notably African Americans and Hispanics), students with identified disabilities, and those students from the lower socio-economic category continue to significantly lag behind their more affluent White peers (Ohio Department of Education, 2004).

Starratt’s (1991) ethic of justice asks, “How then shall we govern ourselves?” In other words, given this disparity in academic performance, what are we prepared to do? While there are a multitude of reasons for disparities in performance, the apparent failure to address those
areas within our control is a serious indictment against our schools and the way we approach students. This “one size fits all” approach is indicative of ineffective pedagogical skills that limit our response to the needs of all students and virtually guarantees that a certain percentage of those students will academically underperform or drop out (Fine, 1987).

The ethic of care asks the question, “What do our relationships ask of us?” (Starratt, 1991). At the heart of this ethic is the moral responsibility to act on behalf of individual student needs. It requires educators to do more than simply avoid harm, but rather proactively engage each student with his or her individual interests at heart in our civic, academic, and human curricula (Starratt, 2004). To accomplish this, we will have to step out of our comfort zones and make a long-term commitment to other human beings if we are to make a difference in their lives—especially when those human beings have considerable baggage or are least like ourselves. It will require us to be aware of their needs and requirements and then provide the support necessary to flourish in our classrooms.

Classroom teachers are uniquely situated to provide the common thread of support to their students which impacts student academic achievement (Scales, Benson, & Mannes, 2002). There is a paucity of literature, however, that explores student perceptions of teacher support and the relationships those perceptions may have on self-efficacy, motivation to support mastery and goal attainment, and ultimately on academic achievement and student success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of these case studies, “which are an exploration of a bounded system over time through a detailed, in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61), was to explore student perceptions of teacher support among low-performing students and high-performing students from one northwest Ohio high school and
teachers’ perceptions of providing support to their students (Creswell, 1998). In doing so, this study attempts to lend empirical validity to Starratt’s (2004) model of the ethics of responsibility, authenticity, and presence.

Important questions that must be answered are whether high-performing students differ from low-performing students in their perceptions of teacher support and how teacher perceptions of delivering support to their students compare to student perceptions of teacher support. This study attempts to answer those questions.

Research Questions

This qualitative study addressed the following questions:

1. What are the student perceptions of teacher support?
2. What are the low-performing and the high-performing students’ perceptions of teacher support?
3. What are the teacher perceptions of teacher support of their students?
4. What are the teacher strategies for providing support to their students?
5. What are the student perceptions of strategies employed by teachers to provide support?
6. What explains the disparity, if any, in student perceptions of teacher support and teacher perceptions of providing support?

Definition of Terms

*At-risk:* possessing characteristics, traits, behaviors, or pre-disposed beliefs about one’s ability to achieve or maintain minimum academic standards.
Case study: a term used to describe a researcher’s exploration of a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context (Creswell, 1998).

Class rank: rank order from top to bottom in a specific group of students as determined by the accumulated grade point average of an individual student.

Dropout: a choice to leave school, without intent to return, and prior to earning sufficient credit for a diploma.

Encouragement: the act of offering hope or confidence to an individual(s) that a task can be successfully completed.

Ethic of authenticity: for the purpose of this study, the ethic of authenticity is being true to one’s beliefs and values and acting in a manner consistent with the espousal of those beliefs and values.

Ethic of care: for the purpose of this study, the ethic of care implies that the caregiver takes positive action on behalf of another individual. It means getting involved in the life of another to the extent that the caregiver remains committed to the needs of an individual or a group of individuals. It requires a more personal understanding of the other individual and implies that the caregiver will exhaust resources within his or her control to meet the needs of another.

Ethic of presence: for the purpose of this study, the ethic of presence means to be aware of the manner in which we interact with other human beings—mindful of possible misinterpretations of our intentions, mood, or willingness to help another human being based on our appearance, body language, or action. It requires an individual to remain in the moment with
another human being—aware of the other person’s needs. It requires a shedding of self and an appreciation of the talents and gifts another human being brings to the relationship or interaction.

Ethic of responsibility: for the purpose of this study, the ethic of responsibility extends beyond the principle of doing no harm. Rather, it requires an individual to actively promote doing good for another human being. The ethic of responsibility requires the caregiver to accept the consequences of his or her behavior, especially if that behavior falls short of providing the care required to meet the unique needs of another human being. The ethic of responsibility implies an affirmative duty to take proactive measures on behalf of another human being.

High-performing students: those students who have a 3.0 grade point average or above on a 4.0 scale.

Low-performing students: those students who have a 2.0 grade point average or below on a 4.0 scale.

Minimum academic standards: maintaining a sufficient grade point average to earn credit for classes attempted while working toward a high school diploma.

Operationalize: to put into operation through a well-defined, repeatable process. For the purpose of this study, it means bringing to life the actual presence, or lack thereof, of the ethics of responsibility, authenticity, and presence.

Perception: an awareness, comprehension, insight, intuition, or impression of reality.

Secondary public schools: grades nine through twelve (high school).

Support: to give approval or be in favor of a particular action or goal of an individual(s). In this study, support means educators taking the necessary steps to create the type of environment that provides an opportunity for them to enter into authentic relationships with
students, fully aware of individual student needs, and prepared to meet those needs, thus
enabling the potentiality of all students to flourish.

Theoretical Framework

Recalling Starratt (1991), the ethic of care requires educators to acknowledge a moral
responsibility to recognize the unique needs of individual students and to take action with respect
to meeting those unique needs. To do so requires a commitment to others (Oster & Hamel,
2003), especially to those who are least like us. Mayeroff (1995) asserts that by caring we must
be aware of the other person’s needs and requirements and then to act on his or her behalf.

The concept of care requires that an important distinction be made between caring for and
caring about another human being. To care about another person not only means making a
commitment to that person’s welfare, but it also requires the care provider to step out of his or
her comfort zone and be willing to make sacrifices; in short, it requires action (Beck, 1994; Oster
& Hamel, 2003).

Starratt (2004) enriches the ethic of care by introducing the ethic of responsibility, the
ethic of authenticity, and the ethic of presence. The ethic of responsibility not only identifies our
responsibility to others, but also our responsibility for others. There is a responsibility to identify
the problem and accept the premise that simply avoiding harm is insufficient if we are to fully
realize the potential for good intended within the context of the ethic of care. The educator is
clear about his or her role in the process and gradually shifts from a responsibility to do no harm
to one of proactive responsibility for others, which requires him or her to not only avoid harm
but to confront it where it exists and eliminate, when possible, the negative impact it has on
student performance. The ethic of responsibility carries the same requirements for teachers as it
does for educational leaders.
The ethic of authenticity means that we bring our deepest convictions and beliefs to work whether that work is in the classroom, the principal’s office, the superintendent’s office, or the boardroom. It is the realization of potential that is uniquely our own. Starratt (2004) expanded on this ethic:

Only I can realize a potentiality that is solely my own. If I refuse this most basic human privilege and opportunity, then I violate my destiny and myself. I prostitute my eternally unique inheritance, my possibility. My possibility is like my child, the me to be born. I either bring it to birth—albeit gradually—or I gradually abort it. (p. 66)

To fully complement the ethic of care and bring it to its full realization for positive intervention on behalf of students, Starratt (2004) not only suggested that educators explore their own unique authenticity, but also insisted that the circle of care is not complete unless we go beyond our authentic selves and connect oneself to the wider whole—recognizing that each individual has the right to develop his or her own sense of self, however different from the norm.

To help develop this sense of self, Starratt (2004) asserted that the caregiver is fully present in the lives of those he or she purports to lead or teach. To be present implies a level of concentration and sensitivity to the signals others send. It means to be fully aware of that which is immediately in front of us, or to individuals with whom we interact and on whose behalf we have a responsibility to act. Carter (1998) suggested that the ethic of presence requires educators to come fully into the presence of another human being with a sense of awe and gratitude.

Starratt (2004) suggests that the ethics of responsibility, authenticity, and presence interpenetrate and enrich one another and that they need each other for their fullest exercise. It is within this framework of interacting ethics that educators may find the key components of
support for their students—support that will ultimately provide the foundation upon which students can more fully engage in the educational process (See Figure 1).

**Figure 1. The Dynamics Among the Foundational Virtues of Educational Leadership**

Significance of the Study

In response to the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—and the “no child left behind” accountability requirements for adequate yearly progress that are contained within the legislation—state departments of education across the country have begun

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to promulgate sweeping reform regulations that will require all students to meet rigorous standards of academic performance—including those students who are in a deficit position as a result of circumstances sometimes beyond their control. Districts failing to provide the educational opportunities for their students to meet those standards face the loss of state and federal funding, among other more invasive consequences. In short, the message is that all students can and will learn. Failure to follow through with this message not only results in higher dropout rates (McPartland et al., 2002), but also produces a citizenry less likely to vote, less likely to assume leadership positions, with less earning power, and less likely to be adequately trained for jobs of the 21st century (Stringfield & Land, 2002).

Given the enormous consequences for failing to meet academic performance standards, it is imperative that educators focus on factors that influence student academic performance and that are within their control—including pedagogical practices that offer support for all students. Ultimately it will require teachers to examine those practices with a critical eye when student perceptions of support are not consistent with their espousal of such support. Sergiovanni, Burlingame, Coombs, and Thurston (1999) have posited:

As a people, we have promised to all children that their educational experiences in school will not be influenced by gender, race/ethnicity, and social class. All will receive equal educational opportunity. We have not fulfilled that promise; what must be done? (p. 42)

If there was ever a more urgent time to explore opportunities to better engage our students, it has been dwarfed by the crisis that exists in many public schools today. And even for those schools that have managed to avoid crises in their classrooms, Wheatley (1994) reminds us that organizational equilibrium is a sure path to institutional death.
Marzano (2003) posits that leadership may be the most important aspect of effective school reform. Confronting brutal facts for the purpose of identifying the need for change (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2001; Collins, 2001) is a step that must be initiated if students and teachers are to build more caring and supportive classrooms.

Recalling Starratt (2004), it is the interplay and interdependence of the virtues of responsibility, presence, and authenticity that provide the framework for the ethics of moral leadership. As Starratt emphasized, “The dynamic interplay between these virtues must ground any more formally explicit ethics of educational leadership, whether it is an ethics of justice, ethics of care, or a synthesis of several ethical perspectives” (p. 111). But it is the ethic of presence that more fully informs, connects and drives this model for ethical leadership. As Starratt suggests, “Presence is the switch, that when it’s on, connects my authenticity to my situational responsibilities and connects those responsibilities to my responsibility to be myself in those circumstances” (p. 105). This study seeks to operationalize and validate Starratt’s model by seeking the actual presence of this model in the interactions and support among teachers, students, and an administrator in one northwest Ohio high school. Of particular interest to this researcher is the effect that the application of these ethics has on student engagement, student academic performance, and student perceptions of teacher support.

The current investigation seeks to reinforce relevant research with respect to student perceptions of teacher support as they relate to academic achievement. Additionally, the study hopes to expand current research by exploring possible disparities in perceptions of teacher support between low and high academic performers. If a disparity is supported by this study, then educators have an opportunity to explore causes and interventions—both within their immediate control. Teacher preparation and professional development opportunities for
educators can be explored in an attempt to reduce the disparity between student and teacher perceptions with respect to support. Initial training and on-going professional development will ultimately benefit students by improving the delivery of support that is necessary for academic success. Whatever the outcome, students will ultimately benefit by receiving the type of support that is necessary for academic success.

Finally, attention is re-focused on Gibson’s (1997) assertion that the common denominator in students who have failed to experience success in school is the absence of a significant attachment to a caring adult who will give them the attention and direction needed to flourish. If nothing else, we can correct that situation beginning today.

Limitations

This study focused on the case studies of six students and three teachers in a qualitative design. The sample was chosen on a non-random, purposive basis, and convenient for the researcher. The ability to generalize the results of this study is limited by the nature of qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 1998). Confounding variables such as socio-economic status, race, and parental support of students may also limit the generalizability of this study. While these confounding variables are recognized and discussed in the students’ interviews, this study limits the inquiry to the perceptions of teacher support.

Delimitations

The data in this study are delimited to the northwest Ohio high school in which the interviews were conducted. The study is further delimited to a specific building principal, to three teachers identified through his recommendation and to the specific students recommended by the classroom teachers.
Organization of the Remaining Chapters

The remaining chapters of this study are organized in the following manner: Chapter 2 presents a review of the related literature; Chapter 3 presents research methods and procedures; Chapter 4 offers a contextual setting and participant composite; Chapter 5 presents the case studies; Chapter 6 provides an analysis of the data; and Chapter 7 presents the discussion and conclusion.
CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A reasonable argument can be made that students come to school with varying degrees of readiness and willingness to learn. Certainly, the educational level of parents, environmental factors, or socio-economic status can influence readiness to learn (Goodlad, 1984; Goodlad & Keating, 1994; Lutz & Iannaccone, 1994). Obviously, these are factors that are largely beyond the immediate control or influence of educators. However, the fact that there are high-performing and low-performing schools—with high-performing and low-performing students in each—suggests that there is something inherent within the school that contributes to the differences in academic performance between the two groups of students. There is considerable evidence indicating that school characteristics such as inflexible scheduling, culturally insensitive environments, rigid instructional strategies, ineffective student engagement, and poor curriculum design which fails to recognize cultural differences and values, inhibit academic achievement—especially among low-performing students (Giroux, 1994; Hixson & Tinzmann, 1990; Klem & Connell, 2004; Richardson & Colfer, 1990). Unlike the environmental factors previously mentioned, educators nonetheless have considerable influence over delivery of services with respect to curriculum, scheduling, text selection, and instructional strategies. Of particular interest to this researcher are instructional strategies—specifically, pedagogical practices that provide support for students—and how low-performing and high-performing students might perceive them differently.

This chapter presents a synthesis of the literature as it relates to the role teachers play in supporting their students through the ethic of care, the ethic of responsibility, the ethic of authenticity and the ethic of presence—especially with those students most at-risk of dropping out of high school prior to receiving a diploma, and specifically explores the closely related
topics of students’ sense of self-efficacy derived from teacher attentiveness, student motivation, and student perceptions of teacher support and encouragement.

At-Risk Students

Defining At-Risk Students

For the purpose of this study, I have defined at-risk students as those students possessing characteristics, traits, behaviors, or pre-disposed beliefs about one’s ability to achieve or maintain minimum academic standards. The implication, of course, is that if there are no significant interventions on behalf of students who fail to meet minimum academic standards, then those students are more likely to disengage with the educational system prior to earning a high school diploma.

Arriving at a universally accepted definition of at-risk students is at best problematic. And attempting to enumerate all the characteristics associated with at-risk students is beyond the scope of this study. However, it is important for the reader to have a general understanding of the indicators and characteristics that may contribute to placing a student at-risk and a better appreciation of the scope of the problem facing educators in attempting to intervene on their behalf.

Hixson and Tinzsman (1990) suggested four approaches to defining at-risk students. The first is predictive. Using this approach, educators look at environmental factors such as minority membership, single-parent homes, low socio-economic status, or limited English proficiency. Historically, students with these environmental descriptors are more likely to drop out of school. The second approach is descriptive. Descriptors such as low grade-point averages, inability to keep pace with the regular curriculum, or other school-related problems point to students who fail to earn a high school diploma disproportionately to their peers who do not possess these
descriptors. A third approach, and of particular interest to this researcher, is related to school factors. Among other factors, inappropriate texts, ineffective pedagogical practices, and negative beliefs and attitudes on the part of administrators and teachers regarding at-risk students are of particular significance. Finally, Hixson and Tinzman (1990) posited, “With the increase in the number and complexity of problems faced by today’s youth, all students are at-risk in one way or another” (p. 3). There is growing support among educators to embrace this unilateral approach to defining at-risk students. Manning and Baruth (1994) agreed by suggesting, “All children and adolescents are at risk at some time” (p. 7).

Recalling the introductory paragraph, the reader is reminded that many characteristics associated with at-risk status are beyond the control of educators. I acknowledge this explicitly. Of primary consideration in this study are those factors in which educators can exert considerable influence. Land and Legters (2002) provided support for this focus by positing:

We argue that educators, researchers, and policymakers are developing a richer and more complex understanding of the conditions and experiences that lead to negative educational outcomes. . . . We describe how thinking about risk in education has begun to shift from identifying risk factors solely in terms of students’ individual and family characteristics to an acknowledgement that substandard teaching and learning environments allow far too many children to fail. (p. 2)

I use this as a point of departure to consider the ramifications for the failure on the part of educational practitioners to understand not only what constitutes at-risk status among their students, but an inability (or unwillingness) to position themselves to act in meaningful ways on their behalf.
Dropouts

A high school diploma has been an increasingly required passkey for a myriad of post-secondary pursuits. Entry into the labor market, entrance to most institutions of higher learning, and acceptance into many skilled trade careers are a few examples of the benefit (and necessity) of having acquired a high school diploma. Obviously, the economic consequences of leaving high school before receiving the appropriate credential are immediate, long-term, and thus significant.

Kaufman, Alt, and Chapman (2004) reported that, on average, high school dropouts are more likely to be unemployed and earn less money when employed than their high school graduate peers. Additionally, high school dropouts are more likely to receive public assistance than high school graduates. Dropouts comprise a disproportionately high percentage of the prison population in the United States as well. The authors also reported that in 2001, some 3.8 million 16-year through 24-year olds were not enrolled in a high school program and had not completed high school. Those students accounted for 10.7% of the 35.2 million 16-year through 24-year old students in the United States in 2001.

McMillen and Kaufman (1996) reported that young women who fail to complete high school are more likely to have children at younger ages, more likely to be single parents, and more likely to rely on public assistance than high school graduates.

The difficulty in obtaining an accurate measure of student dropout rates is acknowledged by Roderick (1993) when she proposed that no single agreed-upon statistic serves as a definitive source. Over time, there are three measures of the national dropout rate: the number of graduates compared to the population 17 years of age in any given year; the number of graduates in any given year compared to ninth grade enrollment four years earlier; and the percentage of 18 or 19-
year-olds with a high school diploma. Whatever the measure, the number of students who fail to complete their high school education is staggering. Roderick (1993) offered a number of possible causes. Of particular interest is Roderick’s assertion that most dropouts feel marginalized and isolated from the intellectual and social fabric of the school. Roderick also found that, when asked, students most often indicated that teachers needed to provide more assistance, interact with them, and provide additional support—especially for those students with low grades.

Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1994) posited, “Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave” (p. 1). Bandura (2000) expanded and informed this theory by stating:

Perceived efficacy, similarly, plays an influential role in the incentive and disincentive potential of outcome expectations. The outcomes people anticipate depend largely on their beliefs of how well they can perform in given situations. Those of high efficacy expect to gain favorable outcomes through good performance, whereas those who expect poor performance conjure up negative outcomes. (p. 120)

Given the significant and perceived influence efficacy may play in academic achievement, and how teachers may influence efficacy beliefs, additional support for the theory is warranted. Pajares (2002) suggested that self-efficacy beliefs can influence achievement and a sense of personal well-being in a number of ways. Of particular interest is the connection between self-efficacy beliefs and motivation as it relates to academic success. Pajares (2002) stated:
Self-efficacy beliefs . . . help determine how much effort people will expend on an activity, how long they will persevere when confronting obstacles, and how resilient they will be in the face of adverse situations. . . . As a consequence, self-efficacy beliefs can powerfully influence the level of accomplishment that one ultimately achieves. (p. 6)

As has been suggested, a strong sense of personal efficacy assists students in adopting skills that will enhance achievement of academic goals. A positive sense of personal self-efficacy is the result of a number of environmental influences, as well as influences exerted on individuals by significant others (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). Recalling that environmental factors are largely beyond the immediate control of teachers, it is appropriate to consider the influence teachers do have in their role of “significant other” on the development of students’ sense of self. In a study of students’ perceived support from teachers and its impact on academic achievement, interest in schoolwork, attendance, and self-esteem, Yeung and McInerney (1999) asked 226 students in seventh and eighth grades to respond to survey items on their self-esteem and interest in schoolwork, their personal expectancy of completing high school, and perceived support from their teachers, parents and peers for this expectancy. Anglo-American students from a high school located in Phoenix, Arizona, completed the survey. Among the respondents, 53% were female. The purpose of this study was to determine who, among the significant others (parents, teachers, and peers), contributed most to the educational outcomes and goal attainment for the students responding to this survey.

For all items considered, a 5-point Likert-type scale was used (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Personal and environmental factors included personal expectancy, parental support, teacher support, and peer support. Personal educational expectancy was inferred from three items coded such that higher scores reflected favorable expectancies of completion of high
school. Four items each inferred support from the student’s mother and father. Higher scores reflected more favorable parental support, and because students did not differentiate between their father’s and mother’s expectancies, a single parent factor was used. Teacher support was inferred from four items, with higher scores reflecting more favorable perceived support. Finally, peer support was inferred from three items, with higher scores reflecting more favorable perceived support.

Yeung and McInerney’s (1999) outcome variables included interest in schoolwork, absence, GPA, and self-esteem in the school context. Interest in schoolwork was inferred from four items, with high scores reflecting greater interest in school. Self-esteem in the school context was inferred from seven items. Higher scores reflected more favorable perceived support. The total number of days absent was taken from school attendance records and the GPA was obtained from school records. Higher scores reflected better performance in schoolwork.

The results indicated that all of the factors had significant positive effects on the outcomes. Of all the significant others considered, teachers appeared to have a noteworthy negative effect on absences and a significant positive effect on interest, self-esteem, and grade point averages. Yeung and McInerney (1999) suggested that teachers have significant influence on the educational outcomes of students. In fact, teacher support is a better predictor of outcomes than the other environmental factors considered in Yeung and McInerney’s study.

Motivational Strategies

Pajares (2002) argued, “Self-efficacy has proven to be a more consistent predictor of behavioral outcomes than have any other motivational constructs. Clearly, it is not simply a matter of how capable one is, but of how capable one believes oneself to be” (p. 9). Accordingly, a brief discussion on motivation, on what constitutes motivational strategies, and
on the application of motivational strategies as it relates to student academic achievement, especially among high-performing and low-performing students, is warranted. Beck (2000) posited:

Motivation is a theoretical concept that accounts for why people (or animals) choose to engage in particular behaviors at particular times. . . . Our basic motivational premise is that organisms approach goals, or engage in activities that are expected to have desirable outcomes, and avoid activities that are expected to have unpleasant or aversive outcomes.

(p. 3)

Engaging in activities that an individual expects to result in desirable outcomes and avoiding those that are anticipated to produce negative outcomes are products of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors unique to the individual. Identifying those factors, and developing strategies to awaken and enhance motivational factors that affect student academic performance are now considered.

Motivation theory entails a wide body of knowledge that extends beyond the scope of this study. The primary purpose for briefly reviewing motivation is to expose the obvious relationship motivation has with self-efficacy. An emphasis on the part of teachers on those strategies that are within their control to enhance student motivation, and thus academic achievement on the part of their students, is inextricably tied to self-efficacy. We have come full circle. To maintain focus on teachers’ responsibility to enhance the relationship between student motivation and self-efficacy, an emphasis on those factors within teacher control is considered. Stipek (2002) provided a contextual framework within which teachers may explore strategies to enhance students’ motivation, students’ sense of self-efficacy, and, accordingly, students’ academic performance by positing:
Student motivation is strongly affected by the nature of instruction and tasks given—for example, whether tasks are clear and at the appropriate level of difficulty, and whether they involve active participation and are personally meaningful. Students’ motivation is also affected by the social context—for example, whether students feel valued as human beings, are supported in their learning efforts by the teacher . . . and whether they are allowed to make mistakes without being humiliated. Motivation problems that are observed in students’ behaviors, therefore, often reside in the educational program. (p. 17)

Stipek (2002) offered a number of strategies for teachers that may be useful in improving student motivation. First, with respect to tasks and assignments, Stipek suggested that tasks and assignments be made clear, challenging, but achievable, varied to insure that students of all abilities are challenged, and organized in such a way that all students can see improvement with their skill level. Second, with respect to goals, Stipek believed that short-term and long-term goals should be established. Goals should vary according to individual student needs and students should be actively involved in establishing personal goals. Incentives should be offered to encourage students to set challenging goals. Third, in reference to evaluation, Stipek noted that whatever criteria are used to assess student performance, they must be made clear and understandable. Students often express understanding in a variety of ways and should be provided alternate ways to demonstrate that understanding. Teachers are encouraged to be specific regarding the feedback they provide students in terms of formative assessments by emphasizing improvement and what is positive. Rewards that are presented based on incentives offered when setting goals should be predicated on pre-determined criteria. Teachers should teach students to assess their own work and, with proper instruction and guidance, to rely on
their own sense of judgment with respect to evaluating performance. Fourth, with respect to providing help, Stipek suggested that students need to feel safe in asking for help. Encouraging students to ask for help must be accompanied with an atmosphere that eliminates ridicule or embarrassing comments. Encouraging students to seek answers to their own questions is important. In this regard, classroom resources are made available—and that includes seeking help from peers. Fifth, Stipek suggested that direct statements to students with reference to their effort and competencies may affect their sense of competency and efficacy. Reference to failure should be framed within a context of insufficient effort. Similarly, references to success should be framed within a context of strong effort and personal competence. Finally, Stipek pointed to classroom environment as an important component of strategies used to increase student motivation. Among those are differentiating tasks and instruction. Assigning the same tasks, utilizing the same materials, and requiring the same outcomes for all students, without consideration given to the unique needs and competencies of individual students, negatively impacts students’ perceptions of their ability relative to their classmates. Strategies such as creating similar ability groupings, implementing layered curriculum techniques (Nunley, 2003), allowing students to volunteer for skill-based groups, avoiding placing behavioral problems in the same grouping, and valuing different skill levels are suggested and encouraged.

Perhaps the most significant motivational strategy, and the one of particular interest to this researcher, has to do with relationships between students and teachers. Stipek (2002) offered, “Students in schools with caring and supportive interpersonal relationships have more positive academic attitudes and values, and are more satisfied with school” (p. 152). Respecting individual students, especially those least like ourselves; being attentive to individual needs; maintaining high standards; avoiding statements and situations that embarrass students; avoiding
sarcasm; taking all questions seriously; following up on incorrect answers; praising students for attempting challenging work; and promoting classroom environments where students are taught to be respectful of each other highlight Stipek’s recommendations to teachers with respect to the use of effective strategies to improve motivation.

Brophy (2004) supported and informed the efficacy of strong interpersonal relationships with students by adding:

You [teachers] can become your own most valuable motivational tool by building close relationships with students and establishing yourself as a supportive and helpful resource person. *It is important to do this with all students, but especially with disinterested or alienated students who don’t find much value in school learning* [italics added]. (p. 310)

Yeung and McInerney’s (1999) assertion that teacher support is a better predictor of outcomes than any other environmental factor is consistent with Powell (1997) who examined students’ sense of academic self-efficacy and attitudes toward themselves and motivational strategies utilized by teachers to support mastery and goal attainment, and how those strategies are perceived differently by high-performing and low-performing students. Powell’s sample included 45 middle school and high school teachers. Each teacher was asked to provide the names of at least six high performing and six low performing students. A total of 314 high performing students and 243 low performing students were selected to participate. Powell reported that most of the participants were European Americans (73%) and African Americans (17%).

Teachers and students completed the Motivational Strategy Use Questionnaire with a focus on strategies teachers encourage students to use when doing their work. Teachers indicated on a 5-point Likert scale the degree to which they employed each strategy (100% of the
time, 75% of the time, 50% of the time, 25% of the time, or Never). Teachers completed the questionnaire twice, once for lower-performing students and once for higher-performing students. The students completed the same questionnaire, except that the wording was changed to reflect student perspectives. Students from the entire class completed their questionnaire; only the responses from the identified high-performing and low-performing students were analyzed.

Mean scores were calculated for each teacher. Teachers were considered high mastery if they reported using strategies that support a mastery goal over 50% of the time. Most teachers reported themselves as high mastery with both high (82%) and low (80%) performing students. However, t-tests for paired samples showed significant differences in the frequency in which they use motivational strategies with high-performing and low-performing students (t = 2.52, p < .05). Teachers who rated themselves as high mastery with both student groups still reported using motivational strategies less frequently with low performing students.

Students’ mean scores were calculated based on their responses. Eighty percent of the high performing students and 78% of the low performing students rated their teachers as low mastery on the overall scale. Teachers, on the other hand, perceived themselves as using support strategies more frequently than did either their high-performing or low-performing students. It is the lack of congruence that is of particular interest here. Teachers who purport to use best practices in the classroom may, in fact, be doing just that. However, their students may not perceive that to be the case.

The role teachers play in assisting students in goal attainment and skill mastery has been considered. The perception students have regarding the extent to which their teachers actually employ strategies designed to help them achieve mastery has also been considered. The effect
that student perceptions of teacher support have on academic achievement is the variable now under consideration.

Student Perceptions of Teacher Support

Teacher support is a difficult construct to define. The review of literature to this point has provided evidence to suggest that teachers who engage in developing a student’s sense of self-efficacy through the effective application of motivational strategies and maintenance of high expectations for academic performance, and who attempt to build strong relationships with their students are providing the type of support necessary for student achievement. Recalling Brophy (2004), the reader is reminded that strong interpersonal relationships with students is perhaps the single most effective motivational strategy available to teachers to promote student learning.

Deiro (2005) suggested that not only are relationships essential tools to enhance student motivation, but strong interpersonal relationships may be the most effective strategy for overcoming environmental factors that negatively impact student learning as well:

The good news is we [teachers] do make a difference for our students. The most powerful and effective way we help students overcome all the negative influences in their environment is by developing close and caring relationships with them. Research shows our relationship with our students is key. By just doing our jobs the best we can, and making a special effort to connect with each child, we can change the course of a child’s life. (p. 80)

Attention is now given to the perception students have with respect to being the beneficiary of these caring, supportive relationships.

The effects of student perceptions of teacher support were considered by Duke and Sessoms (1991) in a study that collected data on students from post-secondary institutions
serving academically disadvantaged students. The study surveyed 609 students in 11 state institutions of higher education and 181 high school teachers whom students identified as having a major positive impact on them and who provided the encouragement and support for students to attend college. Within the study population, 310 high schools were represented in 43 different counties in Pennsylvania. The students were being served under Pennsylvania’s Higher Education Equal Opportunity Act (Act 101), which provides financial assistance to post-secondary institutions serving the needs of academically disadvantaged students.

Students responded to 36 items that offered positive statements about a variety of instructional practices, indicating one of five possible choices on a Likert-type scale measuring frequency. Their responses were grouped into the following categories: Teaching Styles, Teaching Knowledge, Teacher Attitude, Teacher Evaluation, and Interests and Concerns Related to Students.

Of special interest were the student perceptions of high school teacher attitudes and student assessment of teacher concern for students. Accordingly, those results from Duke and Sessoms’ study are reported here. Student perceptions of teacher attitudes were identified and rank-ordered by their responses to the following statements: treating all students with respect, having high standards and expectations, being friendly, and recognizing individual differences in ways of learning. The findings suggested that high standards and expectations for student performance, regardless of academic ability, were recognized as important attributes of teacher effectiveness. Treating all students with respect, including those students struggling academically, was identified as a significant factor in teacher effectiveness, as was being friendly.
The category of interests and concerns related to how well teachers made the effort to get to know their students. Teacher willingness to work with students outside of the classroom on material they did not understand appeared as a frequent response, followed less frequently by showing concern for students’ futures, and even less frequently by showing an interest in out-of-class activities. When asked to identify why the teacher they identified as being effective had such a significant impact on them, 53% indicated it was their personal concern for them, followed by motivating, inspiring, and exciting (38%).

From the student responses in Duke and Sessoms’ study, it is evident that support is manifested in the attitude that the teacher projects toward them. In this study, teachers gave themselves consistently high marks with respect to enthusiasm for their teaching, treating students with respect, and projecting a friendly attitude toward students.

Duke and Sessoms’ results suggested that the most significant attributes of successful and effective teachers are showing concern and being caring and helpful in the lives of their students. The reader is reminded that these are attributes assigned to teachers who have made a difference in the lives of at-risk students by providing them with the necessary support, encouragement, and caring to pursue post-secondary educational opportunities—opportunities they may not have pursued without the nurturing support of their teachers.

A similar study that suggested, and supported, the concept that student-teacher relationships can predict future academic performance was offered by Miller (2000). Of primary interest is the quality of student-teacher relationships as a predictor of student success during the freshman year in high school as measured by the accumulation of sufficient credits to move to the next grade, and as a predictor of reading scores on the Tests of Achievement and Proficiency (TAP) and their absenteeism.
The data for Miller’s study were generated from 11,752 students in the tenth grade class in Chicago Public Schools (CPS). The sample included 68% of CPS tenth grade students, and 55 out of the 67 diploma-granting high schools in the district. The teacher-student climate measure was created from four intermediate measures: teacher-student trust, classroom personalism, academic press, and liking school. Students were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed with statements such as: “My teachers always try to be fair”, “My teacher really cares about me”, “My [math] teacher believes I can do well in school”, “My [English] teacher often puts me down”, and “I usually look forward to going to school”. Realizing that these are merely examples of the numerous questions asked for each measure, the four measures in their entirety captured the core of what students think about their relationships with their teachers. Following a factor analysis, the following attributes emerged and contributed to a better understanding of factors predicting student success: teacher-student trust, classroom personalism, press towards academic achievement, and liking school. The authors found that a one-unit increase in school climate decreases the likelihood of a student being off-track by .17. The authors suggested that an average student would have a 35.9% chance of being off-track by the end of the freshman year, but a student at the school with the highest student-teacher climate rating would have a 27.4% chance of being off-track. Similarly, a student at the school with the worst climate would have a 43.0% chance of being off-track.

In contrast, a similar analysis of teacher-student climate and TAP scores suggested that teacher-student climate has more to do with keeping students in school and progressing to the next grade than helping them achieve higher levels of subject mastery. In any event, the significance of Miller’s study lies in the fact that students are more likely to be on track for
promotion at the end of their freshman year if they attend schools where teachers trust them and treat them fairly and respectfully.

