THE IOS STUDY OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR CLASSROOM RELATIONSHIPS

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the degree of Master’s of Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
Melissa Ann Newberry, B. A.

****

The Ohio State University
2006

Master’s Examination Committee:
Dr. Anita Woolfolk Hoy, Advisor
Dr. Heather Davis

Approved by
Dr. Anita Woolfolk Hoy
Advisor
Graduate School Program in Education
An understanding heart is everything in a teacher, and cannot be esteemed highly enough. One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feeling. The curriculum is so much necessary raw material but warmth is the vital element for the growing plant of the soul of the child.

--Carl Jung
ABSTRACT

Personal relationships between the teacher and student have been shown to influence many things from cognitive development to academic achievement to the social intelligence of the child. Teachers too, have psychological and social needs that they unconsciously seek to satisfy through the relationships in the classroom. This fulfillment comes as they interact and create relationships with select students in the classroom. Through this study it was found that the combination of personal constructs of close relationships based on what teachers value in the classroom and teacher preferences to student attitudes and behaviors influenced the way that teachers treat various groups of students. It was also revealed that without a method or opportunity for reflection, in many instances teachers are unaware of their affective role and its influence on the student. A protocol designed to facilitate the discussion of classroom relationships and encourage teachers to reflect on their classroom interactions proved useful and is offered as a tool for use in classrooms and future teacher preparation programs.
Dedicated to my nephew, Zack; a bright and able student.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank my advisor, Anita Hoy, whose support made it possible for me to be admitted into the program, and for lending me the use of her office; affording me a place to retreat and write.

Many thanks go to Heather Davis, for all the needed encouragement, critiques and sharing of knowledge. Without her help and direction this work would not be complete.

I must also thank Stefinee Pinnegar, whose faith in me was the inspiration for the pursuit of this greater cause.

I would also like to thank my many teachers over the years, those who made me believe in myself because of their loving care and belief in me.
VITA

October 17, 1973 ........................................... Born- Mariemont, Ohio

1997 ......................................................... B.A. - Brigham Young University

2000-2004 ................................................. Lead Case worker/ Assistant Supervisor, The Department of Workforce Services, The State of Utah

2004-2005 ................................................. Graduate Administrative Assistant, Office of Student Services, College of Education, The Ohio State University

  Workshops presented: Resume Writing for Teachers, The PhD Job Search, and General Resume Writing

2006- present ........................................... Graduate Administrative Assistant; Coordinator of Outreach and Individualized Services, The Walter E. Dennis Learning Center, The Ohio State University

  Workshops presented: The Secrets of Academic Success, Preparing Papers and Speeches, Active, Note-Taking, Procrastination, and Learning Styles

FIELD OF STUDY

Major Field: College of Education
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of illustrations</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of tables</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapters:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Social needs</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Relationship influences</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Social psychology constructs</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Literature on belonging and classroom relations</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Classroom relations</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Teacher influence</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Measuring teachers’ perceptions</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Protocol design and use</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Measures</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Participants</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Procedure</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Analysis</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Findings and evaluation</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Perceptions of classroom relationships</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.1 Ms. B</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.2 Ms. C</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.3 Ms. George</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Stage I: Teacher’s use of protocol</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1 Overview of protocol use</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2 Differing use of protocol</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Stage II: Second version of protocol</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.1 Circle selection and placement</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.2 Exploratory use</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4 Stage III: Assigning meaning to circle size ........................................... 43
  4.4.1 Differing concepts of circle size ............................................... 43
  4.4.2 Ms. B .................................................................................. 43
  4.4.3 Ms. C .................................................................................. 45
  4.4.4 Ms. George ........................................................................ 46
4.5 Results ......................................................................................... 47

5. Discussion ...................................................................................... 49
  5.1 Purpose of relationships .............................................................. 49
  5.2 Teacher beliefs ......................................................................... 51
    5.2.1 Effort .............................................................................. 51
  5.3 New insights ............................................................................. 53
  5.4 Limitations ............................................................................... 53
  5.5 Future use ................................................................................ 55
    5.5.1 Research ......................................................................... 55
    5.5.2 Application ..................................................................... 56
  5.6 Conclusion ................................................................................. 57

List of references ............................................................................. 60

Appendices
  Appendix A: Illustrations ............................................................... 64
  Appendix B: Tables ....................................................................... 67
  Appendix C: Forms ...................................................................... 71
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illustration</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The original IOS</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The adapted IOS, first version</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The adapted IOS, second version</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Example use of both versions of adapted IOS scale</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Table of participants</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Table of themes</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Circle placement by teacher</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Circle size by participant</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

First of all, I believe every relationship is a learning relationship. There is no contact ever made where one, if not both parties, is not affected for good or ill. In all of our many relationships, regardless of length, we learn. We are not always cognizant of what we are learning, or even that we are learning, but we take those lessons in and they become part of us. Many of the lessons from past relationships I am just now learning; some I am relearning. Some of the lessons have become so engrained that I cannot seem to unlearn them. I would like to say that only the good lessons stuck and cannot be undone but that would not be true. Depending on the source, I took some of these lessons as gospel truth when they were sometimes wrong and even hurtful. I didn’t really stop to think about how these have shaped me until I started graduate school. It is so much easier to think of how the world unwittingly affects others. In this study, I attempt to find out how the world we actively create affect ourselves and others, focusing on the beginnings of our social selves in the setting of the classroom.