While Miller’s research failed to show a significant relationship between teacher-student climate and subsequent attainment on TAP scores, Fredrick, Walberg, and Rasher (1979) indicated in an earlier study that higher achieving urban schools also have higher rates of positive teacher comments. The target population in Fredrick, Walberg, and Rasher’s study was students in 26 high schools within the Chicago Public Schools. Observers visited 175 classrooms and observed them for two periods each. Approximately seven classrooms per school were observed. Classroom observations were combined and treated as a sample to represent the school. Observers rated each classroom on six variables, two of which related to the variable under consideration—specifically, statements by the teacher that were evaluative in regard to how the students were doing in their schoolwork or self-discipline. The statements were classified as either positive or negative. Achievement data for each school included the median reading comprehension scores of eleventh graders.

The mean for the observed number of positive comments from teacher to students per class was 2.42 with a standard deviation of 2.28. The mean for the observed number of negative comments from teachers to students per class was 1.57 with a standard deviation of 1.31. The authors reported a positive correlation (.22) between positive comments and student achievement and negative correlation (-.08) between negative comments and student achievement. Using a regression model, the authors indicated that each standard deviation increase in the number of positive comments is associated with a .14 increase in achievement. While these results do not provide causal information, they are nevertheless important. Higher-achieving schools had
higher rates of positive evaluative comments by teachers with respect to how well students were doing on their work and the manner in which they self-regulated their behavior.

Ethic of Care

The ethic of care is a multidimensional paradigm that can elicit numerous interpretations with respect to meaning from an individual perspective. Beck (1994) distinguished between caring about another individual and caring for another individual. The latter distinction is of paramount importance in that it implies an inherent responsibility on the individual who cares for another person to take positive action on behalf of the other person. To care for someone means to get involved. It means receiving the other person from that person’s perspective—walking in his or her shoes if you will. It requires the caregiver to remain committed to the other individual’s needs, which may require sacrifice. Beck also reminded the reader that this personal sacrifice would ultimately benefit the giver along with the receiver.

Mayeroff (1995) expounded on the ethic of care by asserting that care is not a dominating position. Rather, care is a process of giving and taking that allows the other person to grow at his or her own pace. It requires a sense of humility that allows an individual to accept the fact that he or she must remain teachable to appreciate a deeper understanding of all that is yet to be achieved—but possible. Caring requires a sense on the part of the caregiver to remain in the moment with those individuals with whom he or she interacts. It is presence that is the essence of caring.

To enhance the reader’s understanding and appreciation of Mayeroff’s (1995) position on caring, a brief summary of the key components comprising Mayeroff’s caring ethic is provided. At the core of Mayeroff’s ethic of care lies the reality that to truly care for another means the caregiver is there to help that individual grow and reach his/her full potential. The concept of
helping others grow has two important features. The first is the recognition that each individual with whom we interact, and especially those for whom we have accepted moral responsibility to act on his/her behalf, possesses unique talents and abilities that require nurturing on the part of the caregiver. The second is devotion. To be devoted to another simply means that the caregiver will persist, remain committed, and persevere in the face of adversity to provide the care needed by the other individual. Devotion is thus inextricably linked to care.

Mayeroff (1995) built on the ethic of care by adding the ingredient of knowing. Knowing implies that the caregiver has sufficient information to act on the other’s behalf. Knowing means the caregiver is aware of the other’s strengths and weaknesses, and has an understanding of the other person’s likes and dislikes, interests and desires. The caregiver is in tune with the hopes and aspirations of the other individual and is sufficiently caring and devoted so as to help the other realize his/her goals. Knowing is thus inextricably linked to care. By linking the concepts of knowing, devotion, and helping to the ethic of care, Mayeroff has established a framework for action on the part of the caregiver to provide on-going support for another human being.

To complement the ethic of care, Mayeroff (1995) introduced the reader to several integral components that characterize caring individuals. Among others, they are the virtues of patience, honesty, trust, humility, hope, and courage. Patience means accepting the fact that growth is a process and not an overnight phenomenon. Like devotion, patience requires the caregiver to remain in the moment with the other individual—allowing him or her to develop his or her unique talents in his or her own style and pace. Patience needs to be conceptualized beyond simply recognizing it within a time paradigm. Patience is not limited by time. Patience requires tolerance as well—especially for those least like us. Mayeroff suggested that honesty in a caring relationship is not necessarily tied to deception or lying. Rather, honesty is a reflective
trait that caregivers engage in when striving for individual excellence. Honesty means the
caregiver actively engages in self-analysis to determine motives, seeking the truth and evaluating
personal efficacy when engaged in a caring relationship.

If the basic tenet of care is a desire to assist another human being in growth and
development, then trust is an essential ingredient. Mayeroff (1995) reminded the reader that,
“Trusting is to let go; it includes an element of risk and a leap into the unknown, both of which
take courage” (p. 343). Simply put, we must face our fears and be willing to let the other grow
even when we are uncertain or fearful of the outcome. Mayeroff reiterated that, “The man who
fears and avoids the unknown, who must always be sure how it will all turn out, cannot allow the
other to grow in its own way. He becomes unresponsive to the needs of the other” (p. 343). In
essence, it is possible to be over-protective and thereby limit the other individual’s full potential.

Mayeroff (1995) continued:

The man who cares is genuinely humble in being ready and willing to learn more about
the other and himself, and what caring involves. This includes learning from the one
cared for as well: the teacher learns from the student; the parent learns from the child; and
the artist learns from the work of art. (p. 344)

Humility, in this context, means remaining teachable and open to new ideas and concepts.
Humility implies a sense of wonder and appreciation for the people in our lives and the situations
in which we find ourselves. Closely related to humility is hope. Not the kind of hope that
implies a sense of desperation or impending doom but rather an appreciation for what is possible
in the present. Hope is an intrinsic device that reassures the caregiver all will be as it should be.
Hope is the promise of a better future predicated on the diligent application of care in the present.
Recalling that Mayeroff’s (1995) virtue of trust requires courage on the part of the caregiver, it only makes sense that courage is embedded in our understanding of the ethic of care. For it is courage that allows the caregiver to fearlessly take his/her own moral inventory. It is courage that permits the caregiver to proceed into the unknown with another human being—uncertain of the hazards in the road ahead or even the destination. And, it is courage that keeps a caregiver humble, grateful for the gifts that have been provided. Mayeroff (1995) summarized the ethic of care by positing:

To care for another person, I must be able to understand him and his world as if I were inside it. I must be able to see, as it were, with his eyes what his world is like to him and how he sees himself. . . . I must be able to be with him in his world, “going” into his world in order to sense from “inside” what life is like for him, what he is striving to be, and what he requires to grow. (p. 352)

Enomoto (1997) brought the review of the ethic of care full circle and sets the stage for a discussion of Starratt’s (2004) ethic of responsibility, ethic of authenticity, and ethic of presence by positing that the ethic of care can be more fully integrated into our moral lives through a better understanding of our relationships with those we purport to lead and teach, and the inherent responsibility to advocate for those with whom we interact, which is blended within the fabric of our relationships with them.

Ethic of Responsibility

Starratt (2004) introduced the ethic of responsibility as it relates to individuals as human beings, as educators, administrators, and educational leaders reminding teachers that we have a choice of doing no harm or not, and for accepting ahead of time our moral responsibility to act and behave in all circumstances based on value. If only it were that simple.
Moral responsibility is an all-encompassing construct that is open to varying interpretations as to meaning based on seemingly unlimited variables—especially when considered from a collective perspective. Davis (2001) provided a clearly defined concept of the ethic of responsibility by drawing a distinction between two types of responsibility, which helps the reader conceptualize and more fully appreciate what it means to be responsible. The first is simple responsibility. An individual who espouses values consistent with this concept of responsibility is “thought to be dependable, reliable, trustworthy, and prudent” (Davis, 2001, p. 6). Unfortunately, espousal of those values does not always translate into values-based decision-making or responsible behavior, which, of course, is the foundational component of Starratt’s model. To address this lack of congruity, Davis (2001) introduced the reader to a second conceptualization of responsibility, which he calls complex or reflexive responsibility. Individuals demonstrating this virtue typically display, among other characteristics:

- A readiness to bear in mind the consequences of their acts; a sense of when to consult others and when to consult their own conscience; [and] an ability to change their plans in the face of consequences boding ill to other highly valued goals or commitments. (p. 6)

Of particular interest to this researcher is the concept of consulting one’s own conscience when faced with moral dilemmas. Recalling the ethic of care, we are reminded that to care implies an inherent responsibility to take positive action on behalf of the other person. The positive action to be taken will depend on each unique and individual circumstance and will be guided by consultation with others and our own conscience, which is the sum total of our beliefs and values. The implication is obvious. A moral agent cannot accept the status quo when a consequence for assuming that posture means another human will be harmed or marginalized.
From an educational practitioner’s perspective, that means that espoused values—such as all children can learn—translates into proactive action, especially when all children are not learning.

Along parallel lines, Cooper (1998) explored two similar conceptualizations of the ethic of responsibility. The first concept is referred to as objective responsibility, which stems from the demands placed upon us in our role as citizens to act and behave within societal norms that are bound by both practical and legal constraints. It is, however, his second conceptualization of the ethic of responsibility—subjective responsibility—that fully informs this ethic. Operating under this concept, individual actions are rooted in our deepest feelings and beliefs; they are a manifestation of our values. Cooper (1998) posited:

> Values are types of beliefs more basic than other beliefs we may hold; they are central to our belief systems and thus to our attitudes. They are beliefs about how we ought to behave and about the desirability of certain end states. (p. 79)

Noteworthy is Cooper’s focus on the desirability of certain outcomes. Again, from an educational practitioner’s perspective, if educators espouse a desire for high academic achievement and successful learning experiences among our students and accept responsibility to and for our students consistent with our central beliefs, then the course of action on behalf of those students will be proactive and be based on individual needs—guided by our conscience and responsibility as moral agents. Carter (1998) informed the ethic of responsibility as an affirmative duty to do good, not simply avoiding harm. And this goes to the heart of Starratt’s (2004) model of the ethic of responsibility. As proactive moral agents we are “responsible for cultivating a caring and productive learning environment within the school for all the students. Cultivating a caring learning environment means insisting that teachers communicate genuine—not contrived—and continuing caring relationships with their students” (p. 55). Starratt also
posed that true caring and nurturing environments include challenging and rigorous curriculum with strict accountability. Not only are these essential components of a caring and supportive learning environment, but they also provide a framework for creating authentic interactions with students, authentic curriculum, and authentic classrooms. Our attention now focuses on the ethic of authenticity.

**Ethic of Authenticity**

Starratt (2004) posited that authentic teachers are able to transform the teaching of content into a more meaningful presentation of all the possibilities for application. In short, with authenticity, learning a specific content becomes relevant and meaningful. While this describes what authentic teachers do, it falls short of providing a glimpse as to who authentic teachers are or how closely related the ethic of authenticity is related to the ethic of responsibility. The following review attempts to shed light on that relationship and more fully inform the ethic of authenticity as it relates to best practice in the classroom.

The essence of authenticity is being true to one’s beliefs and values and acting in a manner that is consistent with the espousal of specific beliefs. Our innermost beliefs, assumptions, and values are what guide our behavior; they are values that are non-negotiable in a responsible, moral agent—deeply rooted ethics that allow us to lead moral lives. They are beliefs that are freely chosen and deeply embedded in our personal value system. Taylor (1991) described this concept as self-determining freedom: “It is the idea that I am free when I decide for myself what concerns me, rather than being shaped by external influences” (p. 27). It is precisely the freedom that allows teachers to disregard the negative opinion others have regarding certain students, their motivation, or their ability to learn. It is a freedom to choose how they will interact with all students—regardless of the reputation that precedes them,
negative or otherwise. Recalling Deblois (1989), Gibson (1997), and Goodlad (1984), the reader is reminded that many factors that influence the ability of students to learn are largely outside the control of educators. Taylor’s (1991) construct of self-determining freedom mitigates our inability to control many of these variables by asserting we—as educators and moral agents—are free to choose how we accept those limitations. In a large sense we are empowered to take responsibility for those things we can control, define the parameters in which we will engage our students and, in a very real sense, determine the outcome. If the ethic of responsibility is properly coupled with a true sense of self, i.e., an ethic of authenticity, then we will not use those limitations as excuses for lack of student academic performance but, rather, use our knowledge of them as opportunities to engage students in meaningful and relevant ways that will enhance student performance—regardless of student preparedness. The coupling agent is an ethic of presence, which will be detailed below.

Bonnett and Cuypers (2003) added to the construct of self-determining freedom by asserting “we are always free—not in the sense of having full choice over the factors that affect our lives, but in the sense of always having a choice as to how we will respond to the situations in which we find ourselves” (p. 328). This is the essence of authenticity. Bonnet and Cuypers (2003) continued:

As individuals, in many ways we are “thrown” into life, but we must decide – and take responsibility for – the commitments and projects we give ourselves. To live in this way is to be authentic – to be true to ourselves. (p. 328)

But this is difficult work and requires persistent attention to the demands it places on our determination, our sense of purpose, and on our moral compass. Simply put, the work is demanding and oftentimes lonely. It is for these reasons the authors suggested that many
teachers lead inauthentic lives. It is simply easier to do so. It becomes a point of departure from our true selves and abandons the principle of being true to oneself. Regrettably, it is played out all too often in our classrooms.

Sergiovanni and Starratt (2002) brought the ethic of authenticity full circle by more fully informing the reader of the qualities that an authentic teacher possesses: “What the teacher does is to try to bring the student to the activity of learning. The [authentic] teacher cajoles, persuades, entices, threatens, encourages, supports, stimulates, invites, teases, explains, tells interesting stories, describes, demonstrates, suggests, [and] nudges” (p. 289). Moreover, the authentic teacher will know something about his/her students’ backgrounds, their aspirations, their learning styles, what motivates them, as well as a clear picture of their sense of self and self-efficacy. An authentic teacher has “the degree of versatility, patience, creativity, persistence, and clarity in using a wide variety of strategies necessary to engender in the student a curiosity about and interest in the material under study” (p. 289). In other words, an authentic teacher meets the student where the student is and brings the lesson to him or her in a context that is both relevant and meaningful.

Pellicer (2003) added to our review of the ethic of authenticity by asserting that authentic leaders (teachers) do what they do out of a genuine desire to make things better for others. Teachers and leaders become servants to their followers with the primary goal of removing obstacles from the path of success and achievement. His or her sense of responsibility to others is embedded in the belief that “the only real joy in life comes from living a life that matters. People live lives that matter by doing meaningful things for others” (p. 11).

The ethic of presence is the catalyst that enables the ethics of responsibility and authenticity realize their full potential. A more complete discussion follows.
Ethic of Presence

Presence in the life of another human being is clearly an ethical construct (Starratt, 2004). While in the presence of another, choices are overtly or subtly made that will determine the extent to which we demonstrate our full commitment to the other as a person of worth—deserving respect and honor. Overtly, our language and behavior indicates the type of choice we have made. We either become a comfortable presence for another or speak and act in ways that belittle or deny the other’s sense of self. Subtly, by our body language, we can convey the same message—either affirming the other person’s worth or not.

The ethic of presence implies that we step out of our comfort zone to explore the unique circumstances surrounding another human being (Oster & Hamel, 2003). The ethic of presence means coming into the presence of another human being with a sense of awe and gratitude for the gifts and talents that human being possesses (Carter, 1998). It requires teachers to consider the needs of each student. It means remaining in the moment and focused on the person in front of us. It is this type presence from which Starratt (2004) suggested authentic relationship can grow and mature.

Starratt (2004) posited three types of presence within the ethics paradigm. The first is affirming. “Affirming presence involves foregrounding an attitude of unconditional regard for the person or persons you are working with. . . . Affirming presence communicates the message that others have the right to be who they are” (Starratt, 2004, p. 93). Either overtly or subtly, affirming presence sends the message that all students are students of worth with unique talents who require caring and nurturing teachers for them to realize their full potential.
The second presence is a critical presence, which imposes a responsibility to analyze and identify barriers that prevent one human from entering into an authentic relationship with another human being. Starratt (2004) explained:

The self, in responding to the presence of the other, becomes aware of some blockage to or distortion of authentic communication. This awareness may lead to an attempt to clarify what is going on and what is at stake in the situation. That clarification, in turn, may call forth a more genuinely authentic presence on the part of one or both of the parties. In this way the virtue of presence mediates the dialogue between authenticity and responsibility. (p. 97)

The third presence is enabling. “An enabling presence starts with this premise: I can’t do it alone; you can’t do it alone; only we can do it. An enabling presence signifies that one brings oneself fully into the situation with the other person” (Starratt, 2004, p. 99). Enabling presence is the essence of building a sense of self-efficacy in our students as well as promoting a sense of collective efficacy as it relates to classroom participants—teachers and students working together to enhance the learning environment. In that regard, this researcher has come full circle, anticipating and fully prepared to explore how these ethics play out in the lives of students and teachers in a secondary school setting.

Summary

There is considerable evidence that suggests clear indicators are available early in the secondary educational process, which predict high school failure rates. Among them are strong and effective teacher-student relationships (Miller, 2000). Presumably, if educators can identify controllable characteristics that inhibit academic progress, then they can design intervention strategies to mitigate those negative influences.
Unfortunately, a prevalent assumption among educators and the educational institutions they represent is that lack of academic success results from a myriad of social problems, or arising from deficiencies within the students themselves, but outside of the control of teachers (Goodlad & Keating, 1994). The review of literature presented in this study is held in stark contrast to that assumption. In fact, the literature reviewed clearly indicates that teacher support (within the control of the educator) has a stronger positive correlation on student self-esteem, interest in school, and GPA than do peers or parents (not within the control of the educator) (Yeung & McInerney, 1999). Not only do the data positively support the link between teacher-student relationships and academic attainment, but also the students are clearly articulating what constitutes their perception of effective teacher-student relationships (Duke & Sessoms, 1991).

An apparent disparity was discovered in the literature reviewed between the espousal of best practice by teachers with respect to applying motivational strategies to all students and the perception students have with respect to the consistent and equal application of those strategies among both low-achieving and high-achieving students (Powell, 1997). This disparity is significant in that teachers perceive themselves as applying those strategies more frequently than do either their low-performing or high-performing students. The finding of apparent disparity is limited in terms of generalizability in that it does not suggest or indicate if the disparity is found in other identifiers associated with teacher support—such as, caring, interest in outside activities, or willingness to assist students struggling with content mastery beyond classroom hours.

Starratt’s (2004) model of the ethic of responsibility, ethic of authenticity, and the ethic of presence provides a rich contextual framework within which educational leaders and teachers may find the tools necessary to address the unique needs of an increasingly diverse population in
the hope of improving delivery of services and providing the type of support needed for academic success. Starratt (2004) reiterated:

The exercise of these three virtues provides a foundation for an ethics of moral leadership. The dynamic interplay between these virtues must ground any more formally explicit ethics of educational leadership, whether it is an ethics of justice, an ethics of care, or a synthesis of several ethical perspectives. (p. 111)

It is upon this foundation that I build my study.
CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This qualitative study focused on the collective case studies (Stake, 1995) of students and teachers with attention given to student perceptions of teacher support among low-performing and high-performing students and teachers’ perceptions of providing support to their students. The rationale for a case study is that it provides for a wide array of contextually rich data drawn from multiple sources (Creswell, 1998).

This investigation sought to operationalize Starratt’s (2004) model of the ethic of responsibility, the ethic of authenticity, and the ethic of presence by seeking the actual presence of this model in the interactions and support among teachers and students.

This study explored the interactions between teachers and students within the classroom with particular attention given to the strategies utilized by teachers to engage, support, and encourage their students in a learning environment consistent with Starratt’s (2004) model. Similar attention was given to the students with respect to their perceptions of support provided by his or her teacher.

Participants

The high school chosen for this study was selected after informally consulting with a few northwest Ohio school superintendents. The purpose of the initial consultations was to provide an opportunity for the superintendents to describe their general perceptions of support provided by their principals and teachers to district students. The school ultimately selected was based upon the recommendation of the superintendent, the availability of the principal and the opportunity to allow this researcher to interview selected teachers and students. Following the recommendation of the superintendent, this researcher met with the building principal for the
purpose of explaining the proposed research, describing the theoretical framework, underscoring the significance of the study, and securing a commitment on the principal’s part to fully participate in the study. Both the superintendent and the principal granted permission to utilize the school system (see Appendixes A and B).

Three high school teachers from one northwest Ohio school were selected on a non-random purposive basis. I engaged the principal in an in-depth conversation regarding teacher support of students, environments conducive to learning, and other topics as they relate to student academic achievement. During the conversation I introduced the principal to Starratt’s (2004) model of the ethics of responsibility, authenticity, and presence. We discussed at length the potential for the application of the ethics in teacher professional development to overcome obstacles to student learning and how, in many classrooms, we see the ethics being applied successfully in teacher-student interactions. I asked the principal to identify teachers who, in his opinion, best represented the application of the ethics of responsibility, authenticity, and presence and at least one teacher who did not fit the paradigm (see Appendix C for instructions to principal). This researcher, based upon the recommendation of the principal, then selected the teachers. It should be noted that the researcher did not know the identity of the non-paradigm teacher during the selection process. Teaching core-area classes was a common denominator among the selected teachers. In the event a recommended teacher would have chosen not to participate in the study, the next teacher recommended by the principal would have been contacted. The process continued until three teachers were secured and each agreed to participate in the study.

Two students were selected on a stratified-random basis from each teacher’s classroom for a total of six student participants. Lecompte and Preissle (1993) refer to this process as
criterion-based selection. Specifically, the students selected represented a sampling of high-performing and low-performing students as defined by their grade-point average at the conclusion of the previous academic year. It should be noted, however, that each student participating in the study was currently a student of record with the respective participating teacher. This researcher chose the students by drawing at random from the class rosters of each teacher. Each class roster was divided by the respective class teacher into two distinct groupings. The first grouping consisted of those students with a grade point average of 3.0 or above; the second grouping consisted of students with grade point averages of 2.0 or below. All averages were based on a 4.0 scale. One student was drawn, at random, from each grouping for each teacher—totaling two students per teacher. In the event selected students would have chosen not to participate or appropriate permission slips were not signed, random sampling would have continued until the pre-determined number of participants was reached. Students on individualized education plans for special education or Section 504 service plans were excluded from the study in that they receive additional support services not provided to general education students.

Selected teachers agreed to participate in the study (see Appendix D). Students and parents were also asked to give permission for participation (see Appendixes E and F). Letters were sent home for the selected students and their parents to sign. Once all the letters were received, the interview process began. A priority of this study, and emphasized with all participants, was to keep the identity of the school district, the identity of the school, the identity of the teachers, and the identity of the students confidential. To that end, fictitious names created by the students themselves were utilized. To protect the identity of the school and teachers, the researcher assigned fictitious names.
Data Collection Process

*Interviews and Journals*

The selected participants who agreed to take part in the study were interviewed several times over a one-semester period from September 2005 through December 2005. Four interviews with each participating teacher and student were conducted at the high school during that time period. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. The exception to the length of time spent in each interview was the first interview, which lasted approximately 90 minutes. Each interview had a theme, or a few related themes, so as to remain focused and consistent with the review of literature and purpose of the study (see Appendixes G to J). Maykut and Morehouse (1994) posited that the use of interviews has been well established in qualitative methods approaches to research and that the depth of the conversations “moves beyond surface talk to a rich discussion of thoughts and feelings” (p. 80). The initial interview focused on introductions, informed consent letters, and general protocol for the remaining interviews and observations. I also attempted to establish some rapport with the participants, ease their apprehension level, and build credibility with them (Glesne, 1999). The second student interview was designed to elicit descriptive information related to the student participants’ academic status, family background, likes and dislikes. Subsequent student interviews focused on the relationship between student participants and their teachers and the students’ perceptions of support received from their teachers. The second and subsequent teacher interviews dealt with teacher perceptions of the support being delivered to their students. If a participant was unable to meet during a scheduled interview time, every attempt was made to re-schedule and conduct the interview within the same week. When this was not possible or not practical, the questions were added to the next interview time.
Between interviews, each teacher and student journaled questions that were generated after a period of reflection. Journaling his or her feelings, reactions, and introspections following each interview was encouraged and welcomed (Meloy, 1994). At the end of the interview process, each journal was collected and copied with permission of the participants to assist in defining the contextual framework of this study and to add to the richness and depth of the data collected by this researcher.

Every attempt was made to conduct the initial interview in a supportive and caring manner and as informally as possible so as to ensure a higher comfort level during subsequent interviews. A sincere attempt was made on the part of the researcher to establish a mutually trusting rapport and ease apprehension on the part of the participants (Schram, 2003). I also recognized that participants were more likely to be open and honest in their disclosures if they viewed me as an individual committed to maintaining honesty and integrity throughout the interview process. It also served the purpose of adding an additional element of trustworthiness to the study (Creswell, 1998). All interviews were conducted one-on-one and in a restricted area of the building to insure the participants’ privacy and confidentiality. Student interviews were conducted during the school day while teacher interviews were conducted either during the teachers’ conference time or at other times outside of instructional periods.

The interviews were audio taped and transcribed prior to the next scheduled interview. “This practice ensures that everything said is preserved for analysis” (Merriam, 1988, p. 81), and to ensure accuracy, each participant read and edited the transcribed documents prior to the beginning of the next interview. Additions, deletions, or other changes were notated by the researcher. The ability of the participants to check and verify the accuracy of the interview documents will obviously impact the degree of success of this study. While the number of
interviews varied according to the participants’ availability, four interviews throughout the semester from September to December were scheduled.

The journals were intended to capture the participant’s reflective thoughts following each interview. Intended to add to the richness of the data collected, the journals reflect the lenses used by each participant to view the interview process. As Merriam (1988) posited, “Personal documents are a reliable source of data concerning a person’s attitudes, beliefs, and view of the world” (p. 112). This researcher used the data as well to gain insight into the participants’ perceptions of the interview process and the contributions each participant made to the study. The journals provided meaningful and relevant data in this regard. In addition, the data provided a basis for comparing the perceptions of teacher support among low-performing and high-performing students and the teachers’ perceptions of providing that support to students.

Observations

In addition to the interviews and journals, the researcher took advantage of opportunities to informally observe the students and teachers. Observations were conducted throughout the course of the semester to enhance the researcher’s perceptions of the overall school climate, its culture, and to gain a better understanding of the efficacy of student/teacher relationships in general (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1984). Observations are a form of data collection and can enhance the overall efficacy of the study by adding a dimension that otherwise would be missing. Each participant was informed during the initial interview that informal observations would take place throughout the semester in a variety of instructional, non-instructional, and extra-curricular venues. The researcher carefully recorded the unique circumstances surrounding each observation, and any other relevant factors that assisted in enriching the context of the study (Creswell, 1998). Each participant in the study was observed at some point during the semester
by this researcher. Informal observations with the teachers were always conducted within the
teachers’ classroom, but not always with the students participating in this study. Informal
observations of students took place primarily in the classroom but also included other settings.
The student observations may or may not have included the presence of the teachers in this
study.

Reactions

Each participant was encouraged to write a short, one paragraph statement at the
conclusion of the study describing any additional reaction he or she would like shared. A self-
addressed stamped envelope was provided each student at the last interview for the purpose of
sending any relevant reflections that he/she wanted to share with the researcher. This was an
optional activity intended to empower the participant, provide ownership of the process (Bassey,
1999), and comment on the interviews conducted throughout the study.

Data Analysis

“Case study research has no specific methods of data collection or of analysis which are
unique to it as a method of enquiry [sic]” (Bassey, 1999, p. 69). Recalling Maykut and
Morehouse (1994), data collected from the preceding interviews were used to inform and direct
subsequent interviews—each becoming more in-depth while simultaneously adding richness and
understanding to the preceding interview. “Data analysis done simultaneously with data
collection enables you to focus and shape the study as it proceeds” (Glesne, 1999, p. 130).
Utilizing the constant comparative method (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985;
Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) the data were analyzed on a disaggregated basis with the emerging
units coded. The data were then categorized, first by intuition and later by emerging themes that
included possible relationships, disparities, inconsistencies, and phenomena not anticipated
(Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1996). Finally, incomplete categories were identified that enabled the researcher to collect additional data to provide a more complete picture of a particular category.

Operationalizing Starratt’s (2004) ethic of presence, ethic of responsibility, and ethic of authenticity, and identifying pertinent themes that emerged from the interviews, coupled with a relevant review of the literature, recommendations were developed that will assist teachers and school leaders in ensuring that the support needed for student success, is not only perceived to be delivered but, is delivered in such a way as to leave no ambiguity in the minds of students that teachers are, in fact, providing the support they need.

Trustworthiness

Glesne (1999) asserted that the credibility of the findings in a qualitative study and the subsequent interpretations of the data collected depend to a large degree on the attentiveness the researcher places on establishing trustworthiness. It requires the researcher to pay particular attention to personal biases and in so doing strengthens the conclusions and recommendations made as a result of the study. I have embedded several methodologies within the study to maximize trustworthiness; each is addressed separately.

Prolonged Engagement and Persistent Observation

Maykut and Morehouse (1994) posited that prolonged engagement during the interview process averages one-and-a-half to two hours spent with each participant. While I would have enjoyed spending more time with each participant, Bogdan and Biklen (1998) informed the reader that the decisions made with respect to the “allocation of time are always made in the context of the study” (p. 61). Accordingly, I visited the high school at least weekly for a ten-week period and, on occasion, more often than that. I also interviewed each participant multiple
times to better understand his or her perceptions with respect to teacher support (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The more data gathered through the interview process, the more time I spent in formal and informal observations in an attempt to complement the data being generated through the interviews. Additional time was spent observing extra-curricular activities and engaging participants in informal conversation. In the process I had the opportunity to better evaluate the overall climate of the school, the dominant culture, and the quality of interactions among and between teachers and students. The additional visits provided valuable insight to my hunches with respect to the quality of those interactions. As a result, our relationships and interactions gained higher degrees of comfort and ease, which produced formal interviews of higher quality.

_Triangulation_

In general terms, triangulation means collecting data from different sources to interpret or give meaning to the topic of interest (Bassey, 1999; Maxwell, 1996; Merriam, 1988). While formal interviews produced the bulk of the data, journals, classroom observations, observations made during class changes and as students entered the classroom, as well as observations made as teachers informally interacted with students were used to serve as a check—or comparison, if you will—to the data collected during the interviews and “to build a coherent justification for themes” (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). Maykut and Morehouse (1994) advocated this methodology by positing:

The combination of interviews and observations from the field, along with reviews of relevant documents increases the likelihood that the phenomenon of interest is being understood from various points of view and ways of knowing. Convergence of a major
theme or pattern in the data from interviews, observations and documents lends strong credibility to the findings. (p. 146)

I looked for evidence that was consistent with espousal of specific beliefs and demonstrated practice of those beliefs on the part of those interviewed. Informal conversations with the principal shed additional light on the data collected through interviews and observations with the teachers and students. Stories and observations about the students and teachers from the principal provided additional evidence consistent with the data collected through student and teacher interviews and observations. Inconsistencies were addressed with follow-up questions in subsequent interviews to determine their origin.

Discrepant Data / Negative Case Analysis

For those teachers feeling overwhelmed with the sheer volume of content that must be covered in a given time frame, or the increasingly high number of students placed in their classrooms, or from any number of additional demands that are placed upon them, Starratt’s (2004) model of ethical leadership is not always fully embraced. From their perspective, simply covering the material is difficult enough let alone engaging each student in the ethics of presence, authenticity, and responsibility. Some educators will view their responsibility to students as solely the presenter of subject material with mastery of the content primarily the responsibility of the student. Deiro (2005) acknowledged this position by stating:

It’s true that not all of us enter the teaching profession with the goal of promoting the personal growth of our students, especially those of us who are secondary school teachers. Many of us are content specialists. We love our subjects. . . . Traditionally, teachers are viewed as responsible only for the cognitive development or academic outcomes of students. (p. 81)
While making no comment with respect to the efficacy of this pedagogical preference, it does stand in stark contrast to the paradigm under study. Rather than deny the presence of a negative case, I instructed the principal to include a teacher who he believed would represent discrepant data and serve as a negative case (see Appendix C). Maxwell (1996) suggested, “the best you may be able to do is to report the discrepant evidence and allow readers to evaluate this and draw their own conclusion” (p. 93).

**Member Checks**

Part of the relationship-building process was to provide the participants with copies of my analysis and reflective journals several times during the course of the study. This was done, in part, to allow the participants an opportunity to inform and clarify positions they had taken with respect to answers they provided during the interviews. An added value was the sense of ownership the participants gained with respect to verifying the accuracy of the data they supplied (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Merriam, 1988).

**Feedback**

“Soliciting feedback from others is an extremely useful strategy for identifying validity threats, your own biases and assumptions, and flaws in your logic or methods” (Maxwell, 1996, P. 94). Accordingly, committee members provided periodic and valuable feedback throughout the course of the study. Following the initial interviews, I met with Dr. Vannatta to discuss the results and the methods utilized. Following the initial contact, additional feedback was provided on a regular basis. As difficulties in data analysis occurred, more frequent consultations were sought with Dr. Vannatta. At each step in the progression of the study, Dr. Pauken was consulted for appropriate direction and was provided a draft of work in progress for his feedback. Additionally, other members of the committee read the interview transcripts and provided
valuable and timely feedback throughout the course of the study. I also sought the input of colleagues through casual conversation and, in some cases, a more formal critique of the work. Criticism was taken constructively and promptly acted upon as necessary.

Subjectivities

As a researcher of this topic, there is some personal subjectivity present. This researcher has long-espoused that educational reform is more than re-designing or enhancing the learning environment. The debate over block scheduling versus traditional scheduling, the structure of the day, the rigor of the curriculum, smaller learning communities, or other structural changes to the delivery of services, while necessary, are insufficient if we fail to take a critical look at the manner in which we interact with students. As a high school student, this researcher nearly withdrew from the very institution designed to prepare me for participation in a highly competitive world. I simply did not see how I fit into the larger picture, had a very low sense of self-efficacy, and failed to recognize, let alone develop, my individual strengths. I simply had no direction and very little support. One high school teacher recognized the rudderless drifting taking place in my life and intervened on my behalf. He did this by simply asking what my interests were. He also complimented me on the way I interacted with students with whom I had little in common. It also happened that I was struggling in Algebra and, while he was not my Algebra teacher, he offered to tutor me on Saturday mornings (the only free time available to him). When I was the last man cut from the freshman basketball team he (not known to me at the time) intervened on my behalf and I remained on the team. I have always credited this singular act as the turning point in my academic life during my high school experience. Now I had an identity within the larger group and my sense of confidence and efficacy grew on a daily basis. As my Algebra grades improved, I gained confidence in my other core classes and slowly
began to excel academically. By the end of my high school career I had not only managed to survive—I thrived. To that teacher, it was not about content or proficiency scores; it was about one lost kid that needed support and encouragement to succeed in a demanding educational environment.

Given the threat to validity my personal subjectivities and biases presented to the study, I utilized committee members to provide ample feedback for the purpose of enhancing the trustworthiness of the data analysis and conclusions drawn from that analysis (Maxwell, 1996; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Merriam, 1988).

Summary

Freebody (2003) suggested, “The goal of a Case Study, in its most general form, is to put in place an inquiry in which both researcher and educators can reflect upon particular instances of educational practice” (p. 81). Perhaps there is no greater instance of educational practice than the support provided by teachers to their students, which promotes a sense of efficacy, maintains high standards of academic excellence, and provides the means to achieve those standards. Long after the debate on how we deliver support and encouragement to our students is over, the impact of what we offer in terms of support and encouragement to countless students will linger.

Operationalizing Starratt’s (2004) model of the ethics of responsibility, authenticity, and presence may provide the contextual framework within which educational practitioners may fully engage their students in meaningful and productive ways—ultimately providing the support necessary for academic success.
CHAPTER IV. CONTEXT

The purpose of this study was to explore student perceptions of teacher support among low-performing and high-performing students in one northwest Ohio high school and teachers’ perceptions of providing support to their students. Of particular interest was whether low-performing students’ perceptions of teacher support differed from the perceptions of their high-performing peers and whether or not teacher perceptions of providing support to their students aligned with student perceptions.

Arriving at a universally accepted definition of the term “support” and then assessing the impact that support—however one defines it—on student motivation and goal attainment presented the greatest challenges in determining the research design that would provide an appropriate format to explore the issue in a deep and rich context. The problem was twofold: First, arriving at a contextual framework within which to explore the topic and second, embedding the term “support” within a theoretical foundation that would allow an exploration of consistent variables.

Starratt’s (2004) model of the ethics of responsibility, authenticity, and presence provided the framework within which to explore the variables associated with the term “teacher support”. Utilizing the case study tradition of qualitative research, I was able to identify common themes of support as presented through the use of these ethics and to seek the presence of these ethics in the interactions between three high school teachers and six high school students in three separate classrooms in one northwest Ohio high school. In so doing, I attempted to lend empirical validity to Starratt’s (2004) model of the ethics of responsibility, authenticity, and presence.

This chapter provides the reader with a detailed description of the setting for this study as well as the participant selection process utilized, the individual interviews, and a composite look
at each case study. From this introduction, the classroom presentation of these ethics by each
teacher and the corresponding perceptions from students as beneficiaries of espoused teacher
support unfolds. The dynamic interplay between the ethics of responsibility, authenticity, and
presence as they relate to student motivation and goal attainment is woven into the fabric of these
unfolding stories—helping to shape and define the relationships that have been created between
teacher and student and how those relationships ultimately affect student achievement.

Setting

Choosing a high school in which to conduct this study was more than chance or merely
acceptance of a location that would accept the parameters of the proposed study. To be sure, a
site had to be selected and permission to conduct the study needed to be secured, but building
demographics, organizational structure, and progressive leadership could not be overlooked.
After in-depth discussion with several area superintendents and members of the research
committee, I decided to seek a high school whose demographics would represent a cross section
of the general public and create a participant pool from all walks of life, with a wide-range of
socio-economic status, ethnic diversity, academic proficiency, and varying interests in post-
secondary pursuits and vocational options. The school finally selected accurately reflects those
considerations.

Lakeview High School (LHS) prides itself as an excellent and innovative high school.
Located in northern Ohio within a district encompassing 17 square miles, and a district
enrollment of 7,000 students, Lakeview is a comprehensive four-year high school with an
approximate enrollment of 2400 students. In addition to its college preparatory curriculum,
which includes 160 course offerings, honors and advanced placement classes, Lakeview provides
extensive technical training with 14 career-training programs. Operating on a 4 x 4 instructional
block schedule, students can take advantage of over 50 clubs and activities, and 22 varsity sports. The school has a faculty of over 170 certificated teachers and instructors with a wide range of teaching experience and advanced degrees. The most recent report card issued by the Ohio Department of Education recognized Lakeview as an “effective” school as the direct result of meeting the 75% minimum passing rate required in five core content areas—even as it struggles to meet the minimum graduation requirement of 90%.

Through the course of the general observations conducted at the high school, it became readily apparent that well-defined expectations for student behavior while on campus were in place and adhered to by the students. Lakeview’s campus is comprised of three instructional areas connected by walkways that require students to occasionally exit one building to attend a class in another. The sheer size of the complex makes it difficult to supervise all pedestrian traffic. Nevertheless, the students freely move from one building to the next in an orderly and organized manner. Students can be seen donning their backpacks loaded with books and supplies, carrying on casual conversations with their peers, and purposefully moving to their next classroom. There is an abundance of laughter and good-natured chatter. Other students prefer the quiet isolation that headsets and favorite music tracks provide. But they too, respectfully move with purpose and order—albeit apparently oblivious to the world surrounding them.

On the days when the weather is inclement, most students choose not to wear coats or other protective outerwear. Preferring instead to trade the temporary discomfort brought on by the weather for the additional time provided by not having to secure coats or umbrellas. It should also be noted that throughout the observation process, there was a noticeable lack of cell phone usage among students—even when there were so many opportunities and so many unsupervised areas in which to take advantage of those opportunities—another indication that
students understand and, for the most part, accept behavioral expectations and policy. In many respects the dynamics of the campus, movement of students, and staff interactions with students reminds me of a college campus with students moving freely and independently to their next destination—all done orderly and purposefully.

I spent several days at the high school to simply observe. My arrival was unannounced and, for the most part, unnoticed. In fact, on one occasion, I sat in the main lobby for quite some time before I was asked if I needed assistance. I met no resistance as I traveled the hallways, observing students and occasionally taking a few minutes to engage one or two in casual conversation.

Student interviews were conducted in a comfortable conference room adjacent to the principal’s office. Its strategic location provided ease in moving students in and out, and also provided a safe, private area to conduct the interviews. Teacher interviews were conducted in their classrooms during conference periods, which allowed us to close the door and meet uninterrupted. For one teacher it was more convenient to meet in her office and for another, we met in a small conference room off the main floor of the media center. Both locations provided a safe and secure area in which to conduct the interviews.

Participant Composite

The Principal, Lakeview High School

“I always felt I had a connection with kids. I think they knew I was being honest in my desire to help them and I think that is what kids read in teachers immediately.”

(Brian Ferguson, LHS principal)

Mr. Ferguson’s role in the successful outcome of this study cannot be overstated. He models the ethics under study and brings to his administrative position years of experience as a
classroom teacher and activities director. His friendly and unassuming mannerisms allow him to easily interact with those around him. He is approachable, accessible, and visible. He can be seen in the hallway engaging students in casual conversation before and after school and between class changes. Maintaining contact with students is an ongoing priority for Mr. Ferguson. He assumes a rotation in the cafeteria each day to help him maintain contact with students—a duty that many other principals avoid. He attends as many extra-curricular activities as possible and even directs one of the high school plays. “It’s a good way to stay somehow connected to a group of kids, which I really enjoy.”

Denise Everly, Mathematics Teacher

“There’s never a point where I can’t do anything else. I [have] never given up on a kid, you know…I’m never going to give up on a kid”.

(Denise Everly)

With eleven years of teaching in both public and private schools, Mrs. Everly has had experience dealing with all types of students, with all types of learning styles—each bringing to the classroom a wide range of individual histories, unique circumstances, and varying degrees of support at home. Through it all she maintains a positive and upbeat attitude that exudes an enthusiasm one would expect from a first-year teacher. Serving as the math department chairperson, she has been in a position to observe and evaluate the impact teacher support can have on students with respect to motivation and academic performance. She espouses a strong support ethic for students and tends to gravitate to marginalized or troubled students. When asked if all students can do well in school, Mrs. Everly responded:

Definitely. With the right support, with showing that you care, you know, in my career I’ve always tended to go to the work with the kids that struggle. That’s just who I like
and I’ve had great success. You know, just showing them, yes you can do this and building their confidence. I think it comes down to them knowing that I care about them. I want them to do well….I think caring is getting to know the student, knowing what makes him or her tick. What type of learning does best for them. Caring enough to hold them to a standard, not just letting them slide by. When they’re down, pulling them up. Recognizing that a weakness may be present but also creating a solution to make that weakness a strength. So, it’s academic caring as well as personal caring.

While Mrs. Everly is the teacher of record for three classes, she does not have her own classroom. Rather, she travels to and from classrooms that are vacant while the resident teachers are on conference period. This creates something of a disadvantage in that she is not always able to create a physical environment that she believes supports student learning. Nor is she able to arrive early or stay late in a given classroom because the resident teacher returns to take advantage of time in his or her room. To compensate for this, students are encouraged to stop by her office whenever she is needed. Her office is small but comfortable. There is a sense of quiet efficiency amongst the stacks of student material, resource literature, and other artifacts associated with the office of a busy department head. She has posted office hours and makes it clear to her students that she is available during those times. In the event students cannot meet during those hours, she makes herself available by appointment.

_Sharon Myers, Physics Teacher_

“And what really irritates me…are the teachers you can tell…they’re on their way to be administrators. They really don’t want to be in the classroom.”

(Sharon Myers)
For 22 years, Mrs. Myers has engaged students in all areas of scientific inquiry. A former scientific researcher/technician, Mrs. Myers was drawn to the classroom to fulfill a need for a more meaningful and rewarding career. For the most part she teaches upper level classes such as physics, although she does teach some entry-level classes as well. She prefers the more advanced science classes. Mrs. Myers also serves as the advisor to the National Honor Society.

Mrs. Myers believes that all students can achieve in her classrooms, but is quick to add: “that doesn’t mean they all work for it.” She maintains high standards and expects her students to accept their responsibility for learning. “If you don’t do the work, you’re not going to pass. It’s as simple as that. I don’t give points for being here.” When asked how she would define teacher caring as it relates to her students, she replied:

Lord, that would be a tough one. Trying to make sure every student, through whatever means you can, gets through. And obviously, that wouldn’t be through cheating or anything like that, you know trying to get them through. And some just don’t want your help, which is terrible.

Student effort is an important component to Mrs. Myers willingness to extend help beyond the classroom. She does commit considerable time both before and after school to meet with students who are struggling academically but she adds: “I’m here at seven o’clock every morning. I’m happy to help them if [italics added] they want to get here”.

While on the surface there would appear to be a certain conflict in the statements, “doing whatever it takes to get every kid through” and “if you don’t do the work, you’re not going to pass”, a closer look reveals a standard of excellence that requires student participation. The extent to which Mrs. Myers will go to elicit that participation, or devise motivational strategies to encourage participation, will become clearer as her story, and that of her students, unfolds. The
The point being made at this juncture is merely to indicate that high standards of academic performance are a component of caring for students from Mrs. Myers perspective, and meeting those standards is primarily the responsibility of the student.

*Michael Kennedy, English and Drama Teacher*

“Don’t fail my class; you’re going to hate it in someone else’s class!”

(Michael Kennedy)

While not initially entering college to pursue a degree in education, Mr. Kennedy was drawn to the field because he felt it was an opportunity to make a significant contribution to society while at the same time providing an outlet for his creative talents. Turning from his preliminary training in law, Mr. Kennedy sought to use his outgoing and engaging personality to engage students in language arts and drama. He also directs one of the school’s plays—believing that involvement in extracurricular activities is one way to support student interests during their high school experience.

Describing his classroom as a “community”, Mr. Kennedy is a complex blend of showman, salesman, actor, teacher, and sometimes con man. He is energetic to the point of zaniness, yet he maintains absolute control over his class. Common denominators readily surface while conducting observations in his classroom. Mr. Kennedy is relaxed, comfortable, and kicked back. He is generous with his compliments toward students and his interactions are friendly and respectful. Having said that, he is candid and to the point while trying to impress students with an honest appraisal of what lies ahead of them. When elaborating on the importance of completing English II, he asserted:
Do you want to graduate high school? Do you understand this is English II [and] that you have to have that to graduate high school? I said … you’re not going to like to take it over; it’s going to be boring; it’s going to bore the heck out of you.

Believing that all kids can be successful in his classroom, he recognizes that “success” is a relative term. The parameters used to measure success by some teachers and students are not what others may use to measure success. When asked how he defines caring for students, he elaborated by saying:

To care for them is to be a steward for them within the confines of my classroom and with the confines of the school. . . . I look for a connection with a kid and then like I say I wrap that around what we’re doing.

Mr. Kennedy can be seen in local television commercials and uses his celebrity to make his content more relevant and enjoyable for his students. Classroom observations reveal students actively engaged in his lessons as evidenced by the lively exchange that occurs between teacher and students as a result of his question/answer and discussion techniques.

Anna Deusan, Mathematics Student of Mrs. Everly

“It makes me feel like she’s trying to connect with us, like she wants us to know that she’s…for real, that she’s not just there to collect a paycheck at the end of the week.”

(Anna Deusan)

Anna is a 16-year old junior who struggles academically. Her current GPA is 1.875 and she readily admits it is not reflective of her ability. She is outgoing, talkative, and cognizant of her responsibilities in the classroom, although it is often times difficult to keep her on-task because of her desire to “socialize” with friends. Her primary extracurricular interest is choir and she has aspirations of post-secondary education in the field of massage therapy or perhaps physical therapy. Her relationships with her teachers are important in that the quality of those
relationships oftentimes determines the extent to which she actively engages in the content and remains persistent with the workload when things are not going well.

She insists that caring teachers are easy to identify. When asked to define the word “care” she replied:

Caring means that they know how you feel; that um, caring to me is knowing that your student is happy. You want to know that they had a good day, had a bad day; if they had a situation with a friend that you’d be there to listen. To me, that’s caring.

Anna elaborated on the term caring and made specific reference with respect to how closely related the word care is with the word concern and how that plays out in the academic setting with Mrs. Everly.

She is the type of teacher who will sit down with you and work with you. If you don’t get it, she doesn’t move on. She’d rather have you be really certain on what you’re learning than move on. Like we did a quiz yesterday and it was suppose to be the day before, but she knew we weren’t ready so she held it off just to go over it one more time.

So yeah, she’s very concerned.

**Krystal Leight, Mathematics Student of Mrs. Everly**

“She works very hard to get us where we’re at…so I would not want to disappoint her.”

(Krystal Leight)

Krystal is a high performing sophomore student with a current GPA of 3.875. She is bright, energetic, and inquisitive. She is involved in her church’s youth volleyball program and loves dancing. She spends all her spare time in the dance studio pursuing her interest in dancing. Following graduation, she would like to pursue a career in either nursing or perhaps dancing.
Krystal values her relationship with Mrs. Everly. When asked to elaborate on her relationship with Mrs. Everly, she talked about her definition of caring and how care is woven into the fabric of her relationship with Mrs. Everly. Krystal responded by saying:

I know she’s not supposed to be your friend and she’s there to be your teacher, but I think there’s like [there will] always be that part that you can always count on her—like if you need to talk to somebody and like help with anything, I think she would be there to talk to you if you needed her—yeah!

And while Krystal is motivated to succeed, as will be detailed later in this study, she acknowledges the role Mrs. Everly plays in helping her excel in mathematics by asserting:

I like—like think it’s really like the way she teaches and the way she breaks things down to make sure we get it. That’s really a big thing and that’s really what got me doing really good in math is the way she teaches it.

As we will see, Krystal works hard for academic success, but her effort and motivation are directly tied to the influence her teacher(s) have on her in terms of inter-personal relationships.

*Paul Ankenbrandt, Physics Student of Mrs. Myers*

“You gotta do what you’re supposed to do and that makes you successful.”

(Paul Ankenbrandt)

Paul is a well-adjusted senior student who is currently seeking the best college to pursue a career in architecture. He is taking physics as an elective class. His current GPA is 3.159. Paul is involved in baseball with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and has been a member of the German Club. He is friendly, respectful, and engaging. At times it appeared as though his responses were crafted so as to not shed any negative light on his teacher. In the end, he was candid, respectful, and cooperative.
Like Krystal, Paul is motivated to succeed in class. “If you get good grades in high school, it’ll help start your career after high school.” So when I asked him if Mrs. Myers helps him be successful, he replied: “it’s more me”. And like Krystal, relationships do have some impact on student engagement. Paul indicates that Mrs. Myers is “very friendly—always making jokes and kinda making the class fun and easy to learn the material.” When asked how he defined caring, he asserted: “I think it is, it’s mostly helping a person succeed. You care enough...that you’re going to do anything you can to help them do that—to reach that goal.” But in Mrs. Myers’ class, he didn’t indicate that caring extended beyond the classroom walls. Using that definition of care, Paul was asked if Mrs. Myers cares what goes on before or after school, or in extracurricular activities, or if she ever asks what’s going on in your life, he replied: “Actually, she hasn’t asked.”


Joe Brown, Physics Student of Mrs. Myers

“I wanted to do well, but I didn’t.”

(Joe Brown)

Joe is a very introspective individual. He has great insight on many topics and has a tendency to display a negative attitude about much that is going on in his life. He does not perform well academically (his current GPA is 1.848) but insists that he could do considerably better under different circumstances. As will be seen later in this study, Joe has ability as demonstrated by his success in other classes. But his success stems from a complicated mixture of factors that affects his motivation. How well he likes the subject, its relevance to his life or immediate plans, and his relationship with the teacher all join to create a model for determining the likelihood that he will be successful in any given class.
Joe is 17 years old and hopes to attend a local community college next year to pursue his interest in computer science. He recognizes his GPA will likely keep him out of other universities he might be interested in. When looking ahead to a four-year institution, Joe said; “they won’t look at high school so much, they’ll more look at what you did at [the community college”].

Joe feels a certain disconnect with his physics teacher as evidenced by the following exchange:

*Interviewer:* What does she do to make the class appealing?

*Joe:* It’s physics…

*Interviewer:* So it’s kind of…

*Joe:* Just show up and do the work and leave—at least for me. It’s not like fun hour.

*Interviewer:* Is that enough for her just to have you show up, do the work and leave”

*Joe:* Yeah. That’d be enough for her.

*Interviewer:* Does she know what your goal is?

*Joe:* As in college and all?

*Interviewer:* Yeah.

*Joe:* No.

*Interviewer:* Why would you say that?

*Joe:* It never came up.

*Interviewer:* Just never came up?

*Joe:* No!

*Interviewer:* Never bothered to ask you what you want to do down the road?

*Joe:* Nope!
Joe believes he can be successful and is looking forward to putting this class behind him. As the semester is winding down to a few precious weeks, Joe is resigned to the fact that he will fail his physics class as the result of several factors outside his immediate control—factors that will surface as his story unfolds.

_Brittney Osborn, English Student of Mr. Kennedy_

“I think he just helps me because he knows I need the help in that class.”

(Brittany Osborn)

Brittney is a quiet and somewhat shy sophomore who is barely keeping her head above water academically. Her current GPA is 1.0 and her attendance is less than exemplary. She hasn’t considered her future at this point and has given no consideration to post secondary pursuits. Her only goal at this point is to get out of high school—with a diploma. During the course of my interviews and observations I had the sense she was pre-occupied with heavy issues that extended well beyond the classroom.

And yet, at least for this class with Mr. Kennedy, Brittney remains focused and is maintaining a “C” average. For that, she credits Mr. Kennedy. While she admits that English has always been difficult, with Mr. Kennedy as the teacher she said; “I understand it better with him teaching it.” The “why” she understands it better with Mr. Kennedy as the teacher will emerge in greater detail later in this study.

_Michelle Sullivan, English Student of Mr. Kennedy_

“He tries to make it easy to learn things.”

(Michelle Sullivan)

Michelle provided the greatest challenge throughout the interviews although, as the semester drew to a close, she became more animated and talkative. Nevertheless, she often times
seemed confused and I sensed she, at times, thought I was trying to secure information that would somehow be used to harm Mr. Kennedy—as if she said what she was really thinking, someone would get in serious trouble. Over time, she began to trust me more explicitly and provided more candid and detailed answers to my questions.

Michelle carries a 3.25 GPA and tries to emulate her brother who was class valedictorian in 2003. Falling short of that goal, she still earns all A’s and B’s and works hard to prepare for the future, even though she is uncertain of the career path she will follow or the college she will attend.

Uncertain as to how to define the word “caring” with respect to her relationship with Mr. Kennedy, she described him as approachable and respectful. He uses humor to deflect confrontation and make the classroom environment “comfortable”. When asked if she felt comfortable going to him if she needed help with any problem outside the classroom, she replied, “yeah”.

Summary

Woven into the fabric of student-teacher relationships are a myriad of variables whose presence, or lack thereof, ultimately determine the quality and efficacy of those relationships. It follows, then, that the quality of the relationship between student and teacher will ultimately determine the extent of the benefit those relationships might produce for individuals in the relationship. For some, strong teacher-student relationships will provide a source of motivation for greater effort in the classroom, which most likely will produce higher academic achievement. For others, those relationships may be the difference between dropping out of school or forging ahead toward individual goals—even in the face of adversity. Some will use their relationship with teachers to manipulate or take advantage, while others will build upon those relationships to
produce even better performance. For all, caring relationships with teachers could and should provide the means for on-going support and encouragement whatever endeavor the student undertakes. Sadly, as we will see, this is not always the case. The following chapter provides a more detailed analysis of the presentation made by teachers with respect to support to their students and how important those presentations are to students in motivating them to achieve their academic goals.
CHAPTER V. CASE STUDIES

This chapter captures nine case studies and provides the reader with a more in-depth review of themes that unfold as the students’ and teachers’ stories are told. While the reader will be engaged in nine separate case studies, the cases will be presented three at a time within the context of each teacher’s classroom. There are three teachers—each with one high-performing and one low-performing student represented from his or her classroom.

Mrs. Everly’s Classroom

Perhaps it was Mrs. Everly’s not so fond memories of one of her high school math teachers that helped shape and influence the type of teacher she is today. She relates:

I was at a private elementary school and always the tops of everything, and I came into Algebra I and struggled like the dickens. I didn’t get the teacher; I almost failed Algebra I as a freshman, and you know, to be in that situation and not understand and not know how to help myself really made me a stronger teacher. . . . But not knowing how to deal with the teacher and to be intimidated by a teacher was a really important lesson to me because I can understand the kid that [is too] scared to go and get help. I never understood a word he said to me. . . . I couldn’t connect with him no matter what I did and it certainly reflected in my grade and ultimately [on] my relationship with him for the rest of the time at [school]. . . . I don’t think I got the sense he cared. He would answer my question cold, cut and dry. And so, I couldn’t make the connection with him. . . . I didn’t know how to deal with that, but my other ones [teachers] if you would go in and ask a question, they were always very personable—and I didn’t find him to be that.

Recognizing the fact that her inability to connect with that teacher ultimately affected how well she was able to grasp the content has allowed her to accept personal responsibility as a teacher.
for student learning. It’s a responsibility that, in her opinion, extends beyond the classroom walls and includes much more than a basic responsibility to present subject material. “I don’t see my responsibility [to students] ever ending at that point.” Mrs. Everly insists that it is a responsibility she readily accepts and underscores the significant role teachers play in student success and well-being—now and in the future.

I have to step in and show them that learning is feasible for them and they can see progress. If I shirk that responsibility, then a kid may leave Lakeview High School thinking [he or she] is not even capable of learning; so how can I live my life? Ultimately, I think [the responsibility] does fall back on me.

While she recognizes environmental conditions and circumstances that can negatively impact student learning, “because it is not the Ward Cleaver household anymore,” she refuses to concede the notion that she is somehow powerless to do anything that would mitigate those negative influences. “We have to figure out how to reach that kid and break down those walls and make it a place where they want to come [and learn].”

Her answers on how to reach “those kids” will become readily apparent as her story unfolds. A short excerpt from one of her interviews provides a glimpse of her approach.

I believe every child can learn; it may be at their own pace or in their own style, but every child has the ability to learn difficult concepts. I believe I exist to support kids, to show them support when things aren’t going well, as well as when things are going well. [It is my job] to motivate them, to show them they can become contributing members of society. . . . I think it’s my job to make sure that they understand their life is an open book and that they have to make good choices that keep doors open for them instead of closing doors…you never want to limit your possibilities.
When pressed on her belief that all kids can do well in school, she replied: “Definitely. With the right support, with showing that you care…I’ve had great success. . . . I think it comes down to them knowing that I care about them. I want them to do well.” A more detailed analysis of how Mrs. Everly defines support and the manner in which she goes about teaching students, motivating students to achieve academically, and assisting students in making values based decisions when faced with difficult academic or behavioral choices follows.

When Mrs. Everly discusses the word “support” she freely exchanges and often substitutes the word “care” because “care” provides the foundation upon which she attempts to build relationships with students. And it is the quality of those relationships that ultimately determines the extent to which she is able to provide the necessary support for all of her students to reach their potential.

Her relationships with students are built first on trust. Without trust, she insists, her students would not share with her details of circumstances in their lives outside of the classroom that hinder their academic performance. During the course of this particular interview a young female student interrupted the interview to tell Mrs. Everly that she needed to talk to her as soon as possible on a matter “personal and very important.” Mrs. Everly excused herself and stepped into the hallway to meet with the young lady for several minutes. When Mrs. Everly returned, she relayed that the conversation was, in fact, very personal and that the nature of the problem had the potential to seriously impact this student’s ability to concentrate on her education—now and in the foreseeable future. She made arrangements to meet with the student during her lunch break to discuss options and determine a plan of action to help resolve the problem. When asked if this was the type of trustworthiness she attempts to establish with all of her students, Mrs. Everly responded with a resounding: “Yes. Definitely so.” And those trusting and caring
relationships make Mrs. Everly highly approachable and accessible to her students on academic issues as well. In short, they trust her and rely on her for individualized help, as evidenced by the following statement concerning a student who was struggling academically:

She was very far behind, very frustrated. She wrote me a note saying, ‘Mrs. Everly, I’m in trouble.’ So on a work day I pulled her in for three hours and we sat down and worked for three hours and she walked out of there knowing what she was doing. So, you know, to me that’s a really good message to her. I’m willing to take my time with her [because] she’s important enough for me to do that and, yes, you can learn.

Mrs. Everly considers herself dependable, patient, humorous, reliable and fair when describing the quality of her relationships with students. And while she is as consistent with her students as possible with respect to expectations—both academically and behaviorally—she acknowledges that “there are circumstances when I have to bend a little to try and meet the needs of certain kids.”

In the end, however, it is her ability to recognize individual needs that allows her to apply fair and consistent intervention strategies to meet those individual needs. She understands that fair treatment of her students does not always mean equal treatment of her students. And to do that effectively, she insists that it is important to know as much about her students as possible—likes and dislikes, home life, family considerations, as well as individual strengths and weaknesses.

At the start of each semester, she asks students to complete an interest survey, which also includes biographical data. She uses this information to better understand her students and, hopefully, gain insight as to how she might more fully engage them in her classroom. When asked if she considered her need to know as much about her students as possible as a teacher
responsibility and how that responsibility relates to the care and support of her students, she replied:

I think they [students] would say that…they would expect me to teach them at whatever level they’re at. . . . I think they would expect fairness. I think they would expect people [teachers] to take time to get to know them and find out their strengths and weaknesses. They want to be cared about. They want a teacher [to] not baby them, but someone that takes time to know them. I think that’s what they demand…what we’re responsible for.

She appreciates and comprehends the inextricable link between home and school and the dilemmas students often face when the demands of school life are not harmonious with the demands placed on him/her through family or friends. It’s a double-edged sword for most students—somewhere between a rock and a hard place—when circumstances in their personal lives are exacerbated by unknowing or uncaring teachers intent on advancing a singular academic agenda regardless of outside considerations.

I think it’s really important that they see me as professional. I believe that math is really important and they need it for life. But, [I] also go to that next step and say I care about you and therefore I know there are other things in your life that are going on right now…to recognize that is very important; to give them a chance to talk about it is very important and then that leads to a better relationship in the classroom. . . . I try very hard to get to know the students.

Slowly, and over time, Mrs. Everly shares personal information about her family, interests and hobbies with her students so that they might appreciate her as “human” and not “just another teacher.” Never taking herself too seriously, Mrs. Everly lets her student know she has “a sense of humor and I can laugh with them and I can tease them…and I allow them to tease me a little
bit.” She takes advantages of opportunities as they are presented to highlight the human qualities they share in common as illustrated in the following comment: “I think it’s important for them [students] to realize that we all [italics added] go through the same things and somehow we all manage to emerge…stronger and with a better sense of what the world is all about.”

Obviously, relationship building and a strong ethic of care with students are necessary and vital components of Mrs. Everly’s pedagogical philosophy. But they do not stand alone. Best practice in the classroom includes an understanding of individual learning styles, clearly stated objectives, a pleasant learning environment, relevant and meaningful lessons, and lessons that build upon previously acquired knowledge. Her deeply held beliefs along these lines are best expressed when she states:

I think my basic responsibility is to develop lesson plans that incorporate lots of different types of strategies that will allow every student to understand the basics of what they need and to be able to build more complex ideas on top of that. I believe it is my responsibility to help them help themselves even when they don’t want to or can’t help themselves….I don’t think as a teacher we can ever say we’ve truly done enough. There has to be one more strategy out there that you can help a kid with.

She can be seen greeting students as they enter the classroom or engaging them in casual conversation in the hallway. She knows her students by name and greets each of them accordingly, regardless of where they encounter one another. She spends a considerable amount of time in the cafeteria talking with students or just making herself available to anyone in need. Beyond that, throughout the course of my classroom observations, I noted friendly and mutually respectful interactions between Mrs. Everly and her students. She allows time for students to
settle in and always takes time to allow students to simply talk about what’s going on in their lives, how the weekend went, or simply to share something of personal interest.

Her classroom discussions are lively and she uses distinguished question-and-answer skills effectively to check for student understanding and, occasionally, to bring disengaged students back on task. She uses ample doses of praise for student performance and doesn’t hesitate to challenge students as evidenced by the following exchange:

*Mrs. Everly:* Matthew, you’re not with me today!

*Matthew* (raised his head from the table): Sorry.

*Mrs. Everly:* Now, do you understand the importance of being able to use the formula and not just memorize it?

*Class* (almost in unison): Yeah!

*Mrs. Everly:* Awesome job, Ron. I like the way you handled the problem. You rock man—nice job.

*Mrs. Everly:* Any questions? Robert! I feel a question burning to be answered.

*Mrs. Everly:* Robert, do you see now why I had to show you how to factor?

*Robert* (with sincerity and appreciation): Yeah. Thanks.

*Mrs. Everly:* Jasmine did an excellent job with it.

*Jasmine:* How did you get the “y” intercept?

*Mrs. Everly:* Mmm. Rachel, how did I get this “y” intercept?

*Rachel* (proceeds to explain):...

Exchanges such as the one above characterize much of the dialogue that takes place in Mrs. Everly’s classrooms. Students are engaged and appear to enjoy the content, the interactions between teacher and student and the pace with which they occur. Much of this is possible
because Mrs. Everly has cared enough to establish personal relationships with her students and carefully explored the individual learning styles represented in her classrooms. When asked if she were randomly given the name of any student in her classes, would she be able to pinpoint his or her learning style or preference, she responded: “Yeah, yeah, I think so because…yup, I’d be in [the ballpark].”

When this particular lesson was completed, Mrs. Everly asked the class if they were ready for a game and their response was overwhelmingly, yes! She divided the class into groups and proceeded to engage them in a mathematics contest in which she used generous incentives in terms of candy for individual students and promises of a class reward to be determined later by class consensus.

Mrs. Everly uses tactics such as classroom rewards, in part, to help motivate and keep students engaged. But her motivational strategies go far beyond a system of rewards or “bribes” in her efforts to secure the very best performance from her students. In reality, her strategies to motivate and inspire her students are complex and include a careful blend of individualized care, high expectations for academic and behavioral performance, a curriculum that is meaningful, and copious doses of praise and encouragement.

Mrs. Everly spends considerable time and effort cultivating caring relationships with her students and she insists that high expectations are an indispensable component of caring and supportive relationships—relationships designed to produce the best results for her students. Reference is once again made to her ability to weave components of care with her high expectations. Caring relationships allow her to set the bar high with respect to expectations and then provide the support necessary to meet those expectations. She asserts that both high expectations and support must be present for students to succeed when she states:
I think high expectations is a student giving you 100% effort all the time. . . . I want them to be their best all the time. Now helping them get there is another story, because you can hold the bar up as high as you want to, but if you don’t help them get there or understand how to get there, then you’re putting them in a place they can’t win.

Having said that, Mrs. Everly provides strong support in terms of instruction based on individual learning styles, making herself available for assistance outside the classroom, and “constantly encouraging them to do whatever it takes to get to the next step.” As she relates: “I’m constantly trying to reinforce things that they’re doing well and give them constructive things that they can do better to get to the next level.” For most, that means simply putting forth a little more effort— and effort is one thing that Mrs. Everly insists upon from each and every student. She captures this sentiment along with her unrelenting expectations and generous support with the following statement:

I’m always trying to get them to reach farther and to prove that they can do more. So a kid just getting by isn’t enough for me. I really try to get them to grow, you know, farther than they ever thought they could. So, I think my expectations are high but I think I handle it in a reasonable way. I don’t set it here, up high, and then expect them to get there by themselves. I know they can get there with my support.

And so, Mrs. Everly enters into the presence of her students intent on building caring relationships that will provide the necessary support to meet her high expectations. She embraces each child with undeniable and reassuring support that lets a student know “I am not going to let you give up; you can do this.” For Mrs. Everly, her students “cannot fail.” “It is not an option.”
Anna Deusan’s Perspective

Anna recalls the day she tripped over a foot and fell into the wall. After Mrs. Everly made sure she was all right, Anna went straight to the hallway because she was laughing so hard at herself. Mrs. Everly followed and “just started laughing so hard she was starting to cry.” Anna remembers it was the type of laugh that only friends could share. It was the type of laughter that provided a brief glimpse of the other person’s humanness. A similar incident occurred when Anna accidentally squirted Mrs. Everly with water from her water bottle. “She [Mrs. Everly] took it from me [giving me a look as if she was very angry] and squirted me.” The ensuing laughter was honest and authentic. It was also respectful of the other person.

A relationship such as this, as Anna describes, is built over time and based on several factors such as trust and genuine respect for the other, honest caring, and—perhaps most important—consistent behavior in words and action with respect to expectations from both regarding the requirements of each for a mutually beneficial relationship. As will be seen as Anna’s story continues, it is this strong connection to her teacher that ultimately promotes higher academic achievement and goal attainment.

Anna’s relationship with Mrs. Everly was made possible, in part, because, “She always makes me feel comfortable when I walk in the room. . . . She’s basically nice; like another counselor.” Anna is always greeted by name by Mrs. Everly and she is generous with compliments such as, “You look very nice today.” Anna elaborates on this important aspect of her relationship with Mrs. Everly by saying:

I walk in there [and] I start the day with ‘oh my gosh I’ve had a bad day’, or ‘I’ve had a great day’. [and] she goes, ‘Wow! What did you do, or why—what happened?’ And then
I explain to her what happened [and] she’ll comfort me or tell me congratulations or something like that and then continue on with the class.

Beyond that, Mrs. Everly has a way of conveying openness with her students that endears them to her and further enhances the connections-building process. Anna relates:

She made it really clear that if I have anything to talk to her about, I can always come to her. If there is anything I needed I can always come to her and she would help me as much as she can. And she said, she told me yesterday, I do care about you; I care about all my students. I’m always here for you—never forget that. That meant just so much….I trust her so much more now.

For Anna, trust is of paramount importance. “To me, trust is everything. If I don’t trust my teacher, I don’t want to learn—and you know she [Mrs. Everly] is very trustworthy.”

In the course of their relationship building, both student and teacher capitalize on opportunities to share personal stories, to share what’s going on in his/her lives at a given moment, or simply to talk about what “happened over the weekend.” For Anna, the practice has considerable significance to her because, as she relates, “It makes me feel like she’s trying to connect with us; like she wants us to know that she’s…for real—that she’s not just there to collect a paycheck at the end of the week.”

It is through the sharing of personal stories that Anna is able to provide a glimpse into things going on in her life that impact her learning—things that she would not share if it weren’t for the quality of the relationship she feels with Mrs. Everly. “Like if something were going on at home, she’d try to do everything in her power to help make it better.” On this subject, Anna became visibly upset and continued by saying:
It’s kind of why I was so emotional yesterday because she looked at me straight in the eyes and she tried to like connect with me on what was going on and I told her exactly what happened at home, and she told me stuff that happened to her when she was a teenager growing up….I was telling her about what happened and she almost started crying…[and] that made me cry even more…but just to know that she cared about me and that she was there—that made me feel really close to her.

From Mrs. Everly’s attempts to make connections with her students comes the perception on Anna’s part that Mrs. Everly really does care. When asked how Anna would feel if Mrs. Everly attended one of Anna’s choir concerts, she replied; “Her being there would be just like a kind of relief. Like OK, maybe my teachers do care about me. Maybe they want to see me succeed in life.”

For Anna, “Caring means that they [teachers] know how you feel. Caring to me is knowing that your student is happy.” And according to Anna, “she is by far the only teacher that cares about me, so you know, I truly care about her.”

And so the stage has been set for Anna to come into the classroom prepared to meet Mrs. Everly’s high behavioral and academic expectations. She receives constant encouragement from Mrs. Everly. When her grade dropped, Mrs. Everly wrote a note saying, “I know you can do better. I know you can get a ‘C’ [because] I know you’re a smart girl. I know you can do better.”

Anna feels comfortable with her ability to meet Mrs. Everly’s high expectations because she trusts her and knows she will assist her based on her learning style and knowledge of things outside the classroom that impede her progress. Both of those strategies are made possible because of Mrs. Everly’s persistent engagement with Anna. “She knows my learning abilities.”
And because of Mrs. Everly’s intimate knowledge of circumstances outside the classroom that affect Anna’s academic performance, Mrs. Everly is likely to “bend the rules a little” to accommodate current conditions as evidenced by the following passage:

She honestly tries for me to pass. I failed a test miserably because I didn’t study. Like, I had so much stress that week…I was just so stressed so like I didn’t study. Well, she knew how stressed I was; she knows that I’m a good student, so she said; ‘I lost the test. Can you retake it for me?’ So I retook the test and, I don’t know if I should say that but, she did it and to me that meant a lot.

With respect to ‘learning abilities’, Anna exclaims:

I can’t just get the material and just look at it and expect to learn it. I like need you to show examples; I need to try a couple on my own, and then go over it and try a couple more examples—and that’s exactly what she does in class.

Somehow sensing this need in Anna, Mrs. Everly is able to engage her in ways that improve the likelihood that Anna will comprehend the lesson. As Anna says, “She’s the type of teacher who will sit down and work with you. If you don’t get it, she doesn’t move on.” She elaborates on this important point by stating:

Like instead of just drawing it on the chalkboard and writing information down, we had to figure out how to cover…like say you had a rectangle and you wanted to wrap it and you didn’t want any extra pieces. She got down a box and actually tried to do it [the problem] what measures we need to look at, what angles we need to look at.

Mrs. Everly attempts to connect her lessons to everyday problems in an attempt to make the material relevant to her students. Anna relates how Mrs. Everly used a mathematical theory to understand her gas bill. When asked if this helped Anna understand the concept, she replied; “It
did. Like putting it into real life and how your real life situations are—it just kind of gives you a more feel about what’s really going on.”

From this progression of relationship building flows a considerable amount of motivation provided by Mrs. Everly, which pushes Anna to excel beyond that which she thought she was capable.

She encourages me to try hard. Like if I do poorly on a test, she keeps telling me that she knows I can do better. She knows I can get a better grade. She basically makes me feel that I’m one of the smartest people ever. She basically wants me to succeed in everything I do, and if I don’t, she wants to work with me.

Anna is motivated to work hard and extend beyond self-imposed limits “because she’s [Mrs. Everly] a good teacher and I know that she cares, so that makes me want to work harder to do better.”

It is Anna’s perceptions of Mrs. Everly’s care and support that has led her to conclude: “I guess I’m like so addicted to Mrs. Everly’s ways that I don’t even know how to adapt to another teacher.”

*Krystal Leight’s Perspective*

Krystal approaches most things in her life with curiosity and enthusiasm. Her zest for life is compelling and her smile is contagious. She readily admits that she is a self-starter and highly motivated to succeed. Her drive is a by-product of her acceptance of the responsibility she assumes for her actions, which ultimately determines the level of success she enjoys. She acknowledges her primary responsibilities to those with whom she interacts are to “listen and do my best.” Interestingly enough, this is a theme consistent with her own personal work ethic that she succinctly sums up with, “To do my best is [my] biggest responsibility—‘cause it makes me
feel good knowing that I do my best even though I didn’t get the best grade.” She is sensitive to the needs of her parents and her commitment to them, saying, “I want to make them proud”.

Krystal also recognizes that she cannot achieve her goals without the help of others—most notably her teachers—and she is not shy when speaking of their responsibility to her. She insists:

I really expect to learn [from her] what I need for the OGT [Ohio Graduation Test, required for diploma]. That’s the biggest thing I expect—to know exactly what I need for the OGT and what to learn out of class. Like what I’m going to need after high school like for certain jobs, and like the major math that I’m going to need for later in life.

Beyond that, Krystal expects Mrs. Everly to “be the really fun person she is.” It is Mrs. Everly’s overall approach to teaching and learning that has captured Krystal’s attention. Krystal’s perceptions of Mrs. Everly’s teaching methods—along with the support she provides to help Krystal meet academic goals—consists of several components including humor, relevant material, breaking down complex ideas into smaller units, individual attention, willingness to offer additional assistance beyond classroom hours, and the caring and encouraging relationship Mrs. Everly promotes with her students.

Caring and encouraging relationships, as perceived by Krystal and promoted by Mrs. Everly, have a positive effect on Krystal, in part, because Krystal is aware that Mrs. Everly is not selective with whom she promotes those relationships. Krystal recognizes that “some of the kids…are having trouble, [they] don’t get it.” But she notices and is aware that Mrs. Everly will “then schedule a time after school or during a lunch period” to assist those struggling academically. For Krystal, “it’s definitely nice to know [she’s] there. Then I know if I’m having difficulty on material and I’m not getting it in class, I can stay after school, or in my
lunch too.” But it seems to go well beyond a mere willingness to go to Mrs. Everly simply for extended academic help. In the process of our interviews and subsequent casual observations, it becomes apparent that Krystal has a significant attachment to Mrs. Everly—a connection that allows Krystal to say, “if something was really bothering me and I needed to talk to someone, I would talk to her.” This comment suggests that the relationship that has been established provides more than academic support for Krystal; it implies a mutually beneficial relationship in which Krystal’s needs are met, and one in which Krystal meets the expectations of her teacher.

Mrs. Everly emerges as an authentic individual who “really cares” in Krystal’s eyes. This, in turn, encourages Krystal to more fully invest in the relationship—and along the way, she finds a teacher who uses creative methods to present the material, making it meaningful and connected to everyday life; a teacher who encourages and supports her efforts, and motivates and inspires Krystal to endure difficulties and continue pursuing her academic goals. All of this would not have been possible if Krystal perceived Mrs. Everly as a detached and uncaring teacher. In fact, Krystal has come to depend on her relationship with Mrs. Everly to help her with a wide range of problems if they were to materialize. She elaborates by saying:

Like I can depend on her. If I had a problem I think I could definitely talk to her about it—grade-wise or even if I was really mad about something out of school. I think I could talk to her about it; I think I could really depend on her. . . . I definitely trust her.

She trusts Mrs. Everly to make certain she is prepared to meet the requirements of the Ohio Graduation Test and she trusts that Mrs. Everly’s ethic of care will support her sufficiently when obstacles arise that threaten her ability to meet those goals—academically or personally. “Because some teachers don’t really do that.”
Flowing from this relationship is a desire on Krystal’s part to work harder and not disappoint her teacher. “I think whatever disappoints me in work, probably disappoints her.”

As previously mentioned, Krystal is a self-starter and yet she responds well to external motivational strategies. When asked if the manner in which she is treated by Mrs. Everly makes her want to work harder and endure obstacles, she replied, “Yeah, yeah. In a way it does….so it’s kind of like you want [italics added] to do it….you really want to pay attention.” When she is pressed on the importance of the relationship she enjoys with a teacher and why it makes a difference, she explains:

I think it makes you like actually do the work in there. A lot of people, if [they] don’t like the teacher, then you’re going to be like why should I do this, you know? Why should I do this for her?

Krystal is consistent in her belief that Mrs. Everly is not only motivational, but inspirational—and, responsible in part for Krystal’s strong drive to be successful. Krystal elaborates:

You know, [she] puts it on the line to never give up. Just kinda like keep going. I think that’s what really [italics added] motivates me to never give up. Like, if we don’t get it and we’re like ‘my gosh, we’re never going to get this’, she’s right there.

And she’s right there with a sense of humor that makes her “human” and approachable—“you look forward to going to her class.” She’s a teacher that skillfully presents her content in a way that allows her students to better understand the lesson and achieve.

According to Krystal, “Mrs. Everly believes everyone can do well…and she knows what everyone is capable of.” When asked to elaborate on why she believes everyone can do well, Krystal simply said, “she knows how to break it down really well….If you’re taking awhile to get the material, she personally sits down with you and breaks it down for you—just so you get
it.” When asked to elaborate on what separates Mrs. Everly from other teachers, Krystal replied, “Her personality. We have so much fun in the class and she makes it so easy. She has different ways of doing this.”

Mrs. Myers’ Classroom

Like Mrs. Everly, it was her high school experience that ultimately led Mrs. Myers to a career in teaching. Mrs. Myers explains:

I like helping people. When I was in high school we had several math teachers that didn’t explain things real well and I actually spent lunchtime helping the other kids figure out what to do. Algebra and Trigonometry all came very easy for me. I mean it just made sense.

For 22 years, Mrs. Myers has encountered all types of students and taught all levels of science. Through it all, she maintains that the most satisfying aspect of her job is watching kids grow and knowing that she played a part in their success. She insists that if that sentiment would ever change, it would be time to retire. She is re-energized each year by her students because of their outlook on life and their sense of humor. “It’s refreshing every year. Oh yea, I remember feeling that way or thinking that way.”

But much has changed in education over the past two decades and, like other educators, Mrs. Myers struggles with the challenges brought on by rigid academic content standards and teacher accountability for successfully teaching those standards. To that end, Mrs. Myers is totally immersed in her responsibility to maintain high standards for her students, while preparing the younger students for the Ohio Graduation Test and her older students for entry into college. Given the importance of passing the Ohio Graduation Test, Mrs. Myers is content driven—“everything’s OGT-driven”—and focused on “getting through” the material required for
the test. It is a requirement that is the source of much frustration on her part, especially when it comes to meeting the individual needs of her students. When asked if getting through the curriculum was more important than individual student needs, Mrs. Myers laments, “Well it would be nice to fill the individual needs of the students, but because of the OGT…we have to get through all the material—period.” And to compound the problem, Mrs. Myers feels constant pressure brought on by a belief that there is insufficient time to adequately prepare her students for such a high-stakes test. Even best practice in the classroom is compromised. For example, the practice of revisiting concepts to solidify understanding is nearly impossible “when you have 20 chapters to get through in 18 weeks. Sometimes you can’t do that. You just have to move on.” She clearly sees time as her biggest challenge when she exclaims, “Not enough time to get everything done. Not enough time to spend as much time as you like on a topic.”

This is also true for her upper level classes such as physics, advanced placement physics and honors physics. “It’s a real struggle to get through the material, the content you have to cover….I looked at the AP test for physics a couple of years ago and there’s no way I could get through all the material.” Nowhere is this frustration more apparent than in her response to a question related to the importance of connecting with students—one at a time. Almost as if she were longing for another place and time, she wistfully replied, “we gotta get through, we gotta get through [the content]”.

She believes she best supports her students by maintaining high academic and behavior standards, covering the required material, attempting to make the content meaningful, making herself available before and after school for additional help, and reinforcing with her students the understanding that the primary responsibility for learning rests on his or her shoulders.
Maintaining standards is, for the most part, cut and dried. Seldom will Mrs. Myers make exceptions to her classroom policies regarding academic work—even for those who are obviously working their hardest. When asked if she ever cuts hard-working students “slack” from time to time, she replied, “usually not, because it’s [meeting expectations] the standard policy.” She elaborates:

Basically, the way I think a teacher should do it is treat all the children the same, all the students the same. You don’t give special consideration to one and not to the others. If you have one that says, ‘well I left my homework at home last night, can’t you let me bring it in tomorrow?’ It’s like, no. It’s the same for everybody, you know. I’m not going to make exceptions.

Mrs. Myers holds the same line for tests and other classroom assignments. And her students know that inappropriate behavior is not tolerated. She does not solicit student input at the beginning of the semester with respect to classroom rules. They are what they are. Unfortunately, some will buy-in while others will not. To which Mrs. Myers replies, “occasionally…you actually have to remove the child from the classroom to get anything done because there are some who are totally disruptive, which is too bad.”

Still, Mrs. Myers makes herself available to all of her students before and after school if they need additional help or are having difficulty meeting her expectations. She believes it is her responsibility to seek out those students and personally extend an invitation to attend an extra help session. “I tell them I’m here at seven o’clock every morning and that I’m happy to help them if they want to get here. I can usually stay after [too] if they let me know.”

Her lessons are well organized and allow for a variety of activities. Her lesson objectives are written on the board at the front of the classroom along with other useful information—
including reminders of important due dates. “We usually go over the previous homework, do an activity and then get started on other homework.” She is careful to give her students time to look at homework and ask questions before they leave for the day. In doing so, she has an opportunity to check for understanding and to clarify any misconceptions—especially on newly acquired information.

Admitting that it is difficult for her to always connect learning with “real life situations”, Mrs. Myers, nevertheless, captures teachable moments whenever they are presented. One such occasion presented itself when explaining the details of an automobile accident. She was able to “bring to life” laws of physics by “measuring the skid marks and then estimating how fast [the driver] was going and how long it took [the driver] to stop.” She elaborates on the importance of utilizing this strategy to support her students by saying:

We do fun labs and we do fun things like that. You know the kids who might be grasping and having a hard time understanding the math, at least some of the labs they can get involved in and they can kind of see it working in the real world and then sometimes it clicks…. So they might not understand at first, but after they get going on it [students] at least get the concepts.

She constructs her lab assignments so she is directly involved in the procedures and expected outcomes. “So, I just don’t hand it to them and say go to it.”

Mrs. Myers, “for the most part”, considers herself friendly, reliable, dependable, trustworthy, strict but fair, and respectful. She sees herself as approachable and when asked if her students consider her a caring person, she replies, “I would hope [italics added] so.” She is knowledgeable in her content area and attempts to present the material consistent with best teaching practices given the time constraints. She makes herself available before and after
school and is concerned about her students’ academic performance. She laments the fact that her students are not accepting their responsibility for learning and failing to recognize that hard work is a necessary component of learning and subsequent academic success. “I can’t make them pay attention.” Mrs. Myers has strong views on this component and is not afraid to share them. “The attitude of the kids [is] that everything is the teacher’s fault. They [the students] put no work into anything at all….They seem more and more less interested in even thinking about doing any work.” And even for her upper level students Mrs. Myers is concerned about their work ethic and readiness to learn. She explains:

Some of them give up because it’s their senior year and they shouldn’t have to work really hard. Some of the students you get don’t have math skills, reading skills, writing skills. They come to high school not prepared for high school.

In her opinion, too many students are disengaged with the educational process—both high-performing students and low-performing students. For that, she has little patience and readily admits so. It is palpable and always on the surface. It also feeds into her sense of frustration—a frustration so disabling that she adamantly professes:

Some children should be left behind. When you have classes where [some] show up for half of the time and somehow you’re supposed to get them through it. It’s impossible. I’ve told several new teachers…you’re not going to be able to get every kid to pass. Kids refuse to do things. I called the parents; they’re no help. Kids [are] suspended every other week. What am I supposed to do? You have to flunk them and you can’t let that bother you….It’s such a waste to have kids in class who drag the other kids down because of their inattention, their inability, or their I just don’t care attitude. They shouldn’t be in there.
Reluctantly, she accepts the fact that there will always be students who, for one reason or another, do not or cannot meet her academic expectations. And she feels powerless over those circumstances. “You just have to be understanding. Sometimes the child just isn’t going to do well in your class and it’s just going to have to be. That’s…the real world.”

Mrs. Myers is not an uncaring or unsympathetic teacher. She attends extracurricular activities her students are involved in and she serves as advisor to the National Honor Society. But she is realistic regarding her ability to mitigate outside circumstances in a student’s life that negatively impact learning, and she insists on maintaining academic high ground, as evidenced in the following passage:

You have all kinds of people having problems in their outside life. Some of them are able to overcome it and do the work. I cannot pass a child unless they meet all the criteria for passing. So you know, even though there are problems at home, if you aren’t able to do the work, I’m sorry.

The problems can be so complex and heart wrenching that Mrs. Myers confesses to not knowing where to begin even if she could. She accepts the sad reality that there are kids, “Who have gone through so much in their home life that you don’t even want to know about it.”

Paul Ankenbrandt’s Perspective

Paul is mature beyond his years. He has a clear vision of what he would like to do professionally and understands the rigorous academic road that lies ahead. In relationship to the larger world that surrounds him, Paul has identified and accepted his responsibilities as a contributing member of the larger global community, even as he pursues his own personal agenda. Paul expresses a responsibility to his teacher to “be respectful to her and to do what she asks…to be cooperative and listen.” Furthermore, it’s a responsibility that doesn’t diminish
simply based on the personality of the teacher or the mood he or she is in on a given day. He recognizes his classmates as deserving from him the same type of respect and assistance he would want for himself. To that end, Paul is eager to help fellow students and enjoys his relationship with them. Paul owes much of his achievement-oriented behavior to his parents and works hard in recognition of his responsibility to them. In short, Paul is extremely focused on his ambitious plans for himself while maintaining a respectful relationship with parents, employers, teachers, and peers.

On the surface it would appear as though Paul works hard for the purpose of pleasing other people. Nothing could be further from the truth. While his relationship with his teacher is important, it is not what drives him to excellence. When asked if his interactions with his teacher are important or if it is important for her to know much about him, he replied, “No, not really…she really doesn’t affect [me] that much cause it’s just me that likes to succeed.”

To provide the support needed for him to succeed he requires several things from his teacher. Most notably he expects his teacher to do the following:

To explain the information as easily as possible [and] to make me learn as much as possible. I think that’s [her] responsibility….It is to give me the knowledge that I’m actually paying for. If I come to class, I want to know as much as I can so I expect her to give me the whole curriculum…because I’m basically kind of paying for it, so I want to get a much as I can. I want her to teach me as much as possible and teach it easy [so] I can get it easy.

Paul is quick to add that, for the most part, his class with Mrs. Myers is productive and enjoyable. He is a hands-on learner, and while he’s “not sure” if Mrs. Myers knows “anything” about the way he learns, he is comfortable with the “balance of activities” offered in her class.
Still, when asked for his ideal teaching strategy, he replied, “What I would want is more hands-on activity or different types of activities to make it easier to learn.”

Paul acknowledges that Mrs. Myers is available before and after school for additional help, but he has no need to take advantage of the offer. And while he is comfortable asking her content-related questions, on any other issue that may be bothering him—including issues that might affect his learning—he’s “just not really that comfortable” with her. “I see her more as a teacher than as a friend.” Paul considers Mrs. Myers to be reliable and dependable but is unwilling to apply those traits universally. As Paul relates, “academics for sure, but for any kind of thing outside of school, I’m not quite sure.”

Paul admits that his interpersonal relationship with Mrs. Myers is not necessary for his success and yet he concedes a better relationship with her might help. He wants to work hard but sometimes he feels disconnected. “Sometimes I can feel that she’s not like…bleeding for us—like really, really concerned. She’s concerned, but I don’t think it’s much.” Asked if he ever gets the feeling that if she doesn’t care, why should he? He replied, “Sometimes.”

Still, Mrs. Myers offers encouragement to Paul—offering an occasional compliment, which Paul takes with little notice.

I mean, compliments always make you feel nice, [but] it doesn’t really matter to me. I’m glad [for] myself to get a good grade. I’m happy with myself, so…anyone else doesn’t have to show me that I did a good job. Doesn’t have to compliment me on it.

And even though Paul doesn’t receive compliments well, he knows Mrs. Myers offers them in support of the work he does. As Paul perceives it, doing the work is part of her plan for student success. “She tries to make you do the work cause she wants you to succeed.”
A recurring theme that emerges when interviewing or observing Paul is his acceptance of his responsibility to learn regardless of circumstances in the classroom or in his personal life. According to Paul, “I’ll still be motivated to try and do the best I can to get it done. I think she might help a little, but most of the time it’s just me…motivating myself.”

Paul is content knowing that Mrs. Myers has established high and clear expectations with respect to both behavior and academic performance. He is so intrinsically motivated, that even though he would like to have a more personal relationship with Mrs. Myers, he is satisfied knowing she is patient, knowledgeable, and presents the material in a way that he comprehends with ease. He understands and accepts Mrs. Myers’ uncompromising position with respect to those standards regardless of what might be going on in his life.

Paul seems to turn a deaf ear at attempts to get him to more carefully reflect on his relationship with Mrs. Myers. Consider the following exchange.

*Interviewer.* Does she [Mrs. Myers] ever compliment you”

*Paul:* I guess she doesn’t really.

*Interviewer:* Does she ever thank you for just being you?

*Paul:* No.

*Interviewer:* Has she ever said, ‘Paul, thanks you made my day’?

*Paul:* No.

*Interviewer:* ‘Thanks for trying so hard or working so hard’?

*Paul:* No. She hasn’t.

While the relationship with Mrs. Myers is somewhat impersonal and distant—lacking a strong personal connection or commitment, Paul insists, “I’m there to learn for me. That’s the kind of education I get.”
Joe Brown’s Perspective

Joe’s care-free approach to life’s everyday activities and his exterior “I really don’t care” attitude masks a well-developed self-appraisal of his abilities and his motivation to succeed. He acknowledges his future plans include a college education and, even though he struggles academically in high school, he is adamant that “you can be successful in anything if you really want to be.”

When asked if he really wanted to be successful in Mrs. Myers physics class, Joe hesitated before responding. He let his eyes wander as he searched for an answer. Several moments passed before he leaned forward in his chair, hands extended from his sides, and rather sadly said:

Well, yeah. I’d like to pass every class. Sure, get flying colors in every class, but there’s other variables that come into [play]. Stuff at home, stuff during the day, other people in class, work…you know. The other day I was tired, I hardly did anything ‘cause, you know, it was Friday morning. I didn’t really sleep that well [and] it’s first period physics, which isn’t so much fun.

To compound the problem, Joe doesn’t perceive he receives any encouragement from his teacher that would indicate she believes he can be successful even if he did try, as indicated by the following exchange:

Interviewer: What does she do on a regular basis that makes you feel like you can be successful?

Joe (as if he were surprised): I can be successful?

Interviewer: In her class, yes.

Joe (seemingly in disbelief): For me personally?
Interviewer: Yes.

Joe (without hesitation): Personally, no. Can’t say.

And while Joe doesn’t have any particular reason to think his teacher believes he can be successful, he admits she encourages the class—in general terms—to come in after school to get help if needed. But, she has never approached Joe on an individual basis to encourage him to come in after school for help.

Joe is taking physics as an elective in high school so he will not have to take it in college. For this reason, he is “really motivated” to get extra help—especially since it’s early in the semester. The thought of being able to take physics “in high school instead of college” is his primary reason for being in the class. And so he concluded, “that’s what made me think I should go after school now and actually get some help.”

Joe wants to go to college and get a good job down the road. He accepts his personal responsibilities to make that happen and conveys a sense of self-efficacy that is compelling. Joe expressed, with vigor, his personal convictions by stating, “If it’s going to be for me, I have to do it myself.” He underscores this resolve by drawing on the experience of others, “especially hearing from some of my other friends who are older and the mistakes they have made. I’m not [italics added] going to end up like them.” And so Joe forges ahead, armed with his personal resolve to overcome obstacles and succeed, all the while recognizing that his teacher may not share his confidence or resolve.

For the next several weeks Joe stayed after school to get help, but it was not making a noticeable difference in his class performance as measured by formal tests. “I stayed after twice; I stayed after Wednesday and we had a test yesterday and I still got a crappy grade.” During the course of the interview, I sensed Joe was discouraged to the point where he was losing some of
his motivation to overcome the setbacks. By mid-semester, Joe laments, “I try to learn and try to learn and still crappy. I’m like ‘forget it’—you know.” When asked if the teacher is encouraging him to keep plugging away, Joe responded, “she said I could still pass—sort of. That’s somewhat encouraging even though it’s horrible.” But as the conversation wore on, it was apparent Joe was losing his sense of self-efficacy and in desperate need of support to help him sustain his precarious hold on a fragile goal. I encouraged him to continue seeking extra help from his teacher and assured him that his persistence would eventually pay off. It was apparent by his body language that he agreed to do so only to temporarily appease me. I sensed he had no intention of doing so. Joe was teetering on a precipice that, if he fell, would lead to a continuous downward spiral that would result in inevitable failure. Regrettably, the push from the precipice came all too soon and without notice.

It was well into the second quarter before I saw Joe again. Anxious to hear of his progress, I asked him if he continued going after school for additional help. The following exchange captures Joe’s rather sad and disappointing response:

_Interviewer:_ Did you go back to her…for help?


_Interviewer:_ Did it help?

_Joe_ (with a sense of finality): A little, but I’ve given up on that class. I found out that it doesn’t count for college credit now, so there goes my motivation. I haven’t done anything this whole week.

Joe readily admits he can still pass the class but the payoff is not worth the effort and the consequences for failing are insignificant as far as he is concerned. He simply accepts that as his reality. With his internal drive to pass the class disengaged, we continued to discuss reasons why
he should persevere and attempt to pass. Surprisingly, he abandons his internal motivational factors such as going to college and getting a good job, and identifies two external motivational factors to consider before giving up. “The only thing I could maybe do is to pass for my parents. I guess the teacher. That’s about it.”

As we talked about his parents, Joe said, with some regret, that he has disappointed his parents “plenty of times.” Joe knows his parents are aware he’s now going to have to take physics in college anyway. Somehow trying to rationalize his decision to give up, he confidently proclaims, “They’ll get over it.”

His perceptions of teacher support do not extend beyond his recognition that she was available after school for extra help, and that is insufficient motivation for him to carry on. When asked would it make a difference if it were another teacher, Joe replied, “Well, maybe, yeah. I mean she doesn’t teach anything…like she doesn’t explain….It’s more like she’s teaching to people like herself.” And Joe believes that’s because Mrs. Myers doesn’t really know very much about him, does not try to connect with him or establish a relationship, doesn’t make the content relevant, or care enough to even know his long term goals let alone devise strategies to meet his individual needs. For instance, Joe likes to read about topics and determine their validity in terms of what he thinks and how they relate to his world. If they do, or are interesting enough, he’ll work with it just to see what happens. In this regard, Joe is intellectually curious. When I asked Joe if Mrs. Myers knew this about him, he emphatically responded, “No.” Interestingly enough, Joe was equally emphatic when he said that if she did, “it would make a difference.” Joe is consistent with his position regardless of the class he is taking. For example, Joe “hates art class.” But he continues to endure because of the teacher. “I
don’t mind going to class.” As far as Joe is concerned, whether or not he likes the subject is immaterial. Connecting to the teacher is what makes a difference.

Joe is able to distinguish the difference between teaching and merely presenting information. When asked if the content is presented in a way that connected it to everyday, real life situations, Joe shared his perceptions as follows:

No. That’s one of the things my friend brought up actually, that she [Mrs. Myers] doesn’t actually teach anything. Well, she does but she doesn’t really like teach [italics added] you. She’ll [show] you how to do it but she doesn’t teach it. She always hands out the papers real quick—I didn’t really notice that before…I kind of realized that’s kind of true. She doesn’t really teach it.

Joe is bored with class, in part, because “it’s the same stuff.” The class is not stimulating and he does not consider the teacher to be motivational or inspirational.

Sometimes she’ll just hand out papers, you know. She’ll be like ‘we’re doing force and the equation for force is this…the equations I wrote on the board yesterday are right up there; you use those.’ ‘Here’s the paper’ and she’ll go back and do whatever.

Joe is now in the final weeks of the class, resigned to the fact he will fail his high school physics class and be required to take the class over next year at the local community college. He is pragmatic about his situation and even tries to find something positive given his current circumstances. He is now able to work on other material during physics class—a practice that apparently meets with no objection from Mrs. Myers—and is looking forward to a fresh start next year. “I just want to start over and do it when it counts for something this time; you know, maybe a little bit better.”
As I said good-bye to Joe that final day, I couldn’t help but wonder if he really meant it. His eyes spoke of lost opportunity and leveled aspirations that betrayed his tough, superficial veneer. I was certain he would sometime in the near future pause and think about “some of [his] other friends who are older and the mistakes they have made.” What I fear most is that his determination “not to end up like them” will be insufficient to provide the necessary motivation needed to overcome the next hurdle—especially if other teachers miss the opportunity to help push him over the top.

Mr. Kennedy’s Classroom

Mr. Kennedy is an affable and self-effacing teacher who easily interacts with those around him. His pleasant and unassuming demeanor allows him to relate with students and colleagues alike. He possesses a quick wit and uses it effectively to charm his critics, engage students on the fringe, and disarm potentially disruptive behavior. He also uses it to keep his students on their toes. They know if they don’t pay attention, they’ll miss much of his almost non-stop humor. He believes his responsibility to his students extends well beyond the classroom walls and encompasses much more than the content standards he is committed to teach.

Mr. Kennedy believes he has a duty to teach social skills and provide support and encouragement through his curriculum to his students as part of the socialization process. It is a critical component of his “community” approach to education. Each member of the community (classroom) is nurtured and valued. Each is expected to make a contribution consistent with his or her unique skills or talent. To be sure, each has a responsibility to make a contribution to the larger community and it is Mr. Kennedy’s task to teach responsibility.
I mean we are teaching them responsibility. We’re presenting them with a possible
pattern, if you will, for how they might achieve whatever particular success that they
wish to pursue in the future. I mean, that’s, that’s what we do [italics added] I think.

Mr. Kennedy’s approach to fulfilling his responsibilities is based on establishing
mutually beneficial and caring relationships with his students. He begins each semester by
having his students complete an index card in which they detail specific information about
themselves—including their likes and dislikes, favorite foods and restaurants, the music they
prefer, favorite artists, what they wish to do after high school, and career goals, among others.
Of particular interest is Mr. Kennedy’s request of his students to include anything special or
unique they would like him to know about them. He uses this information to gain better insight
on how to nurture his relationship with them and to assist in developing strategies to support and
motivate his students down the road. Mr. Kennedy best describes the lynchpin of this approach
by saying:

I want to get those kids comfortable enough to express themselves….I’ll ask questions
each day. You know…how are you doing? What’s going on with you? It’s easy to see a
kid that’s down….Obviously, for me…once a kid is spotted, you have a choice; you can
engage the kid and see what’s up—or not. And it’s hard to do that sometimes because
that is an emotional drain, but I find it has to be present…it has to be there. That has to
be there because you can take the kids farther and [to] different places because you gain
their trust.

Personal and direct observations made in Mr. Kennedy’s classroom confirm his
commitment to engage students consistently and constantly in a fair and compassionate way. As
I entered the classroom, he was still working with a student following his conference period.
After the observation, a student was waiting for Mr. Kennedy to schedule an after school tutoring session. During the observation, I was struck by the comfort and ease in which his students interacted with him and each other. They were polite yet energetic and, often times, spontaneous in their comments. Still, there is order and direction with a palpable sense of synergy in the room.

Surely, within this group, there are students who would not normally associate with the others. They have many popular labels—geeks, skaters, slackers, and preps—and yet, in Mr. Kennedy’s class, they freely exchange ideas, challenge each other and even share a little good-natured humor among themselves—at no one’s expense. All of this is done respectfully and as if they enjoy each other’s company. When I asked Mr. Kennedy how he achieves this level of comfort he replied:

By communicating my expectations [and] number one [is] respect. I make them read it. I put it on my door. But it goes beyond that; it has to go beyond that. It has to go to me leading by example.

And to do that, Mr. Kennedy acknowledges that he has to bring his authentic self to class everyday. “You’ve got to bring a sense of reality, you’ve got to bring a sense of honesty.” It is through his authenticity that Mr. Kennedy is able to convey the “human” side of his character and earn the respect that he believes is necessary if he expects his students to overcome obstacles and meet his high level of expectation.

Maintaining high expectations and holding students accountable are two key components of Mr. Kennedy’s ethic of care. He is passionate about his profession and his content area. “I love the subject matter and I want that to be infectious….if you don’t take your own curriculum seriously, how can they?” He is generous with his compliments even when students fail to meet
his rigid requirements. Mr. Kennedy explains why this is important by asserting, “that’s the only way to pull them up, or have them pull themselves up… and move forward. [You’ve] got to move forward.”

As “they” are pulling themselves up, Mr. Kennedy is reminding them of the next assignment due or to turn in an assignment that is late. Even when his students complain they are tired or under stress, Mr. Kennedy is there to offer encouragement. A favorite retort to complaining students is, “OK, but you can do one thing for me, dude. Pay attention. I won’t ask you to do anything more than that.” And it seems to work. Mr. Kennedy doesn’t write behavior referrals very often. He only wrote four such referrals last academic year because he believes when you do, you’ve sent a message to the student that you can’t resolve your own problems. “When it comes to talking back to me, I do not engage in arguments…I say we’re done, that’s it.” Mr. Kennedy prefers to be more creative and look for alternate behavior modification strategies. He proudly proclaims, “I think it is a student [and] teacher coming together in a way.”

Mr. Kennedy knows he can’t always offer advice to his students, especially when it is out of his area of expertise. But he is always there to offer encouragement to his students and has a strong referral base to help his students get the type of professional advice they need. In short, Mr. Kennedy knows his limitations, but that does not prevent him from referring one of his students to someone who can help. “It goes back to [your] willingness to put your money where your mouth is.” As I sat for a moment reflecting on his comment, I quickly remembered a statement he had made several weeks earlier—“I take their problems seriously.” The following exchange provides a deep and more complex understanding of the teacher Mr. Kennedy purports to be.

Interviewer: Would your kids say you are motivational?
Mr. Kennedy: Yeah, some kid called me a preacher the other day.

Interviewer: When I say motivational, would they do things for you that they might not do for someone else?

Mr. Kennedy: With all humility, I’d say yes.

Interviewer: How about inspirational?

Mr. Kennedy: Gosh, I hope so.

Interviewer: What do you have them aspire to?

Mr. Kennedy: That’s the big can and want to be.

Interviewer: What happens when it’s not the same thing?

Mr. Kennedy: The best they can be and the best they want to be?

Interviewer: Yes.

Mr. Kennedy: That’s a hard lesson. There’s the best they want to be and there’s the best they can be. I’m there to help them with that distance.

As I sat in his class, I couldn’t help but get the impression from his students that they fully understand Mr. Kennedy’s passion for his students and his insistence that there is a world waiting for them with limitless possibilities. And while they may not fully appreciate his passion for them and what it means in the big picture, they will continue to be the beneficiaries of it now and in the years to come.

Michelle Sullivan’s Perspective

Michelle is a young lady of few words, but what she does articulate is well thought out and usually quite intuitive for a person her age. She is consistent in her appraisal of Mr. Kennedy when describing him as friendly and approachable, reliable and dependable, and, above all else, funny. “He’s always upbeat and excited about class.” It’s the type of excitement that
makes the class so enjoyable for his students. Michelle is first to admit that English is not her best subject, but it’s a fun class to go to and she “looks forward to going.” In turn, she believes it has helped her achieve her academic goals. She works harder for a teacher like Mr. Kennedy than she does for other teachers. However, why she works harder for a teacher like Mr. Kennedy is more involved than the mere attractiveness of a “fun class.”

Michelle has high degree of respect for Mr. Kennedy due, in part, to his approachability and willingness to help with any problem at any time. “He’s really interested in us and our opinions.” He is available before and after school, during lunch, as well as his conference period. He doesn’t wait for students to come to him. Rather, Mr. Kennedy is always approaching students asking them to make an appointment with him or “just stop by.” What has earned her respect is the fact that Michelle notices he does this for all students and not just the popular ones. While she doesn’t need the extra help all that much, she admits it’s nice to know she can comfortably approach him and ask for assistance. On one such occasion, Michelle was struggling with an essay question because, as she relates, “I’m not very good with them.” When I asked her if she went to Mr. Kennedy for extra help and if the effort paid off, Michelle replied:

I have a huge problem with procrastination….and he helped me. Because, like a week later when we were both able to stay after he helped me understand the question. And then he let me have a couple more days to turn it in.

When asked if her perceptions of Mr. Kennedy, with respect to his approachability and willingness to help, are the same for all students regardless of their status in the class, Michelle replied, “If they need help, he’s there.”

Another key component of Michelle’s relationship with Mr. Kennedy is his humanness. “He comes into class and it’s like he’s a regular person [who] just teaches us.” She describes a
When it became apparent that a mistake had been made, Mr. Kennedy immediately admitted the mistake and apologized to the class. Michelle’s commentary on that incident concluded with “[he’s] pretty much a regular person and everybody makes mistakes.” In an earlier conversation with Michelle about the importance of seeing her teacher as human and real, she talked freely about how some days Mr. Kennedy seemed unable to connect with his students. Because of her comfort level with Mr. Kennedy, Michelle is able to write days like that off by saying, “like even teachers can have days where they just feel like they [have] attention deficit disorder.” When I asked her if she respects him for that, she simply replied, “Yup.”

While Mr. Kennedy likes to show off a little, he has used his personality to create a comfortable, safe, and warm learning environment. According to Michelle, she works harder as a result and draws a comparison to a teacher who is not like Mr. Kennedy and who failed to make a positive connection with her in the following exchange:

**Interviewer:** Do you work hard in his class because of his personality?

**Michelle:** Yes, maybe a little harder.

**Interviewer:** Are you getting a better grade because you are working harder?

**Michelle:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Think of the worst teacher you ever had. What grade would you get?

**Michelle:** It was the same subject.

**Interviewer:** Oh was it?

**Michelle:** Yea. [I] didn’t do so well…kinda failed the class.

**Interviewer:** Was it because of the teacher?

**Michelle:** Yes.
As we continued the discussion on the difference between the two teachers, it became apparent that the failure to make a connection with the other teacher probably was the result of many reasons. Still, the connection was never made. She simply could not relate to him.

Mr. Kennedy maintains high expectations for Michelle and won’t let her off the hook just because she doesn’t feel like doing something. One example is her fear of speaking in front of the class. But because Mr. Kennedy has insisted she does that, and has provided techniques to help with public speaking, Michelle now feels more comfortable to do so. “I’ve always had a problem with that but he kind of makes it easier because he made it fun….No matter what, you would have to go up.” She very much agreed with me when I suggested that Mr. Kennedy made her stretch beyond that which she thought possible. Prior to Mr. Kennedy’s intervention with this deficit, Michelle confided that she always felt motivation came from within. “I don’t really think any teacher can do that for me.” And now because of Mr. Kennedy’s support and encouragement, coupled with his uncompromising expectation that she can do the assignment, she is now more motivated than ever before—and she credits Mr. Kennedy for the turnaround.

*Interviewer:* So Mr. Kennedy motivates you to try harder, work harder?

*Micelle:* Yes.

*Interviewer:* How does that make you feel?

*Micelle:* Like I could get an ‘A’ in the class.

*Interviewer:* All because of Mr. Kennedy?

*Micelle:* Yes.

*Interviewer:* So that makes you feel pretty good?

*Micelle:* Yes.
Michelle finished the conversation by quietly reasserting that Mr. Kennedy has made a real difference for her in English—a class she typically doesn’t like or do very well in—by making it fun and interesting. I couldn’t help but wonder, if she connected with more teachers the way she has with Mr. Kennedy, if she would have meet her personal goal of achievement like her brother, to be class valedictorian. While she seems satisfied with her academic performance to date, she offered the following advice: “have fun in class. Don’t make it dull and boring.” Judging by the observations I have made in Mr. Kennedy’s classroom, I would have to conclude that Michelle’s peers wholeheartedly share her sentiment.

_Brittney Osborn’s Perspective_

Brittney readily admits that she is shy and prefers to work alone. She is clear with respect to her immediate goals, namely to get her high school diploma. While she personally wants “to get out of high school” she recognizes and accepts her responsibility to others. For her parents, she “wants to do good in school” and for herself “to pass the class, get good grades so [she] can get a good job in life.” She also professes that it is her responsibility for what she learns in class. To that end, she is not shy about what she wants from her teachers. “I expect to be taught the right things, things I need to know.”

Brittney acknowledges that Mr. Kennedy has played an important role in helping her maintain a ‘C’ in his class, but is not able to clearly articulate how he does it. She contends that Mr. Kennedy is reliable, fair, dependable, trustworthy, and even values her opinion on things but she fails to see how those attributes have contributed to her modest success. She doesn’t feel any strong personal connection with Mr. Kennedy and yet she enjoys going to his class and even looks forward to it, primarily because of his humor. “He makes the class fun.” Beyond that, she appreciates the fact he makes himself available at almost anytime if she needs additional help
with academics. She stresses academics because she does not believe she would approach him with personal problems. For that, she would “go to someone closer.” Several weeks later, Brittney conveyed her sentiments in even stronger language when asked if she ever hesitated approaching Mr. Kennedy with a problem. She replied, “Yes, because I’m very shy. I don’t like talking to people I don’t know.”

She believes she can be successful in his class because of the support and encouragement he provides. Brittney gives thanks to Mr. Kennedy for his availability to provide additional help, his support, and his patience because “he knows I need help in that class…because I don’t do good at all.” Still, she trudges onward, even though she admits the work is very hard. She continues in the face of adversity due, in part, to the motivation Mr. Kennedy offers through his strategies of encouragement and support, as indicated in the following narrative:

*Interviewer:* In what ways does Mr. Kennedy drive you to be successful?

*Brittney:* Supporting me with my work.

*Interviewer:* Would you be as successful without him?

*Brittney:* Depends on if I had a teacher that would support me like he [Kennedy] does.

*Interviewer:* Have you always struggled in English?

*Brittney:* Yeah, kind of.

*Interviewer:* But it’s easier with Mr. Kennedy?

*Brittney:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Maybe “easier” is not the right word.

*Brittney:* I understand it better with him teaching it.

This exchange is important for two reasons. First, it indicates that Brittney understands the difference a teacher can make. In this exchange, Brittney holds up Mr. Kennedy as the standard
by which she judges other teachers. And second, the fact she understands it better with him teaching suggests there is something about his pedagogical practice that enables her to better understand the material.

In many ways, Brittney is a paradox in terms. On one hand she does not believe Mr. Kennedy has very high standards for her, while on the other hand she would settle for a ‘C’ and Mr. Kennedy would say, “that’s not good enough.” In fact, “he would say I could probably do better.” She admits that Mr. Kennedy motivates her to work hard and do well, and several weeks later suggests she really “wants to do well for me. I want to get out of high school.” On the whole, she admits he is motivational, but not inspirational.

Brittney honestly believes Mr. Kennedy cares for her and wants nothing but the best for her. He has expressed an interest in Brittney’s plans after high school and has approached her several times to ask how she is doing and if everything is alright. Brittney admits that makes her want to work harder for him, but Mr. Kennedy has no idea of factors outside of the classroom that might inhibit her progress. And even if he did, she doesn’t believe it would help anyway.

*Interviewer:* Do you think he knows of anything going on in your life that might affect you in the classroom?

*Brittney:* No.

*Interviewer:* Do you believe if he did know, that it might help in the classroom?

*Brittney:* No.

It really boils down to the way Mr. Kennedy presents his lessons. “He’s just a really funny person; he makes a lot of jokes. He does activities involving the whole class…he explains the work for me.” Perhaps most important for Brittney is the fact that Mr. Kennedy attempts to “relate the subject” to something of interest to her.
Mr. Kennedy pays her compliments and he is able to find positive things to say to Britney even when her performance is less than exemplary. Still Britney believes that Mr. Kennedy is not sensitive to her individual needs and considers herself just another student in the class. In many respects, Britney feels isolated.

As the semester wears down to a few remaining weeks, it becomes apparent that something is weighing heavy on Britney. Her attendance has become a serious concern and little or no information is made available to her teachers. My earlier intuition that something in Britney’s personal life was interfering with her education is now taking on more meaning.

Following Winter Break, I was able to sit down with Britney to complete our final interview. The setting has changed because she is now enrolled in the distance-learning lab to make up credit for her past absences. She is very comfortable with the arrangement and is looking forward to returning to the regular classroom as soon as she finishes the make-up requirements. I did not pry into the circumstances surrounding her absence but, at least from outward appearance, little has changed. She’s still a very soft spoken and shy young lady who is just a little uncomfortable with strangers. Nevertheless, she was more than cooperative and we finished the formal interview in a timely fashion.
CHAPTER VI. ANALYSIS

Introduction

In this chapter I will provide the reader with a brief summary analysis of the data generated by each participant. In doing so, each participant will be treated as an individual case study. Following the individual analysis, I will present a group synthesis. The purpose of the group synthesis is to identify any disparity in perceptions held by individual participants, identify common themes, and provide a contextual framework from which the research questions can be more thoroughly addressed. Following the group synthesis, I will offer a cross analysis to provide an additional perspective of the data and conclude by addressing the research questions.

Mrs. Everly

A highly approachable and friendly teacher, Mrs. Every is committed to developing interpersonal relationships with her students that are mutually beneficial and productive. She considers herself dependable, reliable, humorous, patient, and honest—and believes her students would agree. Her relationships are built on trust and individualized care. To provide that care, Mrs. Everly wants to know as much about her students as possible. Students complete an interest survey at the beginning of each semester that includes biographical data and special needs. To get to know her students on a more personal level, she provides time for them to share personal stories or simply talk about whatever is on their minds. To demonstrate her humanness, Mrs. Everly often shares her own personal stories, especially when they relate to the stories of her students. She makes herself available to students before and after school, at lunch, conference time, and occasionally on her days off for additional academic work or to discuss pressing personal problems. She is passionate in her belief that all students can learn the content, and a caring, innovative teacher can overcome many of the external barriers that inhibit student
performance. She believes caring and supportive teachers are the key to student learning. For Mrs. Everly, caring and supportive teachers provide highly individualized instructional strategies based on individual needs, high expectations for both behavioral and academic performance, lessons that are relevant and applicable to real life, and generous doses of praise and encouragement—and she does not hesitate to get involved in her students’ personal lives when invited. Not averse to “bending the rules a little”, Mrs. Everly is a proponent of the philosophy that fair treatment of students does not always mean equal treatment. She will do whatever is necessary to assist a student’s academic and social growth. She identifies with kids who struggle academically because she too struggled at one time and identified the role the teacher played in exacerbating her difficulty in class. Recognizing the limitless potential within each student, Mrs. Everly is committed to lasting relationships that extend beyond the classroom walls and last a lifetime.

Mrs. Myers

Believing every child can learn, Mrs. Myers laments that too many students fail to accept their own responsibility for learning. They simply will not do the required work. For those who will, she makes herself available before and after school to provide additional help, but it is their responsibility to get there. Content driven, Mrs. Everly is concerned that there is insufficient time to cover the required material and that, as a result, best practice in the classroom is oftentimes compromised—resulting in an inability to meet individual student needs. And even if she could, external circumstances that affect student learning are so diverse and of such a horrific nature that she doubts individual needs could be addressed anyway. In this regard, she considers herself a pragmatist. She believes she can best show support for her students by maintaining high standards, covering the required content, attempting to make the curriculum meaningful,
being available, and reinforcing with her students that the primary responsibility for learning rests with them.

For the most part, Mrs. Myers believes her students see her as friendly, reliable, dependable, trustworthy, honest and fair—all components of teacher support. She equates fair treatment of students with equal treatment of students and rarely makes exceptions to her academic or behavioral expectations. Balancing time constraints with the necessity to cover a large amount of content, let alone connecting with every student, is a recurring theme for both her upper level classes and her introductory classes. She insists that, in both cases, students must do the work and meet the required standards to pass her course. And she accepts the reality that some students will simply not meet those expectations and standards—for a variety of reasons.

Mr. Kennedy

Recognizing that there is a world with limitless opportunities awaiting his students, Mr. Kennedy is adamant about his personal responsibility to prepare his students for those opportunities, not only by focusing on his content, but by modeling important traits such as responsibility, respect, and trustworthiness to his students. To that end, he hopes to motivate and inspire his students to levels of achievement that might otherwise not be possible. And his aspirations for them extend well beyond the classroom or the finite period of time he is directly involved with them.

Mr. Kennedy’s genuine warmth and care for students is best expressed through his humor and his constant awareness of how his students are doing both academically and personally. He gets involved with his students beyond superficial appearances. He takes their problems seriously—whatever they are—and works hard to develop strategies that might help alleviate some of the burden his students bear because of personal problems. He makes strong
connections with kids through his use of interest surveys conducted at the beginning of each semester, referring to them often throughout the semester. His desire to create trusting and caring relationships with students is the foundation upon which he provides support to them as they pursue academic and personal goals. By fully immersing himself in the classroom community he is trying to create, he is more aware of, and better able to, understand circumstances that affect individual performance and devise strategies designed to alleviate some of those difficulties.

Mr. Kennedy is highly visible in the hallways and greets each student by name as they enter the classroom. His greeting is usually accompanied with an inquiry as to how things are going. He believes he best supports his students by maintaining high academic and behavioral standards, and holding students accountable for meeting those standards, although he admits to adjusting expectations from time to time in an effort to meet unique student needs. He attempts to make every lesson connect to real life situations in the hope that his students will better understand and appreciate the content. He is available before and after school, during his lunch period, as well as his conference time for any student seeking assistance with academics or to discuss any other issue affecting the student’s performance. Mr. Kennedy is generous with his compliments, praise, and encouragement for his students, especially when things are not going very well. Mr. Kennedy’s mission in the classroom is to help his student bridge the gap between what is and what could be. And he believes caring and supportive teachers make the ascent possible.

*Anna Deusan*

According to Anna, Mrs. Everly makes her feel like she’s the smartest person in the world, even though she struggles to earn a ‘C’ in her class. Spurred on by Mrs. Everly’s constant
praise, compliments, and encouragement, Anna believes she can be successful. Mrs. Everly makes her feel welcomed and important. Always greeting her by name, Mrs. Everly has made herself available at most any time for Anna—regardless of the need. Still, Anna struggles trying to master a difficult subject and her perception is that Mrs. Everly is the reason why she persists. Anna works so hard because of the quality of the relationship she has with Mrs. Everly. Through shared stories, she has come to see Mrs. Everly as a human being who has struggled with many of the same issues—both academic and personal—that Anna struggles with, and Mrs. Everly was able to overcome them. Now, Anna believes she can too. Anna has genuine respect for her teacher because Anna believes she really cares and is committed to her long-term well being. Mrs. Everly is honest and open, which allows Anna to expose her vulnerabilities, open up, and take a chance. She does so because she believes Mrs. Everly is genuinely interested in what’s going on her life and makes an attempt to understand those issues so Mrs. Everly can develop strategies to help Anna. Mrs. Everly remains in the moment with Anna and takes the time to listen.

Anna relates how Mrs. Everly’s class is fun and enjoyable with much laughter and genuine exchanges taking place in class. She appreciates Mrs. Everly’s high expectations because she knows it’s in her best interests, and she begrudgingly admits that not being allowed to wiggle out of her responsibilities is best in the long run. She can relate to the lessons and is motivated to stay on task and persevere through obstacles due, in part, to the depth of care and concern she feels Mrs. Everly has for her.

Krystal Leight

An admitted self-starter, Krystal assumes responsibility for her learning, but is quick to add that her work ethic is influenced to a large degree by the relationship she enjoys with her
teacher, Mrs. Everly. She feels a strong connection to Mrs. Everly because she can relate to her as “real” and it is her connection that provides the motivation for Krystal to invest in the relationship to its fullest. That includes not wanting to disappoint Mrs. Everly—and so she always gives it her very best effort. It also means Krystal feels comfortable enough to approach Mrs. Everly regardless of the problem that confronts her.

She trusts Mrs. Everly to provide her with the tools necessary to pass the math portion of the Ohio Graduation Test, and she perceives that her classmates share that trust. She views Mrs. Everly as a really fun person and she looks forward to the time spent with her, both in and out of the classroom. Krystal considers Mrs. Everly to be humorous, respectful, humble, and concerned for everyone in the class. Although Krystal has not had to take advantage of the offer, she knows that Mrs. Everly is available at most any time to help with most any problem. Krystal is also aware that many students take advantage of the extra help.

Krystal is able to articulate her perceptions of teaching methods employed by Mrs. Everly, which have made it easier for her to comprehend the content, achieve her academic goals in math and, all the while, make the class enjoyable. Krystal emphasizes that Mrs. Everly’s lessons are always tied to something in the real world that she can relate to. In addition, Mrs. Everly has a way of breaking down complex concepts into smaller components that are easier to understand. She engages students individually to check for understanding and employs multiple teaching strategies to insure everyone understands the concepts. She appreciates the individual help that is offered, especially the help Mrs. Everly offers outside of classroom hours. From Krystal’s perspective, Mrs. Everly does all these things on behalf of her students out of genuine care and concern for each student’s success. Her concern provides all the additional support and encouragement Krystal needs to face obstacles head on and persist in the face of adversity.
Paul Ankenbrandt

Paul is highly motivated to succeed and doesn’t require much in terms of a relationship with his teacher. Still, he professes that a stronger relationship with Mrs. Myers might help, especially because he feels disconnected from her and, at times, gets the impression she isn’t very concerned about him. He views his relationship with Mrs. Myers as distant and impersonal and yet, when pressed, he doesn’t think it matters much. He’s confident that she doesn’t know how he best learns, but he is content with the variety of activities in class, which are for the most part productive and enjoyable.

Paul understands the rigor of the curriculum that awaits him in college and accepts his responsibility for doing the work necessary to be successful regardless of the quality of relationship he enjoys with the teacher. He accepts an occasional compliment from Mrs. Myers but insists it is only because he is doing the work. He cannot identify any motivational strategies employed by Mrs. Myers that have any impact on his performance. He acknowledges she has high academic and behavioral expectations and appreciates the fact that she has made herself available before and after school for additional help should it be needed. He perceives Mrs. Myers as patient and knowledgeable. She delivers her lessons in ways he can easily understand and provides laboratory experiments that are “fun.” He wishes there were more hands-on activities because they are his learning style preference.

Paul does not believe the lack of a strong interpersonal relationship with Mrs. Myers has adversely affected his academic performance. Still, his disconnection from her means he would not consider approaching her for help on any matter outside of academics. From Paul’s perspective, he is simply too uncomfortable to discuss personal matters with her. Paul’s relationship with Mrs. Myers is primarily transactional. He expects to be taught the prescribed
curriculum and he will do the requisite work to insure comprehension. For Paul, it isn’t much more complicated than that.

Joe Brown

While Joe would like to do well in every class, factors outside the classroom sometimes affect his ability to stay on task and focused on his academic goals. His relationship with Mrs. Myers, while respectful, is distant. Seemingly, her only expectation for him is to do the work. Although he downplays the importance of his relationship with his teacher, he identifies her as one reason why he should persevere and attempt to pass the class, even though his internal drive to succeed has taken a serious blow. The other reason for perseverance is his parents. But Joe is not worried about disappointing them. As far as Mrs. Myers is concerned, he doesn’t perceive she really cares that much about him anyway and that she has made no attempt to make him believe he could be successful even if he put forth the work she requires of him. She knows very little about Joe and, in Joe’s mind, has not developed any strategies to meet his individual needs. Furthermore, from Joe’s perspective, Mrs. Myers does not engage him in a meaningful way and does not connect the content or her lessons to anything relevant or real in his life.

His perceptions of his inability to pass the class are only solidified by the fact that he has sought extra help, but it has had no impact on the end product. He still performs poorly on quizzes and tests. One of the reasons Joe cites for performing poorly on tests is that Mrs. Myers doesn’t really teach anything to him. His perception is that Mrs. Myers only teaches to people like her. And so, while he doesn’t want to end up like some of his older friends who have made poor choices in their lives, he doesn’t see much sense to work hard for something he’s not entirely sure he can be successful at anyway, and for a teacher who has done nothing to convince him otherwise. His conclusion that he cannot be successful has led him to completely disengage.
in the classroom. In fact, while in physics class, he spends as much time as possible working on homework from other classes. His perception that Mrs. Myers doesn’t believe he can be successful is made real due to the fact that she has made no attempt to stop him from this practice.

Michelle Sullivan

Michelle enthusiastically describes Mr. Kennedy as friendly, approachable, reliable and, above all else, funny. He is upbeat and excited about his class. It is an excitement that Michelle believes is contagious and one of the reason why she looks forward to going to class; she enjoys it immensely.

Once in class, Michelle believes she works harder for Mr. Kennedy because she perceives him to be human and real. She sees him as a regular person who is passionate about his subject material and the students he engages. She believes that Mr. Kennedy is able to connect his lessons to everyday life or to current events that his students can readily relate to. Her perception of Mr. Kennedy has led her to conclude that he genuinely cares about his students and is concerned for their welfare now and in the future. When Mr. Kennedy solicits input from his students, Michelle’s perception is that he really cares about his students’ opinions. When students make suggestion on how the class can be made better, Mr. Kennedy attempts to incorporate ideas that are promising. As a result, the learning environment is both warm and safe. It is an environment that encourages students to participate, knowing their effort will be recognized, valued, and nurtured.

She is aware that he makes himself available to all students for additional academic help or to offer advice on any issue that impacts his or her performance in the classroom. She views his outreach to students as authentic and grounded in the belief that all students have his or her
own unique talents and skills that are to be valued and shared with the larger community. Because of this belief, Mr. Kennedy maintains high academic and behavioral standards and holds each member of the learning community accountable for meeting those standards. Mr. Kennedy’s persistence that Michelle speak in front of the class, coupled with her success in doing so, have provided her with the motivation and inspiration necessary to take on new challenges with the hope of achieving even more success. For that, she credits Mr. Kennedy.

**Brittney Osborn**

Brittney is shy and somewhat introverted. She is focused on obtaining her high school diploma even though she struggles academically. Brittney wants to do well not only for herself but for her parents as well and to that end she wants teachers who will teach her and help her meet her personal goal of earning her high school diploma.

While she does not perceive a close connection to Mr. Kennedy, or even believes he is sensitive to her individual needs, she credits Mr. Kennedy for her achievement in English. Although maintaining a ‘C’ average in his class, she believes she is performing very well in a subject she does not like and one in which she has had very little success prior to Mr. Kennedy. She perceives him to be fair, reliable, honest, trustworthy, and dependable even though she is unable to articulate how those attributes contribute to her success. Brittney appreciates the fact that Mr. Kennedy is available at most anytime for additional help and she has sought out that help on several occasions. Mr. Kennedy is able to relate his lessons to real world situations that Brittney is interested in and better able to understand. She understands that somehow Mr. Kennedy makes a difference for her, if only because his teaching style works for her. She describes the class as enjoyable, filled with humor and laughter. Mr. Kennedy is generous with his compliments, always finding something good to say even when things are not going well.
When Brittney voices her opinion on some topic, or offers a suggestion as to how things can be done differently, she expresses her perception that Mr. Kennedy truly values the input and takes it seriously. Mr. Kennedy maintains high academic standards for Brittney and she works hard to meet them. Mr. Kennedy’s constant encouragement that she can do better, coupled with his praise for the work she has done, motivates her to persist. She believes that he truly does care for her well being and will do whatever it takes to help her be successful.

Group Synthesis

High-Performing Students

Michelle Sullivan, Krystal Leight, and Paul Ankenbrandt are all self-starters who are highly motivated to pursue their individual goals in the classroom and beyond. They share common perceptions regarding their teachers—Mr. Kennedy, Mrs. Everly, and Mrs. Myers respectively—that include an appreciation for their high expectations for both behavioral and academic performance and their teachers’ availability for additional help before and after school. Additionally, all three agree that their respective teachers present academic lessons that are relevant and connected to real world problems, which makes it easier to comprehend the material, although Paul acknowledges this practice is less frequently applied in Mrs. Myers’ class. The teachers are able to break down complex issues and explain it in such a way as to enhance learning and improve understanding.

Michelle and Krystal have identified additional similarities between Mr. Kennedy and Mrs. Everly. Both students agree that the two teachers are highly approachable, friendly, reliable, and trustworthy. Their teachers use humor to make the class enjoyable and both students describe their respective classes as fun; both look forward to going to class each day. Both describe their teachers as caring individuals who are genuinely concerned about their
students’ success. Their perception of Mr. Kennedy and Mrs. Everly is that their concern is real and present for all students, not just the high performers—and that their concern for student well being extends beyond the classroom walls and into the students’ personal lives and future plans.

Michelle and Krystal view both Mr. Kennedy and Mrs. Everly, respectively, as “real” people with human qualities they can relate to. Both teachers make mistakes and readily accept responsibility for them. Both are funny and have a special ability to laugh at themselves. They share personal stories that have meaning to their students and they are not afraid to show their emotions. Both feel a special connection to their respective teachers. Even though they are self-starters, both students agree that they work harder in these classes because of the comfortable relationship they enjoy with their teacher. And they believe that their hard work eventually pays off in better academic performance. Michelle informs this point by indicating that Mr. Kennedy’s persistence, regard for her opinion, and belief that all students have gifts and talents to be shared with the larger community, provides an additional motivational spark for her to continue pursuing her goals.

Paul works hard for Mrs. Myers, but it is mostly a result of his internal drive to be successful. It is a trait that he shares with Michelle and Krystal. He does not share the same relationship with Mrs. Myers as Michelle and Krystal share with Mr. Kennedy and Mrs. Everly, but he does not feel as though he suffers because of it. Paul is content to engage the curriculum in the manner in which it is presented by Mrs. Myers. Although he would like more hands-on activities, Mrs. Myers does provide a variety of activities and is able to explain the content in a way that makes comprehension “easy” for Paul. Paul admits that a better relationship with Mrs. Myers could be beneficial. He does not perceive any real care or concern on Mrs. Myers’ part for his well being—in or out of the classroom, now or in the future. He is unable to articulate
anything Mrs. Myers does to support him other than to be available for extra help—help he does not need. Outside of an occasional compliment for doing his work, and doing it well, Paul is unable to identify specific motivational strategies employed by Mrs. Myers that would make him want to work harder. He feels disconnected with Mrs. Myers on a personal level and would not seek her help on matters outside the classroom. It is important to note, that overall, Paul is satisfied with his experience in Mrs. Myers classroom and, even though things could perhaps be better, he perceives his needs are being met.

Low-Performing Students

Brittney Osborn, Anna Deusan, and Joe Brown agree on one component that is shared in common with their respective teachers, Mr. Kennedy, Mrs. Everly, and Mrs. Myers. All three recognize that their teachers make themselves available for additional help at times outside of normal classroom hours. Beyond that, only Brittney and Anna see common traits running through their respective relationships with Mr. Kennedy and Mrs. Everly.

Both Brittney and Anna appreciate the lessons offered by Mr. Kennedy and Mrs. Everly, respectively, because they view them as relevant and connected to everyday problems. Because of that, the material is more easily understood. Both girls are the beneficiaries of generous support from their teachers in the form of constant praise, compliments, and encouragement—especially when things aren’t going so well. They perceive their respective teachers to be caring, concerned, and interested in what’s going on in their lives. Both teachers are friendly and approachable. They believe their teachers will do whatever is necessary to insure their success and willing to assist on matters outside of the classroom.

Brittney and Anna describe Mr. Kennedy and Mrs. Everly, respectively, as trustworthy, fair, and honest, although Brittney cannot articulate how those traits help her in the classroom.
Still, both students believe their teacher is responsible for the level of academic success they currently enjoy—Anna because of the depth of Mrs. Everly’s care for her and Brittney because of Mr. Kennedy’s “style”. His style might very well be a careful blend of his trustworthiness, fairness, and honesty—all traits Brittney failed to see as meaningful when viewed separately.

According to Brittney and Anna, both teachers effectively use humor to make the classroom more enjoyable. Humor also allows them to see the human side of their teachers. They understand that Mr. Kennedy and Mrs. Everly have high academic expectations for them and hold them accountable for meeting those expectations. Nevertheless, they are both confident they can meet classroom objectives because of the individual care they receive from their respective teachers. Both describe individual care as being engaged with teaching strategies based on individual needs as opposed to a “one shoe fits all” approach.

Anna expands on her relationship with Mrs. Everly by indicating she feels so connected to her that she can go to her for help with anything. In fact, she has sought Mrs. Everly’s input on personal matters and values the advice she receives. It is another reason why Anna works so hard for Mrs. Everly. It is a connection that is not forced or false and it’s a connection that Anna believes will last forever. Brittney does not profess that close of a connection with Mr. Kennedy. Still, the relationship is comfortable enough that she would freely seek out his help on academic matters. For personal issues, although she probably could, Brittney would seek the help of a closer friend. Nevertheless, Mr. Kennedy remains the standard by which she judges other teachers.

Joe Brown, on the other hand, does not enjoy a strong relationship with Mrs. Myers. He does not perceive her to be caring or interested in really teaching him. His perception is that her teaching style is geared more “for people like her”. He is not sure what her academic
expectations are for him other than to “do the work”. Her lessons are not relevant to him and he’s bored, which he believes is the result of her not knowing how he best learns. Regrettably, he feels no connection to Mrs. Myers, either academically or personally. Joe relates that he receives little in the way of encouragement or praise from Mrs. Myers, indicating to him that she believes he is not successful, or likely to be successful. Joe cannot identify any motivational strategies employed by Mrs. Myers that would encourage him to persist in the face of setbacks and she does not inspire him.

Teachers

All three teachers maintain high academic standards and hold their respective students accountable for meeting those standards. And to help them along the way, all three make themselves available outside of classroom hours to provide additional support for students in need. All three teachers agree that all students can learn, although Mrs. Myers argues that many choose not to. They consider themselves to be approachable, friendly, reliable, and trustworthy; albeit, Mrs. Myers qualifies the statement with, “for the most part.”

It is at this point that the teachers part company based on philosophical beliefs and pedagogical practice. Both Mr. Kennedy and Mrs. Everly believe teachers must know their students. And to know them means hearing their personal stories, knowing their aspirations for the future, and understanding their unique needs. They believe that by knowing their students within this construct, they are better positioned to provide the individualized care and support needed to help their students meet classroom objectives as well as realize individual goals. They attempt to make their lessons authentic and connected to the real world with the belief that if they can do this, their students will relate to the content and be able to demonstrate understanding and competency.
Both teachers recognize that circumstances outside of the classroom involving their students’ personal lives has an impact on student learning and academic achievement. When those circumstances are negative, both teachers make themselves available to their students for counsel and advice. Sometimes, they merely provide a shoulder to lean on; sometimes it’s a lot of encouragement; sometimes they provide referrals to professionals best suited to help; and on occasion, rules are bent; but they are always within the parameter of what is best for the student based on individual needs and circumstances. Whatever the circumstances, they make it clear they are available for them at any time.

Mr. Kennedy and Mrs. Everly use their senses of humor to demonstrate their humanness and they do not hesitate to share personal stories whenever those stories can be used to help students identify with them. They admit their mistakes and point out their individual weaknesses. Both teachers are not afraid of a little good-natured humor directed toward them by students. The lynchpin of their relationships with students is their deep care and concern for students both now and in the future; this is true for academic and personal goals. Both teachers believe relationships with students can last a lifetime, and they both enjoy following the progress of their students over the years. They are generous with their encouragement, praise and compliments for their students, especially when circumstances are not positive.

Failure is not an option for these teachers and both insist that all students have significant contributions to make to their respective classrooms. Not only do Mr. Kennedy and Mrs. Everly believe their students can learn, achieve, and prosper, they are prepared to do whatever it takes to help insure they do.

Mrs. Myers is more of a pragmatist when it comes to student/teacher relationships. While she believes all students can learn, many will simply choose not to do the work necessary
for success. She is resigned to the fact that some students will fail to meet expectations and fail her class. She understands that often times there are factors in a student’s personal or home life that make it difficult to stay on task or complete assignments in a timely fashion. But, she also recognizes that every person has problems in one form or another. Some are able to work through those problems and succeed, while others cannot. It is a reality of life. In extreme emergencies, she will allow additional time to complete assignments; otherwise, there are no exceptions to her policies. She believes in treating students fairly, and that means equally.

Mrs. Myers is frustrated by the scope of the curriculum that needs to be covered within a short time frame, a time frame she believes is unrealistic for both her entry-level science classes and her more advanced science classes. She acknowledges that it would be nice to address the needs of each student, but that it is impractical given the time constraints under which she works.

Mrs. Myers believes she can best support her students by covering the material they will need to either pass the Ohio Graduation Test or meet college entrance requirements, making her lessons relevant and meaningful for her students, being available for additional help, and reinforcing with her students that the responsibility for learning rests primarily on their shoulders. She believes she motivates her students by providing a variety of activities and fun labs.

Mrs. Myers enjoys her job and cannot imagine being out of the classroom. Among her most satisfying professional experiences is watching her students over the years grow and prosper, knowing she played a role in their success.
Cross Analysis

Teachers

Unlike Mrs. Everly, Mr. Kennedy and Mrs. Myers entered the field of education after having professional work experience in non-educational fields. Both sought careers that would provide personal and professional satisfaction and both report that teaching has satisfied those needs and more. For Mr. Kennedy, his sense of personal satisfaction comes from knowing there is more to life than simply making a living. His enthusiasm for teaching is worn on his sleeve and the passion he exudes for his content—language arts—stems from the belief that it can be used to teach so many of life’s lessons. He uses the curriculum to incorporate many of those lessons into his daily plans. He firmly believes that every student brings to the classroom unique talents and gifts to share with the larger community. His educational mission is to cultivate and nurture those gifts and to impress upon students their responsibility to do the same, regardless of circumstances in their lives. To help students accomplish this, he is ready and willing to become involved in his students’ lives regardless of the circumstances. The source of his greatest satisfaction comes from having former students return to simply say, “thank you.”

Mrs. Myers is task-oriented and committed to preparing her students for high-stakes testing or rigorous post-secondary education. In both scenarios, she is intent on covering the prescribed curriculum in the allotted time. Unfortunately, time is at a premium. Trying to balance the demands placed on her as a result of this conflict has been her greatest source of frustration. She simply does not have sufficient time to meet the demands of all her students. Although she attempts to make her lessons relevant and connected to real world problems, she admits that this is not always possible. Additionally, she cites student laziness and unwillingness to do the work required to be successful as another primary source of her frustration with
students today. After having tried her hand in private business, Mrs. Myers chose education. It boiled down to the fact that she likes helping people. She recalls that math came very easy to her in high school and that she was able to explain math concepts to her less-accomplished peers with considerable success. It came naturally for her. She felt like she was filling a void because, as she remembers, there were several math teachers in her high school that did not explain things very well.

Mrs. Everly, on the other hand, struggled with math in high school. She failed to connect with her math teacher and was very uncomfortable trying to approach him for help. Even when she took the initiative to open lines of communication she felt as though a barrier had been erected between her and the teacher, preventing her from making any significant connection with him. The unpleasant memory of a distant and unapproachable teacher has had a lasting impact on Mrs. Everly, helping shape the type of teacher she has aspired to be since grade school. It has been her only professional career choice. The fact that she knew she had the ability and yet failed to achieve because of the ineffectual relationship with her teacher has inspired Mrs. Everly to make certain none of her students’ potential for success is jeopardized for the same reason. She attempts to look inside each student in an effort to find keys to unlock the door of success for him or her. She checks and rechecks for student understanding and prepares her lessons in such a way as her students can see how the material is applied in everyday life. She brings math alive in the classroom in the hope that her students will relate to it and more fully engage in the curriculum. Rather than waiting for students to approach her for extra help, she makes it a point to approach each student on a regular basis offering her support through her availability outside of the classroom. She even tutors on weekends or teacher workdays when it is the only practical time to get a student in for help. She accepts a responsibility to be present in her students’ lives
whatever the circumstances. She considers herself a resource to her students and is prepared to refer students to the appropriate individual when the nature of his or her personal problem exceeds her capacity to help. Like Mr. Kennedy, Mrs. Everly does not view students’ personal lives as separate from their academic lives. They are inextricably linked and, when embraced in the whole, will ultimately determine the level of success each student enjoys both in and out of the classroom. To that end, both teachers see themselves as integral members of the family-home-student-teacher partnership. When all are invested with the student’s best interest at heart, success is virtually guaranteed.

*High-Performing Students / Low-Performing Students / Teachers*

All six students agree they are the beneficiaries of support from their respective teachers to the extent their teachers are available for additional academic help beyond normal classroom hours. All three teachers report that providing extra help is a key component of supporting students. Mrs. Everly, Mr. Kennedy, and Mrs. Myers profess they actively pursue students in need of help, but Joe, Mrs. Myers’ low-performing student, insists that Mrs. Myers’ overtures to students is done in a general way and she has not directly encouraged him to seek additional help. The high-performing students appreciate the offer of additional help even though they have not needed it. All three low-performing students have sought additional help for academic reasons.

Additional support beyond classroom hours is also manifested by the way teachers make themselves available to intervene on behalf of their students when personal issues interfere with learning. Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy provide such support by cultivating interpersonal relationships grounded in trust and deep concern with respect to their students’ welfare. Mrs. Everly’s students, Krystal and Anna, along with Mr. Kennedy’s students, Michelle and Brittney,
recognize and value their respective teachers’ open and caring presence in their lives. The have identified their teachers as individuals they can trust and who they can seek out for help on any issue. They perceive they will be greeted with warmth and understanding, and an honest attempt to help them with whatever issue is interfering with their performance at school. Whether or not they choose to take advantage of this resource is not the salient point. All four agree that just knowing this about their teacher has a positive impact on their classroom performance. They enjoy high comfort levels with their respective teachers and view their teachers as a comfortable presence in their lives. They work harder for these teachers because they perceive them as real human beings who truly care about them as individuals.

Mrs. Myers believes her students, for the most part, would perceive her to be friendly, reliable, dependable, trustworthy, honest and fair—all components of caring relationships, but these valuable traits do not translate into a deep and passionate concern for her students as perceived by both Paul and Joe. For Paul, Mrs. Myers’ high-performing student, his relationship with her is more transactional. She teaches the class, he does the work. Still, he admits that a better relationship with Mrs. Myers would be beneficial and could result in better performance on his part. At times, Paul perceives Mrs. Myers as distant and uncaring. He seriously doubts he would consider seeking out Mrs. Myers for advice on anything beyond academics.

Joe, Mrs. Myers low-performing student, does not perceive any interest on the part of Mrs. Myers with respect to Joe outside of the classroom. And even inside the classroom, Joe perceives Mrs. Myers is not interested in anything other than having Joe “doing the work.” He does not view her as caring, supporting, or encouraging and, accordingly, would not seek her counsel on any matter outside of the classroom. His perception of Mrs. Myers as an uncaring,
disconnected teacher has also contributed to his decision to withdraw from seeking academic help from her as well.

Another area of general agreement across all groups is the presence of high behavioral and academic standards, coupled with high expectations on the part of teachers that their students will meet those standards. Consistent with all three teachers is their insistence that all students can learn. Mrs. Myers believes some will choose not to, while Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy profess that, not only can all students learn, all students will—with their help. Both teachers view anything less than that as unacceptable and they accept personal responsibility when a student fails or is in danger of failing. To paraphrase Mrs. Everly, there is always one more strategy, one more thing she can try. She’s not going to give up on a kid; it’s never too late.

Consistent in all six students, and somewhat surprisingly so, is the understanding that high expectations for academic performance is a good thing. There may be some general grumbling about all the work and demands placed on them by their teachers, but they believe their teachers maintain tough standards in the best interests of their students. Even Joe agrees that having an adult who knows what he can expect down the road is important. As such, all six view high standards for behavioral and academic performance as components of teacher support. As will be seen, for the most part, the students trust their teachers to help them along the way as they attempt to meet high standards. Where the teachers part company is in their philosophical and pedagogical approaches with respect to providing appropriate motivational strategies and tools necessary for their students to meet those tough standards. From the students’ perception, the strategies employed by their respective teachers makes all the difference in the world—for better or worse.
All three teachers include in their definition of support an attempt to make the curriculum and their daily lessons relevant to their students by connecting it to something of meaning in their lives. Mrs. Everly’s and Mr. Kennedy’s students, both high-performing and low-performing, perceive this to be the case more often than not. Mrs. Myers’ students see that component of support less frequently. When they see possible applications of theory, they fail to see relevance. When they see relevance, they fail to see immediate application in their lives. Still, Mrs. Myers’ perception is that she introduces “fun labs” and that they “do fun things like that” in the hope her students will see principles of physics “working in the real world.” Her students fail to share that perception the majority of the time spent with her.

An additional component of support identified by the teachers is to present the material in a variety of ways to accommodate individual learning styles and to make the classroom more enjoyable and fun. Both the high-performing and low-performing students in Mrs. Everly’s class and in Mr. Kennedy’s class perceive that to be the case on both counts. All four agree that their respective teachers present the material in a way that makes it easier for them to comprehend. They believe that individualized teaching strategies based on unique needs best meet their requirements. The low-performing students in Mrs. Everly’s and Mr. Kennedy’s class agree that their teachers are adept with this strategy. They believe Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy are able to accomplish this because they know a great deal about their academic and personal lives. The class is fun and there are sufficient activities to keep them from getting bored. Paul, Mrs. Myers’ high-performing student, agrees that for the most part class is productive and enjoyable. Mrs. Myers presents the material in such a way that he easily grasps the concepts, although he would prefer more hands-on activities, which is his preferred learning style. He believes that if his teacher would incorporate a wider variety of activities, it would have a positive impact on his
comprehension. Paul is certain that Mrs. Myers is unaware of his preferred learning style. Joe, on the other hand, perceives the classroom activities as the “same old thing” and, as a consequence, he is bored. Joe is convinced that Mrs. Myers doesn’t “really teach” him. His perception is that Mrs. Myers teaches to students most like her. Both Paul and Joe agree that, on occasion, Mrs. Myers simply passes out the lab assignments with little instruction or supervision. They are left on their own to ask questions or to seek her assistance. This perception is held in stark contrast to Mrs. Myers’ perception that she provides considerable support during labs by indicating, “So, I just don’t hand it to them and say go to it.”

Another perception held by the students of Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy is that the teachers will do whatever is necessary for them to be successful. They believe this because of their perceptions that their teachers have a deep, personal, and caring commitment to them as individuals—a commitment to their success, which is grounded in an ethic of care for them as individual human beings.

While Mrs. Myers states that she too will do whatever is necessary to ensure her students’ success (“without cheating”), her low-performing student does not see it that way. In fact, Joe cannot articulate any strategy employed by Mrs. Myers to ensure his success other than being available for extra help and holding high expectations for his performance. Moreover, Joe doesn’t perceive that Mrs. Myers even believes he can be successful. Paul believes that Mrs. Myers might help “a little” along those lines, but he relies primarily on his intrinsic motivational attributes.

Another strategy utilized by Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy to motivate and encourage students is their generous use of compliments, congratulatory statements, praise, and words of appreciation for the work they do. Anna and Brittney, the low-performing students in Mrs.
Everly's and Mr. Kennedy's respective classes, respond favorably to these strategies. Anna exclaims that Mrs. Everly makes her feel “like the smartest person in world.” It is a belief that Anna tries to live up to. In other words, she works up to that expectation for her. Brittney, Mr. Kennedy's low-performing student, appreciates Mr. Kennedy's ability to always find something positive to say to her even when she fails to meet expectations. It is another reason why she works hard for him and persists in the face of adversity.

In Mrs. Myers' classroom, Paul does not see the value of compliments from Mrs. Myers. The fact that he rarely receives them is not important. Paul relies on his transactional posture with Mrs. Myers and, while he thinks compliments are nice, they are not what make him work hard. Joe, on the other hand, is not the recipient of praise or encouragement. Again, Joe stresses that Mrs. Myers has not applied any strategy or technique that leads him to believe he can be successful in the class even if he put forth the effort. It has given him another reason to disengage and give up.

Mrs. Everly's and Mr. Kennedy's students, both high-performing and low-performing, agree that the use of humor by their respective teachers provides an additional reason to come to class and persist when the going gets tough. Humor has allowed these students to see the human side of their teachers and they perceive it as a valuable component of their learning experience. They can count on their teachers to put any issue or problem in perspective through the timely and effective use of humor. Humor is used to defuse confrontation, poke good-natured fun at each other, and to keep the lesson exciting and fun. Both Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy see it as an indispensable tool when relating to students, engaging them in the curriculum, or motivating them to do things that they otherwise might not do. Ironically, when Mrs. Myers was asked to
identify her greatest strength she replied, “humor.” Regrettably, both Paul and Joe see little
evidence of its application in her classroom.

Research Questions

(1) What are the student perceptions of teacher support?

Teacher support, as perceived by student-participants, consists of five general
components. First is additional academic help outside of normal classroom hours. Krystal, Mrs.
Everly’s high-performing student, best summarizes this when she describes the availability of
Mrs. Everly. “She [Mrs. Everly] goes out of her way…like I said, ‘after school, or during lunch
period’ she’s right there to help you.” This is a common theme among low-performing and high-
performing students as evidenced by Joe, Mrs. Myers’ low-performing student, who agrees that
extra help is available. “She announces it [extra help] is available to everyone.” Whether or not
students take advantage of the additional help seems to be immaterial. The fact that it is available
is sufficient evidence to the students that their teachers support academic achievement. Paul,
Mrs. Myers’ high-performing student, although he has not had to take advantage of her offer,
recognizes how helpful the support is, especially to students who are struggling. “There are a
couple of kids that are not doing so well. But they’re coming in before school because I heard
them talking about it.” Krystal elaborates on this component by adding, “I know another girl
who is really having trouble and she [Mrs. Everly] said, ‘check your schedule, we’ll get together
after class or during lunch.’ So, I’ve definitely seen that.”

Second, maintaining high expectations for academic and behavioral performance,
especially when the teachers are able to demonstrate how meeting high standards benefits each
student directly, are perceived as important components of student perceptions of teacher
support. Joe, Mrs. Myers’ low-performing student, as much as he struggles in physics, captures
the essence of this component when commenting on his teacher’s high standards. “It’s preparation for college. Now I can see where she’s coming from. So...I mean high standards, but fair standards and I respect [her] for that. She knows what’s coming up for us and we don’t yet.” When Michelle, Mr. Kennedy’s high-performing student, was asked if Mr. Kennedy pushed her hard academically, she replied. “He won’t let you off the hook.”

Third, lessons that students can relate to and that are tied to real world applications are viewed as another way teachers support their students. Examples include Anna’s description of Mrs. Everly’s attempt to use a math concept to explain a gas bill. For Anna, she came to appreciate how a math formula “actually will be [used] in the future.” Krystal describes how her teacher always relates concepts to future applications. “It makes you want to listen more.” And in Mrs. Myers’ class, both students agree that relating concepts to the “big picture” would be beneficial.

Fourth, teachers are willing to get involved in their personal lives when the teachers’ interventions are perceived by the students as supportive of the students’ personal goals and overall well being. This component does not flow directly from a teacher knowing a specific problem in a student’s life, although the teacher may be aware of a particular problem. Rather, teacher involvement in a student’s personal life flows naturally from the ethic of care. A caring teacher will respond to students’ personal problems with appropriate and meaningful interventions. The perception of the students with respect to caring teachers includes the ability of the student to go to the teacher with a personal problem if necessary and that the teacher will offer assistance in anyway he or she can. Anna offers a summary of this component when describing how Mrs. Everly reacts to Anna when asked for help on a personal issue. “She cares a lot about us...she would take time out of anything, stop what she is doing for a student.”
Fifth, and perhaps most important, designing lessons that take into consideration individual learning styles is viewed as an essential component of teacher support. I suggest this component is perhaps most important because all of the students, with the exception of Michelle, articulated to me that they know how they best learn; they know their individual learning styles. They agree that they perform better academically, or could perform better academically, if their teachers know this about them and provide a variety of activities to accommodate individual preferences. Recall that Paul, Mrs. Myers’ high-performing student, wishes his teacher knew he is a hands-on learner. His belief is that, not only would the class be more enjoyable, but he would probably perform better as well.

It should be noted that, even in the absence of these components in their relationships with their respective teachers, students at all performance levels viewed them as indicators of supportive teachers and acknowledge them when they see them applied to their peers.

(2) What are the low-performing and the high-performing students’ perceptions of teacher support?

In addition to the components itemized above, low-performing students’ perceptions of teacher support include teachers who provide individual attention to them, are friendly, approachable, caring, and committed to doing whatever is required to ensure academic success. Anna confirms this perception of Mrs. Everly by saying, “She basically wants me to succeed in everything I do, and if I don’t, she wants to work with me”. Accordingly, students are more likely to seek help from a teacher who possesses those traits. Moreover, low-performing students perceive teachers who are trustworthy, reliable, and dependable as supportive. They believe these traits are essential because, once they have felt comfortable enough to approach their teacher with an academic or personal problem, they want that issue to be secure with them.
They enter into the relationship with the teacher perceiving they are safe and that they can depend on their teacher to act in his or her best interest. Even if they are unable to articulate how those components directly provide support for them as they pursue academic goals, they intuitively know that supportive teachers possess them. As referenced in Chapter V, this is the case with Brittney, Mr. Kennedy’s low-performing student who sees Mr. Kennedy as “reliable, fair, dependable, [and] trustworthy.”

The reader will recall that Joe, Mrs. Myers’ low-performing student, does not perceive her as caring, supporting, or encouraging. His perception of Mrs. Myers as an uncaring, disconnected teacher has contributed, in part, to his decision to stop “doing the work” in her class. The fact that Joe is not the beneficiary of a caring and supportive relationship with his teacher suggests that a caring and supportive relationship with his teacher would have made a difference. When Joe was asked to think of the best teacher he ever had—a teacher possessing the traits already identified—and would that teacher have made a difference, he indicated that, among other variables, the teacher would have made a difference for him. When pressed as to why the teacher would have made a difference, Joe replied, “He’s more real.”

High-performing students’ perceptions of teacher support closely parallel the perceptions held by their lower-performing peers. High-performing students’ perceptions of teacher support include a recognition of teachers who are available outside of classroom hours for additional academic help, those who maintain high behavioral and academic expectations, make lessons relevant and meaningful, are willing to get involved in their personal lives and adapt teaching styles to meet the needs of individual students. Krystal, Mrs. Everly’s high-performing student, credited these attributes in Mrs. Everly as having contributed to the academic success she currently enjoys. Michelle, Mr. Kennedy’s high-performing student, indicated that she has a
high degree of respect for Mr. Kennedy because he possesses and applies these attributes. Furthermore, she is aware of the fact that Mr. Kennedy applies these attributes to low-performing students as well.

The extent to which they take advantage of this support varies from student to student and from component to component. For example, all three high-performing students perceive availability of teachers to provide additional help outside of classroom hours as a strong component of teacher support; however, only Michelle has taken advantage of it. Along similar lines, high-performing students more easily adapt to preferred teaching styles and are less concerned about teachers adapting to a more preferred learning style. As Paul, Mrs. Myers’ high-performing student, indicated, even though he has a preferred learning style he is easily able to understand the concepts regardless of the manner in which they are presented by Mrs. Myers. While relevant lessons are recognized as beneficial and preferred, high-performing students are more likely to grasp theory and concepts more readily than their low-performing peers and, as such, relevant lessons are not as critical to them as they might be with low-performing students.

(3) What are the teacher perceptions of teacher support of their students?

Mrs. Everly, Mr. Kennedy, and Mrs. Myers agree that high behavioral and academic standards coupled with clear expectations that students will meet those standards are important components of teacher support. To help students meet their expectations, they are available at most any time to provide additional academic assistance. They believe their lessons are relevant to the students and they attempt to connect the content of their lessons to real world problems. Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy expand on this by attempting to individualize instruction based on a student’s individual needs. They offer a variety of instructional activities in recognition of preferred learning styles and they are sensitive to issues in students’ personal lives that
negatively impact student learning. To help mitigate those problems, Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy insist that they know as much about each one of their students as the students are comfortable sharing, including future plans, aspirations for college, or career options under consideration. By design, Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy attempt to build caring relationships with each student with the intent to provide a more encompassing net of support to meet individual needs. Their deep commitment to caring relationships—one human being with another human being—is the bedrock upon which all other supportive measures are built. This is their first commitment to students.

To a lesser degree, Mrs. Myers attempts to individualize instruction based on individual needs, but is wary of time constraints and the volume of material that needs to be covered. Placing a high premium on those two limiting factors, Mrs. Myers believes she can best support her students in the long run by emphasizing that the primary responsibility for learning rests with the student. And with this responsibility comes the responsibility to do the work necessary for success. She believes she is not supportive of students if she demands anything less. Furthermore, strong support comes from treating each student fairly and consistently. She rarely makes exceptions to her policies because of individual problems and strongly believes by doing so she is preparing her students for the real world. Anything less is not supportive.

(4) What are teacher strategies for providing support to their students?

On the surface this seems like a relatively straightforward question with an easy answer. At first glance, it is possible to confuse the concept of support as indicated in this study with strategies for providing support; however, they are not the same. A closer examination reveals a more complex relationship between the espousal of support on the part of teachers and the manner in which it is delivered. While some agreement can be reached on what constitutes
support, how the common components of support are delivered is a matter of philosophical persuasion and personal choice.

The word “support” can be viewed as an action construct implying that the definition of support and strategies of providing support are one in the same. While closely related, there are subtle and yet critical differences. And the differences lie in the manner by which individuals go about implementing them. To illustrate these important differences each component of support, as perceived by the teachers, will be considered.

Making yourself available for additional academic help is one component of support. Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy, in addition to general class overtures, seek out individuals in need of extra help and extend personal invitations. Mrs. Myers prefers a more general approach.

Maintaining high academic standards with the expectation that students will meet those standards is another common component of support identified. But simply maintaining high standards without providing the means to achieve those standards is counterproductive and meaningless. Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy believe that the means to reach those tough standards lies in the quality of the relationship they enjoy with students. Recalling that all of their strategies are embedded in caring relationships, both teachers enter into the presence of their students with an appreciation of his or her unique strengths and talents, recognizing that all will carry with them some degree of burdens from outside the classroom that impact academic achievement. They work hard at uncovering those strengths so they can nurture them and thereby help build a student’s sense of efficacy. They embrace students’ burdens in the belief that by sharing them they are cut in half. To make it inviting and safe for students to enter into this caring relationship, Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy expose their humanness through humor and sharing personal stories. They allow their students to see them as authentic human beings
with shared values such as trustworthiness and respectfulness. Their strategy is embedded in the knowledge that if they can enter into authentic relationships with students, then students are more likely to fully engage in the curriculum and persist in the face of adversity. To that end, Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy will invite, encourage, and cajole their students to enter into caring relationships with them. Within those relationships, the teachers hope to provide support based on individual needs and circumstances. If students view them as authentic with shared values, then students are more likely to enter into a mutually beneficial and caring relationship with their teacher. Once established, students are more likely to share personal stories, as well as their individual aspirations, hopes, and dreams. In doing so, the teachers hope to gain insight into problems outside the classroom that impede learning or how they might devise additional instructional strategies to meet individual needs. Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy use copious amounts of praise and encouragement along the way, especially for their low-performing students. They try to find positive things to say to their students even when they fall below expectations. They are generous with their compliments and they actively seek opportunities to deliver them.

Flowing from caring relationships, and the details they learn about each individual student as a result of those relationships, is the ability to intuitively create lessons with meaning for their students. The ability to deliver the preferred pedagogical practice of tailored instruction based on individual needs and circumstances is perceived as essential by both teachers. For Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy, developing and nurturing caring and supporting relationships are prerequisites to demanding and expecting high academic achievement.

Mrs. Myers’ strategies for delivering support are less relational and more transactional in nature. Preparing her students for the harsh realities of high-stakes testing, rigorous college
curriculum, or life in general, dictates that she place the primary responsibility for learning
squarely on the shoulders of her students. If they do the work, they will succeed. Beyond that,
she perceives herself to be humorous and engaging. She attempts to build lessons that are
meaningful and fun for her students. Basing instruction on individual needs, or taking into
consideration outside influences on student learning, while desirable, are not perceived to be
significant when considering the constraints of time or the volume of material that must be
covered.

(5) What are the student perceptions of strategies employed by teachers to provide support?

There is agreement between both low-performing students and high-performing students
that the manner in which teachers go about providing support to them can make a significant
difference in how hard they work, remain on task, and, ultimately, attain academic goals. Even
for Joe and Paul, Mrs. Myers’ low-performing student and high-performing students,
respectively, being the beneficiary of a caring teacher’s commitment to their students’ overall
well being, coupled with an ability to personalize instruction, are not only desirable but also
preferred. Both students do not perceive any strategy exhibited by Mrs. Myers that would lead
them to conclude she embraces caring, interpersonal relationships as a strategy to provide
support for them. While the components of support are present, they are not as effective as they
could be because Mrs. Myers lacks specific information related to individual student needs—
information they believe could motivate them to work harder and enhance their academic
performance.

The remaining students, Krystal, Anna, Michelle, and Brittney, perceive their teachers to
be caring and deeply committed to their individual success, both now and in the future. The
perception of their teachers as authentic, real human beings who will do whatever is necessary to
help ensure their academic success spurs them on to work harder and achieve more. The teachers’ willingness to get involved in their personal lives when invited is perceived by the students as an effective strategy to provide additional support. The teachers’ comfortable presence in the lives of their students is seen by the students as an effective strategy that allows them to seek additional help, ask for individual attention, or share personal information that might provide insight into how they best learn or into circumstances in their personal lives affecting their academic performance—all components of support. All six students share the same perception—whether they take advantage of this strategy, or whether it is even offered—that entering into a caring relationship with an authentic teacher has desirable outcomes.

(6) What explains the disparity, if any, in student perceptions of teacher support and teacher perceptions of providing support?

As the findings presented in the past two chapters have indicated, there is no significant disparity in student perceptions of teacher support and teacher perceptions of providing support. Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy espouse specific components of support and embrace caring, authentic relationships with their students as their primary strategy for providing support. Mrs. Myers shares with Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy common components of support. But she parts company with them by espousing a strategy of providing support which relies heavily on the student accepting responsibility for his or her own learning and for the work necessary for success. Both Paul and Joe perceive this strategy precisely as it is espoused by Mrs. Myers.

Summary

With the advent of standards-based curriculum, high stakes testing, and strong accountability measures for student academic performance, it has become increasingly important to provide students with the support necessary to meet ever-increasing academic performance
standards in an ever-increasing competitive world. The components of support that have been identified in this study are believed to be essential by the teachers that espouse them and perceived to be of importance by the students who are the beneficiaries of the espoused support. A significant piece of the data collected during the course of this study suggests that the manner in which support is provided or delivered to students is perceived by students to be of equal, if not more, value than the components of support themselves. Components of support, as identified in this study, are perceived by students to be essential but insufficient in the absence of effective strategies to provide or deliver those components. Overwhelmingly, whether they are recipients of this strategy or not, the students in this study placed high value on teachers who provided support by first attempting to establish caring relationships with them. They cite teachers who employ strategies of trust, openness, honesty, and authenticity as teachers who they work harder for and persist longer with on-task behavior, even in the face of adversity. Teachers who students would most likely seek out for additional help are perceived to be friendly, approachable, and real. All six students believe they enjoy academic success, or could achieve academic success, or could excel to even higher academic performance levels if their teachers grounded the identified components of support in a strategy that included genuine concern for their overall well being, an interest in their future plans, and a better understanding of the circumstances in their lives that impact classroom performance.

Mrs. Everly, Mr. Kennedy, and Mrs. Myers agree that preparing students for high-stakes tests, entry into the work place, or entry into college is of primary importance. Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy have chosen to provide the components of support required for success by employing an ethic of care. From this ethic, they hope to engage their students more fully in the curriculum and motivate them to persist throughout life’s challenges. Mrs. Myers prefers a
strategy that is more task-oriented and student-driven. She best supports her students by adopting a strategy that requires them to accept responsibility for their learning and for the work associated with it. The data indicate all six students work harder and achieve more with the preferred approach taken by Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy.
CHAPTER VII. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore student perceptions of teacher support among low-performing and high-performing students and teachers’ perceptions of providing support to their students. Important questions were whether high performing students differ from low performing students in their perceptions of teacher support and how teacher perceptions of delivering support to their students compared to student perceptions of teacher support. Of significance was whether or not students’ perceptions of teacher support have any impact on students’ classroom performance and subsequent academic achievement. The data collected throughout this study were used to construct a common definition of teacher support and to assess the impact teacher support has on student engagement in the curriculum, motivation, persistence, and ultimately, on student academic achievement.

Contained in the discussion of the research questions in the preceding chapter are five components of teacher support as identified by the students. Both high-performing and low-performing students identified supportive teachers as those teachers who provide additional help outside normal classroom hours, maintain high behavioral and academic standards, provide relevant lessons tied to real world applications, get involved in students’ personal lives, especially when personal issues jeopardize academic achievement or overall well being, and present lessons that are designed to take into account individual learning styles or unique personal circumstances.

As the components of teacher support emerged, a number of related variables emerged as well. Trustworthiness, respectfulness, friendliness, truthfulness, approachability, reliability, dependability, and humor were identified by all six students—whether they perceived them in
their respective teachers or not—as traits associated with supportive teachers. These are also traits associated with individuals who care for others (Mayeroff, 1995; Beck, 1994). The data also indicated that all three teachers perceive themselves to possess these traits and that their students would validate these perceptions. However, the mere presence of the components of support and associated traits does not necessarily translate into enhanced student performance. Nor does the teacher’s perceived possession of these traits necessarily translate into students’ recognition of them. Inextricably linked to the components associated with teacher support is the manner in which teachers deliver or provide the components of support to their students.

Starratt’s (2004) model of the ethics of responsibility, authenticity, and presence provided the framework that allowed this researcher to not only explore the components of teacher support more thoroughly, but the associated traits that emerged as well. More important, the presence of these ethics in student-teacher interactions provides valuable insight as to how teachers might provide support to their students as they pursue academic goals. Taken in the context of their inter-dependent relationship—the components of teacher support as identified in this study, the associated teacher traits that have emerged, and the ethics of responsibility, authenticity, and presence—a clear paradigm emerges that provides meaningful support for students and, ultimately, enhanced student academic performance.

Meaning Making

Certainly, from Mrs. Myers’ perspective, there are factors in students’ personal lives that negatively impact student learning (DeBlois, 1989; Gibson, 1997). She has strong personal views on this topic. She indicated that some personal life factors are so horrific she would prefer not to think about them. Besides, she believes that many of those negative factors are outside her immediate control anyway. She acknowledges that some students are going to fail, either from
lack of effort or other personal problems they cannot overcome or resolve (Goodlad & Keating, 1994). Accordingly, her interactions with students are transactional in nature with less emphasis placed on relational components. Mrs. Myers believes that if students do the work as it is prescribed, they will be successful.

In contrast to this approach, Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy espouse an approach to student-teacher relationships that encompasses a more comprehensive understanding of the issues in students’ personal lives that impact student learning. More important, they focus their efforts on those things over which they do exercise control in the belief that this approach will provide the type of support needed for students to overcome negative factors affecting academic achievement or goal attainment (Giroux, 1994; Hixson & Tinzmann, 1990; Klem & Connell, 2004). The distinction made between the approaches espoused by Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy and those expressed by Mrs. Myers is significant in that the approach used by Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy is tacit acknowledgment that ineffective pedagogy contributes to poor academic achievement, especially when teachers fail to embrace strategies that enhance the learning environment and help mitigate many of the negative factors that personal problems and family circumstances have on academic outcomes (Land & Legters, 2002). This contrast is important to our basic understanding of teacher support and will be revisited when the ethic of responsibility is considered. But the contrast is highlighted when considering the differences that exist between teachers with respect to building relationships with students.

A closely related concept to pedagogical practices that enhance student learning is the presence of strong motivational strategies to improve student performance. Recalling Stipek (2002), the reader is reminded that a strong inter-personal relationship between a student and teacher is a significant motivational strategy that enhances student learning. Brophy (2004),
added that the most useful motivational strategy that teachers can employ to support student academic performance is building close, caring relationships with students. This practice is consistent with Mrs. Everly’s and Mr. Kennedy’s interactions with their respective students. An additional benefit resulting from this practice is the development of enhanced perceptions of self-efficacy on the part of the students (Pajares, 2002).

Mrs. Everly, Mr. Kennedy, and Mrs. Myers believe all students can learn. The teachers also believe they are uniquely situated to provide positive influence on academic outcomes (Scales, Benson, & Mannes, 2002). Unfortunately, some students do fail to meet minimum academic standards (Manning & Baruth, 1994). Joe, Mrs. Myers’ low-performing student, is an example of a student who has failed in spite of his teacher’s perception of her positive influence on learning. Starratt’s (1991) ethic of care requires educators to determine exactly how they will respond when students fail to learn, especially when the teachers believe all students can learn and when teacher support and strong student-teacher interpersonal relationships are better predictors of academic outcomes than many environmental factors (Deiro, 2005; Miller, 2000; Yeung & McInerney, 1999).

It is at this point that Starratt’s (2004) model of the ethics of responsibility, authenticity, and presence frame Mrs. Everly’s, Mr. Kennedy’s, and Mrs. Myers’ response when their students are in need of their support to help them achieve their academic goals or overcome personal problems that threaten their ability to achieve academic goals. To find more meaning in their responses, to gain a better appreciation of their interactions with students, and to better understand the impact their responses have on their students’ self-efficacy, motivation, persistence, and academic goal attainment, the ethic of care must be considered. It is the ethic of
care upon which the ethics of responsibility, authenticity, and presence are built. And it is the
constant interplay and weaving of these ethics that creates a blanket of support for students.

*Ethic of Care*

Just as the word “care” can be interpreted in many ways, so too, are there many ways in
which care can be applied. To be sure, Mrs. Everly, Mr. Kennedy, and Mrs. Myers care about
their students. The mere presence of high academic standards with teacher expectations that
those standards will be met suggests that the teachers want what is best for their students and that
the teachers themselves are made more whole when their students succeed. Consider,
additionally, that all three of our teachers commit significant personal time without additional
financial compensation to assist students who are struggling to meet academic standards. But to
care *about* an individual is not the equivalent of caring *for* an individual—an important
distinction when evaluating the students’ perspective of what it means to have a caring teacher
(Beck, 1994). From the students’ perspective, caring teachers do specific things for them and
take positive action on their behalf. For Anna, care meant that Mrs. Everly was there to help her
through a personal problem at home. For Michelle, care meant that Mr. Kennedy was there to
help her overcome her fear of public speaking. The data suggested that care from the teachers’
perspective could be manifested in multiple ways (Duke & Sessoms, 1991; Miller, 2000). For
Mrs. Myers, care meant making sure her students were prepared for high stakes testing or the
rigor of post-secondary education. She accomplishes this through high standards and strict
accountability. But from the students’ perspective, care meant that teachers have sufficient
knowledge of them and their unique circumstances that enables teachers to meaningfully
intervene on their behalf—whether it is of a personal nature or academic matter. Mrs. Everly
knows Anna is having trouble at home and Mr. Kennedy knows Michelle is afraid of public
speaking. Knowing is inextricably linked to care (Mayeroff, 1995; Gilligan, 1987). For Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy, knowing about their students includes knowing their hopes and aspirations, strengths and weaknesses, or what they like and dislike.

Truly knowing their students drives the measure and manner in which teachers provide care and support for students. For Mrs. Everly it means getting to know what “makes a student tick.” She asks her students to complete a personal information survey at the beginning of each year that includes biographical data. From it she gleans useful insight into her students’ personal and social lives. She has a better understanding of her students’ interests and what their goals are—academically and personally—now and in the future. She frequently refers to her data sheet seeking bits of information that may help her when interacting with a student or devising strategies that may be useful when intervening on a student’s behalf. She uses her knowledge of students to better understand how they learn best. She learns her students’ strengths so she can build on them and she learns her student’s weaknesses so she can recognize and capitalize on the opportunities for growth they represent. By doing this she is conveying the message to her students that she cares and that she cares sufficiently enough to do whatever is necessary to help her students achieve their goals. Her students agree. From Anna’s perspective, Mrs. Everly is not just there “to collect a paycheck at the end of the week.” Anna believes that Mrs. Everly truly does care and that she tries to connect with all her students. Mrs. Everly knows how Anna feels, knows if she is having a good day or not. She also knows that Mrs. Everly is there if she needs her. Krystal also perceives that Mrs. Everly cares enough about her that she could “count on her for anything.” Both students report that they respond favorably to Mrs. Everly’s academic demands because they perceive that Mrs. Everly is motivated in all she does out of genuine care and concern for her students (Brophy, 2004; Deiro, 2005).
Mr. Kennedy believes that caring for his students requires him to be a steward for his students. And to be an effective steward he recognizes the need to know as much about his students as possible. Like Mrs. Everly, he has students complete an interest survey at the beginning of each semester and, like Mrs. Everly, he uses the information to enhance his relationship with his students and to demonstrate his desire to know each of them as individuals. Mr. Kennedy recognizes that each student brings to the classroom unique gifts and talents and that to care for his students means he will provide whatever support is required of him so his students can realize the full potential of their individual talents (Mayeroff, 1995). He looks for a connection with his students and uses the connection to build trusting and caring relationships so he may better serve the needs of his students (Deiro, 2005; Stipek, 2002). Michelle perceives that to be the case so much so that she is comfortable enough to go to Mr. Kennedy for help on any problem—personal or academic. Michelle’s classmate, Brittney, may not go to Mr. Kennedy for help on personal matters but she honestly believes that Mr. Kennedy cares for her and wants what is best for her. For Brittney, it is nice to know that Mr. Kennedy is caring enough that she could seek his help on any matter if she needed to.

Mrs. Myers is more complex with respect to demonstrating care for her students. From her perspective, to care for students is to help them get through the class by “whatever means you can.” She cares enough to devote considerable personal time for extra tutoring sessions for her students. Joe, Mrs. Myers’ low-performing student, has taken advantage of her offer for extra help, but it proved ineffective. She holds high standards for her students and expects them to do the work necessary to meet those standards. She knows the many academic challenges that lie ahead for her students and she believes she can best demonstrate her care for them by making absolutely certain they are prepared to meet those challenges. Joe appreciates the extra time she
is available for him but beyond that does not perceive any depth of care in their relationship. In Chapter IV, reference was made to Joe’s great insight and intuitive sense about the world that surrounds him. While he appreciates Mrs. Myers’ willingness to help, he views it as a contractual obligation on her part and nothing more. And it is only an obligation to the extent her students’ hold her accountable to the contract. In other words, if Joe does not take the initiative to seek her out for help, Mrs. Myers will not encourage him to engage in the contract. Care requires more than fulfilling a contractual requirement. Care starts with knowing the realities of the other person in the relationship and continues with turning one’s self over to that person’s reality and remaining committed to that person’s well being and self-actualization. In the absence of this care, Joe perceives no real support or depth of caring on the part of Mrs.. Myers. Still, he appreciates the fact that she holds high expectations for him because she knows what he’ll need academically in the future and he doesn’t. For Joe, this is a measure of Mrs. Myer’s care for him, albeit a small one. Like Joe, Paul’s perception of Mrs. Myers’ care for students is narrowly defined. Paul’s only measure of care with respect to Mrs. Myers is her willingness to provide extra academic help beyond classroom hours.

Mayeroff (1995) identified several personal attributes that are consistent with caring individuals. Among them are patience, honesty, and trust. They are mentioned here because all three teachers believe they possess those virtues and all six students report that their respective teachers, for the most part, possess them as well. The students also agree with their teachers that they are friendly and approachable. What is significant about these data is that the mere presence of these attributes does not translate into a caring relationship with students. And as the data suggest, a caring teacher is perceived to be more than possessing specific traits. Rather, a caring teacher is prepared to take whatever action is necessary on behalf of the student in
recognition of the personal responsibility he or she assumes as a partner in a caring relationship (Enomoto, 1997). All three teachers in this study perceived themselves to be caring teachers, possessing the traits associated with caring individuals. However, only Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy were perceived by their respective students as caring teachers. The data indicate that the characteristics common to Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy are their willingness to get involved in their students’ personal lives, especially when circumstances in their students’ personal lives threaten academic goals, to create and present meaningful lessons that can be applied to everyday situations, and base instruction on individual needs and learning styles. A significant outcome from this study is that the students report that, in a caring relationship, they work harder for their teachers, persist in the face of adversity, and achieve at higher levels than would have been possible in the absence of this type of relationship. Caring interpersonal relationships with teachers are perceived by the students in this study, who are the beneficiaries of caring interpersonal relationships with teachers, as the primary factor in their academic success.

*Ethic of Responsibility*

Starratt’s (2004) ethic of responsibility suggests that educators have a moral responsibility to take proactive steps on behalf of students. To varying degrees, the teachers presented in this study have accepted responsibility to take action on behalf of their students. Staying after school to help a student with a math problem is certainly an action step taken by a teacher on behalf of his or her student. And the students all agree. But they also agree that teachers can be a resource for so much more.

In the previous section, I referred to Mrs. Everly’s and Mr. Kennedy’s approach to student support through the development of strong inter-personal relationships with their students as tacit acknowledgment that ineffective pedagogy contributes to undesirable outcomes
In short, they accept their responsibility to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem—whatever the problem might be. This means that they must engage in reflective practice to determine the extent of their responsibility when a student fails (Davis, 2001). And so for Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy, to be responsible for a student means more than helping a student after school or during lunch. The ethic of responsibility requires a healthy introspective inventory of personal assets that can be invested in the welfare of their students. Accepting responsibility for their students’ welfare means being available to work on personal issues as well, providing a supportive shoulder for a student to lean on, adapting pedagogy to meet individual needs, and referring students to other professionals when the scope of their students’ needs extend beyond their capabilities. Both teachers see themselves as advocates for their students and, as such, they have a responsibility to do more than avoid harm when interacting with them (Beck, 1994; Carter, 1998; Mayeroff, 1995). Both teachers understand that circumstances in a student’s personal life often times negatively impacts academic achievement in the classroom. Rather than accept that as a sad reality of life, Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy have consciously decided to accept the responsibility to make themselves available in the lives of their students for whatever purpose is necessary. As moral agents they cannot accept the status quo, especially when doing so violates their personal code of ethics. Their actions are based on deeply held beliefs and values that require them to act in all matters that affect their student-partner in a caring relationship—not limited to purely academic interventions (Cooper, 1998). Their respective students, both high-performing and low-performing, perceive Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy as not only caring teachers but caring teachers who will go to any length to assist them regardless of the nature of their difficulty. They feel safe and secure in the presence of these teachers and trust them to act on all matters with their best interests at heart. And this goes
to the heart of the ethic of responsibility. Educators not only have a responsibility for students, but a responsibility to students as well. This means recognizing students’ inherent value as human beings, safeguarding their civil rights, and nurturing individual strengths and talents to their full actualization (Starratt, 2004). In part, an educator’s responsibility to students includes providing a safe and nurturing environment that provides for the students’ overall welfare. It requires teachers to nurture caring relationships with their students (Starratt). Caring relationships require responsible action. This is a daunting task and one that surely helps shape and define the extent to which the teachers presented in this study are willing to go to help ensure the overall well being of their students.

In contrast to Mrs. Everly’s and Mr. Kennedy’s approach, Mrs. Myers prefers to accept responsibility primarily as a provider of information. She is a resource person on all matters as they relate to her subject area and she will commit whatever resources are necessary to assist a student in meeting her academic standards. But it is the student’s responsibility to make sure the work gets done regardless of circumstances in the student’s life. While Mrs. Myers is sensitive to individual student needs and problems that arise in students’ personal lives, she does not believe she is preparing them for real world realities where there is little tolerance for missed deadlines, unfinished assignments, and sloppy work—and even less tolerance for excuses. Mrs. Myers’ actions are based on those beliefs and consistent with what she believes are desirable outcomes (Cooper, 1998).

The data generated by her students indicate that, while they perceive Mrs. Myers to be dependable, reliable, and trustworthy, all traits associated with responsible people (Davis, 2001), they do not see those traits translated into responsible behavior on their behalf. Unfortunately, Mrs. Myers’ transactional approach to teaching has left the impression on both students that she
is not a very caring individual who is interested in their personal well being or personal goals. Both believe their academic performance could be better if they were the beneficiaries of a more caring and supportive relationship with Mrs. Myers. For achievement-oriented teachers like Mrs. Myers, this perception on the part of her students has significant practical implications. If teachers were made aware of data-driven strategies that could increase the number of students who meet high expectations and achieve academic success, they would likely embrace those strategies, especially in an era of strong teacher accountability for student success. More important, teachers would embrace those strategies out of a sense of responsibility to take proactive steps on behalf of their students. For Mrs. Myers, that would result in her students enjoying learning the content more and being prepared for high stakes testing and the rigors of post secondary education.

_Ethic of Authenticity_

The essence of the ethic of authenticity (Starratt, 2004) is being true to one’s values and acting in a manner consistent with the espousal of specific beliefs. The teachers in this study view their responsibilities to students differently and each interacts with students from different perspectives. At a basic level, all three are motivated to act on behalf of their students based on personal values and with an eye on outcomes they each view as desirable (Cooper, 1998). Without question, all three teachers want their students to be academically successful. As pointed out in the previous section, however, while all three want success for their students, Mrs. Myers believes that regardless of her best efforts some students will fail. And some of the students who do fail will fail as a result of their own irresponsibility. Regrettably, as the data indicated, Joe—Mrs. Myers’ low-performing student—resigned himself to failure weeks before the semester ever ended.
Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy believe that student success rates can be greatly improved through strong personal relationships and creative pedagogy that springs from strong student-teacher relationships. They are not ready to accept the premise that some students are going to fail regardless of teacher interventions. They have chosen not to allow negative outside factors to define the academic worth of their students. Instead, they have chosen to take responsibility for what they can control and use it to confront and ultimately overcome that which they cannot control (Taylor, 1991). They are true to their own beliefs and non-negotiable values and act in a manner consistent with them. This is the true essence of the ethic of authenticity (Starratt, 2004).

Of interest is the fact that Mrs. Myers espouses some of these same beliefs. She believes that she is taking responsibility for doing all she can for her students. She believes that when students fail, it is out of her control. In fact, she espouses the belief that if students do the work, they will be successful. By maintaining non-negotiable standards for academic performance, Mrs. Myers believes she is acting in the best interests of her students. Accordingly, her actions are consistent with her beliefs and, at a basic level, authentic. What is missing, however, is the recognition that truly authentic teachers are empowered to define the parameters in which they engage their students and in a very real sense determine academic outcomes (Bonnet & Cuypers, 2003; Taylor, 1991). Mrs. Myers has chosen to limit the ways she interacts with students and, as the data in this study suggest, has limited the potential for higher academic achievement among her students. In this regard, her students perceive her pedagogy as inauthentic.

Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy, on the other hand, fully engage their students, especially at-risk or marginalized students, with lessons that are seen through the students’ eyes as relevant and meaningful. The students will see meaningful applications of what they learn to real world problems (Starratt, 2004). The content will come to life and be viewed as part of the students’
world as opposed to a disconnected unit meant to be stored along side other disconnected units in a warehouse of useless knowledge.

Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy attempt to create such lessons. Mrs. Everly develops her lesson with individual learning styles in mind. She incorporates multiple strategies in each lesson to make them relevant to students in the hope they can grasp basic concepts. From there she can build more complex ideas. On other occasions she will start with complex ideas and break them down to more comprehensible, smaller units—always trying to demonstrate possibilities for application in real life. She believes there is always one more strategy you can find to help a student. Whatever her approach, both Anna and Krystal agree that she has a way of making even the complex comprehensible. Both agree that they are successful in math because of the way in which the material is presented by Mrs. Everly.

Mr. Kennedy also attempts to bring his content area to life for his students. He often does this by comparing characters in literature to current individuals in politics or entertainment. He believes his content area can be used to help students understand how they fit into the big picture. He has a passion for his students and he wants them to see all the possibilities that await them in life. Mr. Kennedy is committed to bringing reality to his everyday lessons in the hope his students will more fully engage in the content. Mr. Kennedy’s students notice and appreciate his attempts to make class real. Both Michelle and Brittney enjoy his class and look forward to going to class, in part, because of the way Mr. Kennedy presents the material. For them, it’s just easier to understand.

In many ways, Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy are two entirely different personalities. But as authentic teachers, they share one common component that is inextricably linked to the ethics of care, responsibility, and authenticity—and that component is that they know their students.
They truly know their students. Without knowing, they could not provide care for them, take responsibility for them, or engage them in meaningful ways. Knowledge of their students drives these ethics, and it is knowledge that draws the circle of support ever so tighter around the students.

To be an authentic teacher requires more than merely knowing about your students. Authentic relationships are mutually beneficial and, as such, require the teacher to share their authentic selves with their partners in the relationship—the students. Authentic teachers share personal stories with students, especially when they relate to issues in students’ lives. Authentic teachers laugh with students and are not afraid to show emotion. Authentic teachers admit their mistakes and acknowledge the fact that they do not have all the answers. Authentic teachers allow students to see their humanness. The students in this study identified authentic teachers as “real.” The students easily related to them and preferred teacher-student relationships with “real” teachers. From the perspective of the students in this study, authentic teachers made class interesting and more enjoyable. Accordingly, they looked forward to going to class and, as the data in this study suggest, the students performed at higher levels than would have been possible otherwise.

*Ethic of Presence*

The ethic of presence invites the participants in a relationship to step out of their comfort zone and explore the unique circumstances that surround the other participants in the relationship, as well as the limitless possibilities for individual growth within the relationship (Oster & Hamel, 2003; Starratt, 2004). Central to the discussion on caring and authentic teacher-student relationships is Mrs. Everly’s and Mr. Kennedy’s practice of entering into their students’ lives with the intent to gain a better understanding of the circumstances that surround them.
Entering into students’ lives implies more than merely acquiring information about them. It means remaining with students in the moment and validating them as human beings. For Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy it has meant taking students’ problems seriously. Presence also means that they have recognized the unique talents and abilities that even the most challenging students bring to the classroom (Carter, 1998). By their actions, Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy provide a comfortable presence for their students. It is a presence that is trusting and safe; a presence that is so comfortable and safe that all four of their respective students agree they would seek out the presence of Mrs. Everly or Mr. Kennedy if they needed to, regardless of the problem. Because of the distant relationship Joe and Paul have with Mrs. Myers, they would not seek her out for help on personal issues, although they both report that such a relationship would be beneficial.

Starratt (2004) suggests that while in the presence of another, educators demonstrate by their appearance or actions the extent to which they are committed to the well being of another individual. This ethical construct is essential to understanding the teacher-student relationships among the participants in this study and, as such, warrants additional consideration. Recalling the literature review, Starratt (2004) identified three types of presence: affirming, critical, and enabling. Following is a brief narrative describing how these components were operationalized in the classrooms of the teachers in this study.

Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy accept students for who they are. Both teachers seek to identify the unique gifts and talents each student possesses. Both teachers solicit additional personal information from their students in an effort to learn more about them as human beings. In so doing, they are conveying to their students that they respect them as humans and value their input. Their respective students recognize this and associate the practice with caring teachers. Their affirming presence also leads to the perception on the students’ part that their teachers are
“real.” Michelle speaks of Mr. Kennedy as pretty much a “regular person” and for Anna, affirming presence is the way Mrs. Everly makes her feel “like the smartest person in the world.” Mrs. Myers also provides an affirming presence with her students, but it is hierarchical in nature and her students rarely have an opportunity to express who they really are. Both Joe and Paul report that they seldom have opportunities to share personal stories in class and that Mrs. Myers has expressed no real interest in either students’ personal lives, their future plans, or career goals; from the students’ perspective that information is of no apparent value to Mrs. Myers.

The very essence of student-teacher interactions requires authentic communication to convey, from one person to the other, clear meaning with respect to needs, intent, and expectations. Unfortunately, communication can be distorted by a person’s appearance, pre-conceived appraisals by the other person, personal biases, or dominating posture (Starratt, 2004). The resulting inauthentic communication—from student to teacher and teacher to student—can often create barriers that, at best, diminish the quality of the relationship enjoyed by both parties, and, at worst, impede or prevent learning from taking place. The attitude can be played out by a teacher dismissing a student as lazy because he or she will not do the work or by a student disengaging from a teacher because he or she perceives him or her to be too hard, unsympathetic, or uncaring. These perceptions, on the part of both teacher and student, disrupt the educational process. They underscore the importance of traits such as approachability, friendliness, trustworthiness; a teacher who smiles and seems genuinely interested in the other party, so as to avoid sending a non-supportive, unapproachable, or uncaring message. More important, this presence requires teachers to take a critical look at what separates them from their students; what prevents them from entering into a meaningful and caring relationship with another human being. The data from the present study suggest Mr. Kennedy attempts to do this as evidenced, in
part, by the fact he writes very few behavioral referrals. He prefers to work it out with his students. As Mr. Kennedy stated, “I think it is a student and teacher coming together in way.” Mr. Kennedy also indicates that when he sees a student who is obviously down, that he must consciously “check in” with that student to determine the problem, even at his own emotional expense. This is the heartbeat of critical presence.

Mrs. Everly mirrors Mr. Kennedy with respect to critical presence. She also speaks to her students of the importance of her content and what is at stake for both teacher and student if competency in the content cannot be demonstrated at least at a basic level. Mrs. Everly recognizes that we do not live in “Ward Cleaver” households anymore. She is ever mindful that being in the moment helps to break down walls that separate teachers from students and make school a “place they want to come and learn.”

Mrs. Myers demonstrates critical presence in this regard—with respect to expectations and accountability—but does not actively seek out solutions to barriers that prevent creating authentic and caring relationships. In the end, students misinterpret her motives and fail to recognize how her pedagogy can have desirable outcomes, especially when her students in this study—both high-performing and low-performing—report that a more caring relationship with her would be preferable and most likely more beneficial.

Earlier in this section, I noted that all three teachers express the belief that all students can learn. Transferring that belief into a sense of efficacy on the part of the student is another matter. Underscoring the importance of a strong sense of efficacy, Pajares (2002) suggested that a strong sense of self-efficacy will, in many ways, determine the extent to which students will persist in the face of adversity and remain focused on academic goals. Accordingly, self-efficacy has a significant impact on academic achievement. Many students lack the belief that they can
be successful and, to make matters worse, without a significant adult in their lives—such as a
teacher—who instills in students a belief that they can be successful, more will fail (Shavelson,
Hubner, & Stanton, 1976; Yeung & McInerney, 1999). Mrs. Myers’ student, Joe, is an example
of such a student. Given a choice, he would rather be successful but in his case a series of
seemingly uncontrollable events led him to conclude that the effort was simply not worth the
work. His teacher, who places high value on effort and work, was not in a position to provide the
type of support he needed when he needed it. The failure stemmed from the fact that Joe could
not muster the personal resources alone to overcome this obstacle. An enabling presence on the
part of his teacher could have made a difference. This type of presence means more than
enabling a student to be successful because the material is taught well, or that there are high
expectations, or that additional help is available after school. This presence defines the type of
relationship a teacher is willing to enter into with a student. This presence signifies to the
student that, whatever the problem, we’re—teacher and student—in it together. And together we
can solve the problem (Starratt, 2004).

Theory Implications

Teacher Support of Students

The genesis for this study was embedded in my inability to clearly articulate what it
means to either provide support for students or to be the recipient of support from a teacher. The
word “support” conjures different meanings for different people and, as such, support, in terms
of teacher-student relationships, could not be defined or quantified easily. The problem was
twofold. To gain a better understanding of the construct of support not only required a
quantified definition of what support means, but it also begged for a framework that provided the
means to effectively deliver support to students. Utilizing a case study methodology (Creswell,
1998), I was able to thoroughly explore this topic and collect the data necessary to suggest a resolution to the aforementioned problems.

Arriving at the five components of support identified in this study was the result of synthesizing the perceptions of all participants, both teachers and students, from their respective perspectives as to what it means to either give or receive support. I did not discover significant disparity in perceptions of teacher support among the groups in this study. That is, high-performing students, low-performing students, and teachers agreed that support included providing time outside of the classroom for additional help, maintaining high academic and behavioral standards, creating lessons that students can relate to and apply in their lives, creating lessons based on individual learning styles and, with the exception of Mrs. Myers, teachers willing to get involved in students’ personal lives. Accordingly, as a significant result of this study, a construct of teacher support has been operationalized and provides a lens that brings the construct into clearer focus. As the data indicated, however, the mere presence of the components of teacher support identified in this study does not automatically translate into effective strategies for providing or delivering support to students. For example, maintaining high academic standards is not an action step. High expectations for student achievement does not mean that effective strategies are in place to help students meet teacher expectations. Moreover, even when a component of teacher support implies action on the part of the teacher, it does not necessarily mean that the action is productive or even present from the students’ perspective.

The results of this study indicated that, when the components of teacher support are embedded in deeply caring and active interpersonal relationships between teachers and students, students persist with on-task behavior even in the face of adversity, work more diligently toward
goal attainment, enjoy coming to and participating in class, and demonstrate higher levels of competency within the content regardless of personal circumstances surrounding them that have the potentiality of negatively influencing their academic performance (Gershman, 2004; Stipek, 2002). Deeply caring interpersonal relationships between teachers and students, although essential, are insufficient when standing alone to provide the type of support and intervention required to make a significant impact on student engagement and, ultimately, on student academic achievement, as the data in this study so clearly indicate. Caring requires action on the part of the caregiver (Mayeroff, 1995; Enomoto, 1997; Starratt, 1991).

The action required on the part of teachers, and reinforced by the data generated from the students in this study, is more than providing additional help after school, being friendly or approachable, maintaining high standards, or allowing students to traverse the topography of the curriculum without meaningfully engaging them in relevant ways in the content. The action required from teachers involves knowing their students sufficiently well that the teacher is aware of how particular students learn and is able to create lessons those students can relate to and apply in real world situations. This flows from the ethic of care and the ethic of responsibility. Knowing students sufficiently well so that pedagogy can be adapted to accommodate individual needs are action steps taken by authentic teachers. Most important, teachers have to be willing to get involved with students at a personal level; to know what makes them tick; to share their hopes and aspirations; to be sufficiently present in their lives that the teacher is in position to provide appropriate support and intervention consistent with individual needs and desirable outcomes. This is the essence of the ethic of presence. A supportive teacher is more than an academic advisor. Supportive teachers create interpersonal relationships with students so they
can enter into true partnerships to help other human beings realize their unique potential (Starratt, 2004).

The discussion on Starratt’s (2004) model of the ethics of responsibility, authenticity, and presence, coupled with the data generated by the student participants in this study, make clear one pertinent theme that clearly resonates with Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy. Students’ perceptions of supportive teachers are those teachers who embed within their strategies of support for students a genuine concern for their overall well being, an interest in their future plans, and a better understanding of the circumstances in their lives that impact academic achievement. The discussion also provided a better understanding of who the teachers are in terms of their humanness and authenticity. When students are in the presence of such teachers they report that they currently enjoy academic success, or could achieve at even higher levels. As such, both high-performing and low-performing students have contributed to the validation of Starratt’s (2004) model.

Starratt’s (2004) ethics of responsibility, authenticity, and presence have been effectively operationalized, particularly by Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy, and the data generated from their respective students validates Starratt’s paradigm.

Recommendations for Future Study

A replication of this study has the potential of adding strength and trustworthiness to the findings contained within this study or to provide another perspective from which to view the data generated. Although the student-participants in this study were selected on a purposive-random basis, gender distribution in each classroom did not result in equal representation. Mrs. Myers, the non-paradigm teacher, was represented by two male students. Both Mrs. Everly and Mr. Kennedy, the paradigm teachers, were represented by female students. For the purposes of
additional study, I recommend that consideration be given to the purposive sampling process to address this disparity. Having said that, the data generated in this study would be enriched when viewed from a feminist’s perspective on care and support. Boys and girls come to know things differently (Gilligan, 1982, 1987), and, as such, a replicated study that involves the perspective of all female teachers and all female students, or all male teachers and all male students, would shed light on perspectives of teacher support uniquely their own. Another line of inquiry worthy of exploration is the perception female students have with respect to support from male teachers and male students’ perceptions of support from female teachers.

As a result of this qualitative study, a construct of support has been operationalized. A quantitative study would lend empirical validity to the efficacy of this construct and expand the body of literature relative to teacher support. Similar to Powell’s (1997) study on the frequency of motivational strategies reported to be utilized by teachers to support content mastery and goal attainment as compared to the perceptions of low-performing and high-performing students with respect to academic self-efficacy as the result of receiving the teachers’ motivational strategies, I recommend a quantitative study that would explore the differences in perception of teacher support between low-performing and high-performing students utilizing the components of support identified in the current study. The teachers would indicate on a 5-point Likert scale the degree to which they employ each component of teacher support. The survey would be completed twice, once for lower performing students and once for higher performing students. Students would complete the same questionnaire, except the wording would be changed to reflect the students’ perspectives. Appropriate statistical analysis would be applied to determine the disparity, if any, between the teachers’ espousal of support and the students’ perception of
receiving support. The data generated would either lend empirical validity to the current study or provide another lens with which to view the construct of teacher support.

From an educational leader’s perspective, it would be beneficial to know if the construct of support as defined in this study remains valid when applied to other school-based relationships. Would teachers perceive support from their principals consistent with the principal’s perception of providing support? Would newly hired teachers perceive support received from their mentors in the same way mentors report providing support? From a more encompassing perspective, how would school districts report their perceptions of support from the community and reconcile those perceptions with the community’s perception of providing support to the school? All three scenarios provide fertile ground for additional research.

When considering my recommendations for future study, it should be noted that the principal of the high school in which the current study was conducted, Brian Ferguson, played a significant role in the purposive sampling process employed in this study as well as the selection of potential teacher participants. I mention it here to underscore the important consideration that must be given to the attributes and values of the principal to replicate or validate future studies on this topic. A deliberate selection process, with specific criteria in mind, was undertaken when searching for an appropriate administrator to collaborate with this study. By reputation within the educational community, and upon recommendation of a highly respected area superintendent who is a recognized authority on educational leadership, the principal in this study was selected and, consequently, his school was selected. It was essential to this study for the principal to thoroughly understand the ethics of care, responsibility, authenticity, and presence. In the weeks and months leading to the start of this study, I met with Mr. Ferguson on several occasions and for extended periods of time to discuss Starratt’s (2004) paradigm and to ascertain as to whether
or not we were on the same page with respect to the efficacy of Starratt’ model. We had candid conversations regarding the attributes most desirable in teachers and spoke in general terms of teachers who best fit this model. More important, without making commentary as to the effectiveness of any given teacher or teaching style, it was important that he be able to identify at least one teacher to participate in the study who he believed fit the model and at least one teacher who he believed did not fit the model. In Chapter IV, a composite of Mr. Ferguson was provided. I have also included the specific instructions given to him prior to the start of this study (see Appendix C). The support provided by Mr. Ferguson over the course of the study cannot be overstated. He was instrumental in securing times to interview the student-participants while minimizing the loss of instructional time. He was key in providing access to the building, which greatly enhanced the opportunity to casually observe the daily rituals of the various stakeholders within his building.

Practical Implications

I would be presumptuous to conclude that teachers-in-training are exposed to models such as Starratt’s (2004) or that significant time is spent on studying the efficacy of strong, interpersonal teacher-student relationships as they relate to academic achievement. The data in this study, and others (Duke & Sessoms, 1991; Miller, 2000; Yeung & McInerney, 1999), lend strong support to the position that academic gains can be achieved by students who are fortunate enough to have been influenced by teachers who model the ethics of care, responsibility, authenticity, and presence. Given the data it would seem reasonable that teacher preparation programs give serious consideration to a viable means of screening potential teacher candidates for attributes that are consistent with the research. While not purposefully trying to exclude individuals from entering the profession, screening results could be utilized to counsel entering
students with respect to the rigors of the profession, or to highlight the essential attributes
associated with successful teachers—all of which are grounded in research.

Along similar lines, on-going professional development, as it relates to student-teacher
relationships, would be useful especially for teachers who struggle finding ways to connect with
students. In an era of high-stakes testing, strong accountability, and considerable consequences
for school districts that fail to maintain minimum academic standards, providing on-going
opportunities for educators to engage in research-based best practices professional development
seems prudent and logical. The data in the current study indicate, at least from the students’
perspective, that students benefit from strong inter-personal relationships with teachers. The
students work harder, persist longer, and attain higher academic achievement as a result of these
relationships. These findings are the most significant findings flowing from the current study.
But the data also suggest that teacher support of students is not the same as providing support for
students—another significant finding in this study. To assume that teachers intuitively know
how to provide support for their students, even if they possess the components of support as
identified in this study, is myopic at best. Mrs. Myers maintains high academic standards but
fails to identify teaching strategies that would enable more of her students to meet those
standards. Teachers need to be exposed to those strategies in the hope they will be seen as
effective tools to achieve her own stated goals. When teachers like Mrs. Myers see the mutual
benefit received by employing the identified strategies of teacher support, they are more likely to
embrace them. Providing opportunities for Mrs. Myers to visit and work with teachers
employing such strategies is of practical importance. Time must be made available for such
activities. It would be irresponsible to assume that teachers fail to adopt effective teaching
strategies simply because they don’t care. Rather, it is a matter of exposing them to effective
practice, educating them on the efficacy of the practice, and providing the support they will require implementing the practice.

What is most often lacking when working with teachers who lack strong connections with students is knowledge of what students need most. Students appreciate tough standards and they especially appreciate teachers who are able to connect tough standards with a reason for meeting them. Moreover, students respect and value teachers who provide the means to achieve rigorous standards. Providing on going professional development regarding best practice in the classroom is of practical consideration.

Limitations

As significant as the results of this study are, this study was limited to nine case studies in one high school in northwest Ohio. Accordingly, application of the results should be viewed carefully when considering broader application (Creswell, 1998). Furthermore, this study did not attempt to identify any current circumstances in the participants’ lives that may have influenced the response provided on a given day and time. Additional limitations revealed themselves in the form of answers that seemed at times to be self-serving. At other times I felt as though some responses to my questions were less direct and honest. In the early stages of the interviews, I had the sense that at least one student was being cautious with regard to the responses provided so as to protect the teacher. The reader will recall that Brittney, Mr. Kennedy’s low-performing student, is shy and somewhat uncomfortable talking with people she does not know. Limitations of time prevented me from getting to know her better and securing a higher degree of trust, at least in the early stages of our time together. It should also be pointed out that the ability to accurately articulate what is on a respondent’s mind varies from individual
to individual. Furthermore, some individuals simply talk more than others, which at times produced responses that seemed to contradict earlier responses.

In the opening chapter I suggested that confounding variables such as socioeconomic status, race, and parental support may limit the generalizibility of this study. In retrospect, the diversity of participants in this study, as they relate to those confounding variables, may not have been as limiting as previously thought. In the end, all students—regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status—need caring adults in their lives. I draw attention to this because Starratt’s (2004) model is all encompassing. The data in the current study suggest that caring and supportive teacher relationships produce tangible benefits for all students. I mention it here because confounding variables should not be used as an excuse to withdraw from the important work of seeking solutions to students’ problems—regardless of their nature.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, kids want direction and yearn for teachers in their lives who are willing to provide direction; who are able to bring the “big picture” into focus and make it meaningful; who care enough to spend their emotional capital when they are in need of more than academic assistance; and who provide the support and encouragement needed to meet the ever-increasing demands placed on them in an increasingly depersonalized world. Furthermore, for adults who have earned the respect and trust of their students and who are perceived as caring human beings truly interested in their well being, they will find that their students will attempt the most difficult tasks, persist toward meeting high academic expectations in spite of the presence of obstacles or personal adversity, and will extend beyond that which they thought possible of themselves because of the positive influence their teacher has in their lives. Teachers who are able to do this will also find they have created life-long friends who will always credit
them in one way or another for whatever success they enjoy in life. It is a lasting legacy that is made possible for both teacher and student through the generous application of the ethic of care. And it is care that breathes life into the ethics of responsibility, authenticity, and presence.

As I reflect on my role as an educational administrator (and on the role I played in this study), I cannot help but wonder how often I must send confusing or misleading signals to the people I purport to lead. Like most people, I can be easily distracted by the seemingly endless demands placed on my time and the rapidity with which they arrive. Administrators, especially building principals, can be overwhelmed with urgent problems that require immediate attention. More often than not, those urgent problems are competing for the attention of an administrator who is already attending to other urgent problems that require immediate attention. It’s easy to sometimes lose focus.

Whenever I am asked what is the most precious gift one can give or receive, I immediately respond, the gift of time. When one considers that all eternity is nothing more than a series of moments—one coming right after the other—and that when one moment passes so too does the opportunity to do something meaningful for another human being pass with it, I gain a better appreciation for being fully present in the moment with the people who surround me. When students are in need of our support, we cannot afford to dismiss them or discourage them because of our inattentiveness to their needs or our misplaced priorities.
REFERENCES


http://www.emory.edu/EDUCATION/mfp/BanEncy.html.


APPENDIX A. LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENT

August 24, 2005

Dear Colleague,

I am a doctoral student in the Leadership Studies Program at Bowling Green State University conducting research for my dissertation. The topic of my dissertation is Student Perceptions of Teacher Support: Effect on Student Achievement. I am requesting your permission to conduct this case study within your district. The purpose of the study is for educational purposes and to complete my doctoral dissertation. It also should assist in gaining a better understanding of student perceptions of teacher support among low-performing and high-performing students and teachers' perceptions of providing support to their students.

If you agree to this study, I will interview three teachers from the high school approximately four times each. Additionally, I will interview six students approximately four times each and conduct informal conversations with the high school principal, teachers, and students throughout the course of the study. Interviews will last approximately 45 minutes. The study will commence and be completed during the first semester of the 2005–2006 academic year. The interviews will be scheduled to avoid loss of instructional time. I will provide each participant a journal for the purpose of recording impressions, questions, or observations throughout the semester. I will also observe the participants informally to get a better picture of the overall school climate. I will talk to each parent to explain the study prior to beginning. The information obtained from the study will be utilized in the doctoral dissertation and to assist educational administrators in developing professional development programs designed to enhance the delivery of teacher support to their students. For your convenience, I have itemized the terms of the study.

1. The information obtained during the project will be used to write a doctoral dissertation and to assist educational practitioners in developing strategies to enhance delivery of teacher support to their students.
2. Real names will not be used during the data collection process or in the writing of the dissertation. Every attempt will be made to disguise the identity of the participants.
3. Interviews will be audiotaped to ease data collection. Data collection will begin approximately mid-September 2005 and will be completed approximately January 1, 2006 at which time the tapes will be destroyed.
4. Student and faculty participants will have the opportunity to read their own individual transcribed tapes to insure accuracy. Transcripts will be destroyed as well at the conclusion of the study—approximately March 1, 2006.
5. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time.
6. Direct quotations from the interviews and observations may be used in the dissertation; however, real names will not be used.

7. With the participant’s permission, information collected from the journals may also be utilized.

8. I will provide you with a copy of the completed dissertation.

9. Signing and returning this letter will indicate your agreement to voluntarily participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent agreement.

Risks
The risk associated with this study is that specific statements made by you or other participants may be able to be traced back to their source. To safeguard against that possibility, I will take the following measures: First, all personally identifiable demographic data will be eliminated from the final report. Second, only fictitious names will be used. I will remove any information that might disclose your identity, except references made to you as superintendent. Third, you will have the opportunity to review information you have provided, or references that have been made to you, for the purpose of checking for possible disclosure. You retain the right to have any or all of your data removed from the final report.

If you have any questions with respect to the research participants, their rights, or any other aspect of the data collection / dissertation process, please feel free to contact me, my advisor, Dr. Patrick Pauken, or the Human Subjects Review Board at Bowling Green State University. Contact information is provided below.

I agree to participate in this study ________________________________, __________________________
Superintendent Signature Date

__________________________ __________________________
Researcher Signature Advisor Signature

If you have any questions, please contact the researcher, Michael O’Shea, at:

630 Anastasia Ct. Springfield High School
Holland, Ohio 43528 1470 S. McCord Rd
(H) 419-754-3813 Holland, Ohio 43528
(C) 419-290-5019 419-867-5621
spms_mo@nwoca.org
or Dr. Patrick Pauken, Division of Educational Administration and Leadership Studies at Bowling Green State University, at:

510 Education Building  
Bowling Green State University  
Bowling Green, Ohio 43403-0250  
419-372-7377  
paukenp@bgnet.bgsu.edu

or the chairperson of the Human Subjects Review Board at Bowling Green State University at:

201 South Hall  
Bowling Green State University  
Bowling Green, Ohio 43403-0250  
419-372-7716  
hsrb@bgnet.bgsu.edu
APPENDIX B. LETTER TO PRINCIPAL

August 24, 2005

Dear Colleague,

I am a doctoral student in the Leadership Studies Program at Bowling Green State University conducting research for my dissertation. The topic of my dissertation is *Student Perceptions of Teacher Support: Effect on Student Achievement*. I am requesting your permission to conduct this case study within your school. The purpose of the study is for educational purposes and to complete my doctoral dissertation. It also should assist in gaining a better understanding of student perceptions of teacher support among-low performing and high-performing students and teachers’ perceptions of providing support to their students.

If you agree to this study, I will interview three teachers from the high school approximately four times each. Additionally, I will interview six students approximately four times each and conduct informal conversations with you and the participants throughout the course of the study. The interviews will last approximately 45 minutes. The study will commence and be completed during the first semester of the 2005 – 2006 academic year. The interviews will be scheduled to avoid loss of instructional time. I will provide each participant a journal for the purpose of recording impressions, questions, or observations throughout the semester. I will also observe the participants informally to get a better picture of the overall school climate. I will talk to each student-participant’s parent to explain the study prior to beginning. The information obtained from the study will be utilized in the doctoral dissertation and to assist educational administrators in developing professional development programs designed to enhance the delivery of teacher support to their students. For your convenience, I have itemized the terms of the study.

1. The information obtained during the project will be used to write a doctoral dissertation and to assist educational practitioners in developing strategies to enhance delivery of teacher support to their students.
2. Real names will not be used during the data collection process or in the writing of the dissertation. Every attempt will be made to disguise the identity of the participants.
3. Interviews will be audiotaped to ease data collection. Data collection will begin approximately mid-September 2005 and will be completed approximately January 1, 2006 at which time the tapes will be destroyed.
4. Student and faculty participants will have the opportunity to read their own individual transcribed tapes to insure accuracy. Transcripts will be destroyed as well at the conclusion of the study—approximately March 1, 2006.
5. Participation is voluntary. You and the other participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time.
6. Direct quotations from the interviews and observations may be used in the dissertation; however, real names will not be used.

7. With the participant’s permission, information collected from the journals may also be utilized.

8. I will provide you with a copy of the completed dissertation.

9. Signing and returning this letter will indicate your agreement to voluntarily participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent agreement.

Risks
The risk associated with this study is that specific statements made by you or other participants may be able to be traced back to their source. To safeguard against that possibility, I will take the following measures: First, all personally identifiable demographic data will be eliminated from the final report. Second, only fictitious names will be used. I will remove any information that might disclose your identity, except references made to you as principal. Third, you will have the opportunity to review information you have provided, or references that have been made to you, for the purpose of checking for possible disclosure. You retain the right to have any or all of your data removed from the final report.

If you have any questions with respect to the research participants, their rights, or any other aspect of the data collection / dissertation process, please feel free to contact me, my advisor, Dr. Patrick Pauken, or the Human Subjects Review Board at Bowling Green State University. Contact information is provided below.

I agree to participate in this study ____________________________________________
Principal Signature ____________________________ Date __________

__________________________ ____________________________
Researcher Signature Advisor Signature

If you have any questions, please contact the researcher, Michael O’Shea, at:

630 Anastasia Ct.                      Springfield High School
Holland, Ohio 43528                    1470 S. McCord Rd
(H) 419-754-3813                      Holland, Ohio 43528
(C) 419-290-5019                      419-867-5621

spms_mo@nwoca.org
or Dr. Patrick Pauken, Division of Educational Administration and Leadership Studies at Bowling Green State University, at:

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Bowling Green, Ohio 43403-0250  
419-372-7716  
hsrb@bgnet.bgsu.edu
Dear Colleague,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. I am asking you to identify two teachers who, in your opinion and based upon your experience, best represent Starratt’s (2004) model of the ethics of responsibility, the ethics of authenticity, and the ethics of presence. I am also asking that you identify one teacher who does not fit the paradigm. Please be mindful, the selection of a teacher who does not fit the paradigm is not necessarily an indication of poor pedagogical practice. Rather, that individual is focused primarily on delivery of content with the responsibility for learning the material resting with the student. While preparing your recommendation, please consider that I will ask all three teachers to meet with me four times over the course of the semester for approximately 45 minutes each time. I will also ask them to keep a journal in which to record any impressions, thoughts, or comments regarding any aspect of the study. In addition, I will informally observe the teachers’ interactions with students in general to get a better picture of the overall school climate. I will also interview six students four times over the course of the semester for approximately 45 minutes each time. Students from each teacher will be selected by drawing at random from the class rosters of each teacher. Each teacher’s class rosters will be divided into two categories, those students with a 3.0 GPA or above and those students with a 2.0 GPA or below at the end of the 2004-2005 school year. One student per teacher will be drawn from each category for a total of six student participants—three from each category.

To assist you in the selection process, I have included a brief summary of Starratt’s model along with some of the characteristics associated with each ethic.

Ethic of Responsibility

Under this ethic teachers are reminded of a moral responsibility to do more for their students than simply avoiding harm. As moral agents and advocates for all students, especially for those students who are least like them or who espouse values in opposition to them, teachers frequently consult with others and their own conscience to determine a course of action that discharges their full responsibility to their students as human beings. This ethic requires teachers as moral agents to reject the status quo when the consequences for maintaining that posture means another human being will be harmed or marginalized. From an educational practitioner’s perspective, that means that espoused values—such as all children can learn—translates into proactive action, especially for those who are at-risk of failing to meet academic standards.

Ethic of Authenticity

The essence of authenticity is being true to one’s beliefs and values and acting in a manner that is consistent with the espousal of specific beliefs. Our innermost beliefs, assumptions, and values
are what guide our behavior; they are values that are non-negotiable in a responsible, authentic individual. Authentic teachers translate values into action. They have a freedom to choose how they will interact with students—regardless of the reputation that precedes them, negative or otherwise. Authentic teachers are able to transform the teaching of content into a more meaningful presentation of all the possibilities of application. In short, with authenticity, learning becomes relevant and meaningful.

Ethic of Presence

The ethic of presence implies that we step out of our comfort zone to explore the unique circumstances surrounding another human being. It means coming into the presence of another human being with a sense of awe and gratitude for the gifts and talents that human being possesses. It requires teachers to consider each student needs. It implies a commitment on the part of a teacher to be aware of a student’s needs. It means remaining in the moment and focused on the person in front of us. Starratt identifies three types of presence. The first is an affirming presence, which communicates the message that others have the right to be who they are. The second presence is a critical presence, which requires us to identify the problem that stands between us and another human being and take action to remedy that problem. The third presence is an enabling presence, which starts with this premise: I can’t do it alone. We can do it together. In essence it is building a sense of efficacy in our students. It signifies we are bringing ourselves fully into the learning environment with another person to assist that person in achieving academic goals.

To reiterate, please select three teachers who are teaching in core content areas and who, in your opinion, best represent the characteristics within the parameters I have provided. Once you have made your recommendations, I will need from you the teachers’ name, address, phone number, email address, grades and subjects taught, and your input on the most efficient manner in which to make initial contact with the teachers. I may also need to meet with you following your recommendation in the event any of the teachers recommended by you choose not to participate.

I hope this summary sheds some light on the paradigm under investigation. I would be happy to meet with you at your convenience to answer any questions you might have or shed additional light on the ethics under review.

I’m looking forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Michael D. O’Shea
APPENDIX D. LETTER TO TEACHER-PARTICIPANT

August 24, 2005

Dear Colleague,

I am a doctoral student in the Leadership Studies Program at Bowling Green State University conducting research for my dissertation. The topic of my dissertation is *Student Perceptions of Teacher Support: Effect on Student Achievement*. I am inviting you to participate in this study. The purpose of the study is for educational purposes and to complete my doctoral dissertation. It also should assist in gaining a better understanding of student perceptions of teacher support among low-performing and high-performing students and teachers' perceptions of providing support to their students.

If you agree to participate in this study, I will interview you approximately four times, each one lasting approximately 45 minutes. Additionally, I will interview two of your students approximately four times each and conduct informal conversations with you throughout the course of the study. The study will commence and be completed during the first semester of the 2005 – 2006 academic year. The interviews will be scheduled to avoid loss of instructional time. I will provide you a journal for the purpose of recording impressions, questions, or observations throughout the semester. I will also observe you informally at various times throughout the semester to get a better picture of the overall school climate. I will talk to each parent to explain the study prior to beginning. The information obtained from the study will be utilized in the doctoral dissertation and to assist educational administrators in developing professional development programs designed to enhance the delivery of teacher support to their students. Your decision to participate or refrain from participating will not affect your professional teaching position in any way. For your convenience, I have itemized the terms of the study.

1. The information obtained during the project will be used to write a doctoral dissertation and to assist educational practitioners in developing strategies to enhance delivery of teacher support to their students.
2. Real names will not be used during the data collection process or in the writing of the dissertation. Every attempt will be made to disguise the identity of the participants.
3. Interviews will be audiotaped to ease data collection. Data collection will begin approximately mid-September 2005 and will be completed approximately January 1, 2006 at which time the tapes will be destroyed.
4. Student and faculty participants will have the opportunity to read their own individual transcribed tapes to insure accuracy. Transcripts will be destroyed as well at the conclusion of the study—approximately March 1, 2006.
5. Participation is voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.
6. Direct quotations from the interviews and observations may be used in the dissertation; however, real names will not be used.
7. With your permission, information collected from the journals may also be utilized.
8. If requested, I will provide you with a copy of the completed dissertation.
9. Signing and returning this letter will indicate your willingness to voluntarily participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent agreement.

Risks
The risk associated with this study is that specific statements made by you or other participants may be able to be traced back to their source. To safeguard against that possibility, I will take the following measures: First, all personally identifiable demographic data will be eliminated from the final report. Second, only fictitious names will be used. I will remove any information that might disclose your identity, except references made to you as teacher. Third, you will have the opportunity to review information you have provided, or references that have been made to you, for the purpose of checking for possible disclosure. You retain the right to have any or all of your data removed from the final report.

If you have any questions with respect to the research participants, their rights, or any other aspect of the data collection / dissertation process, please feel free to contact me, my advisor, Dr. Patrick Pauken, or the Human Subjects Review Board at Bowling Green State University. Contact information is provided below.

I agree to participate in this study______________________________________________, _______________________

Teacher Signature                                           Date

__________________________________________                        ________________________________

Researcher Signature                                         Advisor Signature

If you have any questions, please contact the researcher, Michael O’Shea, at:

630 Anastasia Ct.
Holland, Ohio 43528
(H) 419-754-3813
(C) 419-290-5019

Springfield High School
1470 S. McCord Rd
Holland, Ohio 43528
419-867-5621
spms_mo@nwoca.org
or Dr. Patrick Pauken, Division of Educational Administration and Leadership Studies at Bowling Green State University, at:

510 Education Building  
Bowling Green State University  
Bowling Green, Ohio 43403-0250  
419-372-7377  
paukenp@bgsu.edu

or the chairperson of the Human Subjects Review Board at Bowling Green State University at:

201 South Hall  
Bowling Green State University  
Bowling Green, Ohio 43403-0250  
419-372-7716  
hsrb@bgsu.edu
APPENDIX E. LETTER TO STUDENT-PARTICIPANT

August 24, 2005

Dear Student,

I am a doctoral student in the Leadership Studies Program at Bowling Green State University conducting research for my final project. The topic of my project is Student Perceptions of Teacher Support: Effect on Student Achievement. I am inviting you to participate in this study. The purpose of the study is for educational purposes and to complete my doctoral dissertation. It will also help me to better understand how you view the things your teacher does to support you in the classroom and how your teacher views them.

If you agree to participate, I will interview you approximately four times and conduct informal conversations with you throughout the course of the study. Each meeting will last approximately 45 minutes. The study will begin and be completed during the first semester of the 2005 – 2006 academic year. The interviews will be scheduled so you don’t miss class time. I will provide you a notebook for the purpose of writing down impressions, questions, or observations throughout the semester. I will also observe you informally at various times throughout the semester to get a better picture of the overall school climate. I will talk to your parents or guardians to explain the study prior to beginning. The information obtained from the study will be utilized in the doctoral dissertation and to assist educators in developing training programs designed to improve the delivery of teacher support to their students. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your grades or role as a student in any way. For your convenience, I have listed the terms of the study.

1. The information obtained during the project will be used to write a doctoral dissertation and to assist educators in developing ideas to improve delivery of teacher support to their students.
2. Real names will not be used during the data collection process or in the writing of the dissertation. You may select your own fictitious (false) name. Every attempt will be made to disguise your identity.
3. Interviews will be tape recorded to ease data collection and will be destroyed at the end of the study. The study will begin approximately mid-September 2005 and end approximately January 1, 2006 at which time I will destroy the tapes.
4. You will have the opportunity to read your own individual transcribed tapes (a complete written record) to make sure they are accurate. Transcripts will be destroyed as well at the conclusion of the study—approximately March 1, 2006.
5. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.
6. Direct quotations from the interviews and observations may be used in the final report; however, real names will not be used.
7. With your permission, information collected from the journals may also be used.
8. If requested, I will provide you with a copy of the completed study.
9. Signing and returning this letter will indicate your agreement to voluntarily participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent agreement.

Risks
The risk associated with this study is that specific statements made by you may be able to be traced back to you. To protect against that possibility, I will take the following measures: First, information that will personally identify you will be eliminated from the final report. Second, only false names will be used. I will remove any information that might disclose your identity, except references made to you as student. Third, you will have the opportunity to review information you have provided, or references that have been made to you, to make sure you are comfortable with the information and that your identity is not revealed. You will have the right to have any or all of your information removed from the final report.

If you have any questions with respect to the research participants, their rights, or any other aspect of the data collection/dissertation process, please feel free to contact me, my advisor, Dr. Patrick Pauken, or the Human Subjects Review Board at Bowling Green State University. Contact information is provided below.

I agree to participate in this study.............................................

Student Signature                                Date

__________________________                        _______________________
Researcher Signature                    Advisor Signature

If you have any questions, please contact the researcher, Michael O’Shea, at:

630 Anastasia Ct.                     Springfield High School
Holland, Ohio 43528                  1470 S. McCord Rd
(H) 419-754-3813                       Holland, Ohio 43528
(C) 419-290-5019                      419-867-5621

spms_mo@nwoca.org
or Dr. Patrick Pauken, Division of Educational Administration and Leadership Studies at Bowling Green State University, at:

510 Education Building
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, Ohio 43403-0250
419-372-7377
paukenp@bgnet.bgsu.edu

or the chairperson of the Human Subjects Review Board at Bowling Green State University at:

201 South Hall
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, Ohio 43403-0250
419-372-7716
hsrb@bgnet.bgsu.edu
APPENDIX F. LETTER TO PARENT / GUARDIAN

August 24, 2005

Dear Parent / Guardian,

I am a doctoral student in the Leadership Studies Program at Bowling Green State University conducting research for my dissertation. The topic of my dissertation is Student Perceptions of Teacher Support: Effect on Student Achievement. I am requesting your permission to allow your child to participate in this study. The purpose of the study is for educational purposes and to complete my doctoral dissertation. It also should assist in gaining a better understanding of student perceptions of teacher support among-low performing and high-performing students and teachers’ perceptions of providing support to their students.

If you, and your child, agree to participate in this study, I will interview your child approximately four times and conduct informal conversations with him/her throughout the course of the study. Each meeting will last approximately 45 minutes. The study will commence and be completed during the first semester of the 2005 – 2006 academic year. The interviews will be scheduled to avoid loss of instructional time. I will provide your child a journal for the purpose of recording impressions, questions, or observations throughout the semester. I will also observe your child informally at various times throughout the semester to get a better picture of the overall school climate. The information obtained from the study will be utilized in the doctoral dissertation and to assist educational administrators in developing professional development programs designed to enhance the delivery of teacher support to their students. Your decision to participate or to refrain from participating will not affect your child’s grades or role as a student in any way. For your convenience, I have itemized the terms of the study.

1. The information obtained during the project will be used to write a doctoral dissertation and to assist educational practitioners in developing strategies to enhance delivery of teacher support to their students.
2. Real names will not be used during the data collection process or in the writing of the dissertation. Your child may select his/her own fictitious name. Every attempt will be made to disguise his/her identity.
3. Interviews will be audiotaped to ease data collection. Data collection will begin approximately mid-September 2005 and be completed approximately January 1, 2006 at which time the tapes will be destroyed.
4. Your child will have the opportunity to read his/her own individual transcribed tapes to insure accuracy. Transcripts will be destroyed as well at the conclusion of the study—approximately March 1, 2006.
5. Participation is voluntary. You can withdraw your permission at any time.
6. Participation by your child is voluntary and he/she is free to withdraw from the study at any time.
7. Direct quotations from the interviews and observations may be used in the dissertation; however, real names will not be used.
8. With your child’s permission, information collected from the journals may also be utilized.
9. If requested, I will provide you with a copy of the completed dissertation.
10. Signing and returning this letter will indicate your agreement to allow your son/daughter to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent agreement.

Risks
The risk associated with this study is that specific statements made by your child or other participants may be able to be traced back to their source. To safeguard against that possibility, I will take the following measures: First, all personally identifiable demographic data will be eliminated from the final report. Second, only fictitious names will be used. I will remove any information that might disclose your child’s identity, except references made to him/her as student. Third, your child will have the opportunity to review information he/she has provided, or references that have been made to him/her, for the purpose of checking for possible disclosure. Your child retains the right to have any or all of your data removed from the final report.

If you have any questions with respect to the research participants, their rights, or any other aspect of the data collection / dissertation process, please feel free to contact me, my advisor, Dr. Patrick Pauken, or the Human Subjects Review Board at Bowling Green State University. Contact information is provided below.

I agree to permit my child to participate in this study.

_________________________  _______________________
Parent Signature               Date

_________________________
Researcher Signature

_________________________
Advisor Signature

If you have any questions, please contact the researcher, Michael O’Shea, at:

630 Anastasia Ct.  Springfield High School
Holland, Ohio 43528
(H) 419-754-3813  1470 S. McCord Rd
(C) 419-290-5019  Holland, Ohio 43528
419-867-5621
spms_mo@nwcca.org
or Dr. Patrick Pauken, Division of Educational Administration and Leadership Studies at Bowling Green State University, at:

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419-372-7377  
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or the chairperson of the Human Subjects Review Board at Bowling Green State University at:

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APPENDIX G. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – BECOMING MORAL

1. Do you believe your teacher is concerned for you? Can you support your belief that he/she does or does not?
2. Is your teacher fair?
3. How do you know?
4. Does your teacher believe you can do well in school?
5. What does your teacher do on a regular basis that makes you believe you can be successful in his/her class?
6. Does your teacher trust you?
7. How do you know?
8. Does your teacher help motivate you to be successful? How? How not?
9. Does your teacher say positive things about you? To you?
10. Does your teacher ever compliment you?
11. Does your teacher demonstrate respect for you as an individual? How?
12. Is your teacher friendly towards you?
13. Does your teacher have tough standards?
14. Does your teacher seek the common good in the classroom?
15. Do you ever feel a sense of unease or discomfort in the way your teacher presents the material?
16. Does your teacher ever allow you to challenge his/her rules of governance?
17. Do you believe your teacher cares for you? How so?
18. Does your teacher go out of his/her way to make the classroom environment appealing?
19. Does your teacher make you feel like you can be successful?
20. Is your teacher an advocate for you? Does he/she speak up for you or intervene on your behalf when needed.
21. Does your teacher offer assistance to you with difficult choices?

Note: The same questions will be used during the teacher interviews. The wording will be changed to reflect the teachers’ perspective.
APPENDIX H. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – RESPONSIBILITY

1. Can you describe your basic responsibility while in the classroom—to fellow students, to the teacher, to your parents, to yourself?
2. Are you responsible for what you learn? How?
3. What responsibilities do you have outside the classroom?
4. Does your teacher support your classroom efforts? How? Give examples. If not, why not?
5. Does your teacher help you negotiate conflict with fellow students, with other teachers, with your parents? (Evidence of civic responsibility)
6. Does your teacher hold you accountable for your actions? Inaction?
7. Is your teacher dependable?
8. Is your teacher reliable?
9. Is your teacher trustworthy?
10. Does your teacher ever accept responsibility for how you’re doing in class? Can you give some examples?
11. Does your teacher explain the lesson objectives each day?
12. Does your teacher ever change plans?
13. Is your teacher aware of his/her limitations?
14. Is your teacher aware of circumstances in your life that affects your learning?
15. Does your teacher actively promote harmonious relationships in the classroom, especially among subgroups?
16. Does your teacher communicate well and explain things thoroughly?
17. Does your teacher care about you? How do you know?
18. What responsibility does your teacher have with respect to your learning?
19. Does your teacher provide assistance to you at times other than class time?
20. Does your teacher talk with your parents on a regular basis?
21. Has your teacher ever asked if you have an interest in extra-curricular activities?
22. Has your teacher ever offered to help you with your homework?

Note: The same questions will be used during the teacher interviews. The wording will be changed to reflect the teachers’ perspective.
APPENDIX I. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – AUTHENTICITY

1. Does your teacher help you understand how the things you are learning connect to your everyday life?
2. Does your teacher laugh with you?
3. Has your teacher ever attempted to get to know you outside of the classroom? By that I mean, has he/she tried to get to know you on a personal basis—likes, dislikes etc.?
4. Has your teacher ever shared personal stories with you?
5. Does your teacher go out of the way to ask how your evening or weekend went?
6. Does your teacher give you an opportunity to express yourself in class?
7. Do you feel comfortable talking with your teacher?
8. Is your teacher patient with you?
9. Does your teacher make you stretch beyond that which you thought you were capable?
10. Is your teacher persistent in his/her expectations for classroom performance?
11. Does your teacher ever attend any of your extra-curricular events?
12. Does your teacher ever show any interest in what you’re doing outside of the classroom?
13. Has your teacher ever asked you what your interests are?
14. Does your teacher hold high expectations for you? How?
15. Does your teacher know anything about your home life?
16. Does your teacher use various approaches to presenting lessons?
17. Do you think your teacher knows how you best learn new things?
18. Is your teacher available for you before or after school?
19. If extra help is available, have you ever taken advantage of it?
20. Has your teacher ever expressed an interest in your future?
22. Has your teacher ever admitted being wrong about something?
23. Does your teacher make you feel good about yourself?
24. Is your teacher sensitive to your individual needs?
25. Does your teacher show patience with students struggling academically?
26. Does your teacher know all of the students’ names?

Note: The same questions will be used during the teacher interviews. The wording will be changed to reflect the teachers’ perspective.
APPENDIX J. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – PRESENCE

1. Have you ever been afraid of approaching your teacher with a problem?
2. Have you ever hesitated to ask a question?
3. Do you feel out of place in the classroom?
4. Do you ever try to determine what kind of mood your teacher is in?
5. Does your teacher’s mood make a difference to you?
6. Does your teacher look you in the eye when speaking to you?
7. Does your teacher welcome you as you enter the classroom and make an attempt to let you know he/she is glad to see you?
8. Has your teacher ever made exceptions to his/her policy based on unique circumstances in which you find yourself?
9. Is your teacher compassionate to you with respect to emergencies, illness, or death in the family?
10. Does your teacher help make the classroom experience enjoyable? Fun?
11. Does your teacher ever perform any “random acts of kindness” on your behalf?
12. Does your teacher find something good to say about your performance even when it fell below his/her expectation?
13. Does your teacher include you in important decision-making that affects the classroom? Class rules etc.?
14. Does your teacher ever take time for the class to talk about whatever is on their mind, collectively or individually?
15. Does your teacher ever talk to you as if you were a long lost friend?
16. Does your teacher ever solicit your opinion as to how things could be made better in the classroom? With relationships?
17. Does your teacher ever treat you as though you are a burden to him/her?
18. Does your teacher ever act as though your problems are of no concern to him/her?
19. Does your teacher ever ask for your ideas?
20. Does your teacher ever allow you to provide critical feedback on his/her performance?
21. Does your teacher ever compliment you?
22. Does your teacher ever ask your opinion?
23. Does your teacher encourage you to act independently?
24. Does your teacher provide time for you to take the initiative and responsibility for your learning?

Note: The same questions will be used during the teacher interviews. The wording will be changed to reflect the teachers’ perspective.