I was visiting with my sister one evening a few years back when she shared with me that her son, just eight years old at the time, had reported to her earlier that day that his teacher at school “hated” him. How did he know that? Why would he ever think that? He wasn’t a troublemaker, in fact he got along well with other students; no poor
behavior had ever been reported. His explanation was that she was always yelling and that she seemed bothered when he would ask her questions. My sister and I were surprised that he would use the word “hate” to describe how his teacher related to him. What was even more shocking was when two years later, as I spoke with him about teachers and his relationships with them, he remembered the teacher from two years before, and although he did not seem to hold a grudge, he seemed resigned to the fact that she did indeed hate him personally. Did it have an effect on his learning? According to him it did. He told me that if you think your teacher hates you then you are less likely to ask questions, but if she is nice, then you trust her and will let her help you.

At the time of the original conversation I was working in the social service field, predominantly with unwed mothers. A vast majority of these young women were also high school dropouts. Their many explanations for why they left school were varied in detail, but similar in underlying premise: they felt disconnected from the school environment, no one seemed to notice them and they weren’t the “student” type anyway. The “no ones” that didn’t notice them were obviously not peers. Most of these girls spent a great deal of their time with their peers inside and outside of school. The “no ones” that they referred to were the adults, the teachers, from whom these young women felt disconnected, even neglect. These young women were not troublemakers, and neither were they top students. They did not bring attention to themselves in either way. Another interesting commonality is that they held the belief that they were not “student material,” and no one seemed to try to convince them otherwise.

The combination of these experiences sparked my interest in several social constructs. First, I wondered about the relationships that are formed in classrooms. How
do these relationships influence students’ motivation to learn or self-beliefs about their
ability to learn? How are these relationships formed and how does the teacher as well as
the student perceive them? Are teachers cognizant of the effect they may have on a
student socially and academically? What are teachers’ beliefs about classroom
relationships? How are positive relationships formed and maintained in a classroom of
20+ individual personalities? How are negative relationships formed, and what can be
done to change them from negative to positive? Outside of my own relationships with the
many teachers through my academic career, the majority of which were positive, I had no
reference or understanding of what others had experienced or were experiencing in
school until these reports from my nephew and the women with whom I worked. I
wondered why some students feel connected to the classroom while others do not. To
answer these questions I turned to social psychology theories and looked into the idea of
belonging.

Social Needs

Two ideas have led me along this path: 1) that humans are social creatures and
have a need for belonging (Leary, 1995); and 2) that we can monitor our relationships to
predict trends and make adjustments (Warner, 2001). The first idea I have been aware of
for most of my life. I don’t know if it goes back to the fact that I come from a large
family or from my first classes in social studies, but I have always been aware of the
social needs of humans. From a biological perspective, Reis, Collins and Berscheid
(2000) explain the foundations of relationships based on the systems model consisting of
four tenets. Those four tenets are:
1) From the moment of conception, individuals are nested in social relationships that influence the nature and operation of many of the hierarchically organized biological and behavioral systems that each individual encompasses.

2) Each relationship is itself nested in a social environmental system and in a physical environmental system, which together represent each relationship’s ecological niche.

3) The specific ecological niche of each relationship is, in turn, embedded in larger societal and cultural systems.

4) All of these systems are simultaneously evolving and influencing each other over time.

What was new to me was the idea that we are constantly striving for belonging. The work of Leary (1995) intrigued me with his idea of the “sociometer” and how we monitor our behavior to avoid being disassociated from the group. In fact, Leary posits that the need to belong is so strong that we are sensitive to all feedback from other people and constantly monitor it for acceptance. He also claims that we are much more attuned to rejection than acceptance, so much so that any communication that is less than full out acceptance can be perceived as rejection. A scary thought when we are constantly dealing with a multiple of personalities on a daily basis.

*Relationship Influence*

The other idea, that of the ability to monitor our relationships and be true and honest in them, comes from my reading of a book by Dr. C. Terry Warner entitled *The Bonds that Make Us Free*. His book discusses being self-aware and how we react to others. He further discusses how we can change from simply reacting to others to acting towards others, by accepting them as our equals. Dr. Warner leans heavily on Buber’s *I-Thou* perspective, in that we cannot separate who we are from how we are with others. I am defined by how I am in the relationship with the other person; that every interaction is a combination of my personality in response to yours. I can either react to your
personality, or I can simply be with you. The first idea is a kind of struggle for
identification and separation, while the second is an acceptance of both self and other.

Now, this idea intrigued me and has greatly impacted my life. However, it is a difficult
thing to constantly monitor your reaction to determine if you are seeing the other as a
person or as an object and much more so in a group setting like a classroom.

If we humans do indeed need to feel that we belong and the classroom is the place
that we develop many of our views of our social selves, then surely the relationships that
we develop there will drive the way that we see ourselves and contribute to an overall
understanding of who we are. Thinking about my nephew and how his interactions with
his teacher have had such a profound effect on how he sees himself in the class setting, I
wondered about the task that teachers have to maintain positive relationships with all of
their students to help create an atmosphere conducive to openness and learning. It
seemed to me that rejection from a teacher would be similar to rejection from a parent.
So, back to my questions: are teachers aware of their relationships with their students and
how do they monitor them?

*Social Psychology Constructs*

As I struggled to define the exact problem and plausible solutions in my head, I
came to feel that the issue was the lack of nurturing environments and acceptance. The
young women with whom I worked did not feel that they belonged; my nephew did not
feel accepted by his teacher. I know that I have had good experiences with my teachers,
so not every teacher treats students in an exclusionary way, but perhaps teachers are
unaware of the ways they treat different students. It was while thinking about Leary and
other social constructs of belonging that I read an article by Aron, Aron and Smollan (1992) and the scale they had devised called The Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale. This scale was designed to measure the amount to which a person felt close to a significant other, be that person a parent, partner or close friend.

I was attracted to the IOS scale because of its ease of use. This is a scale that can be used by children or adults. The IOS scale consisted of a one-dimensional pictorial representation of a series of over-lapping circles. One circle was to represent the participant and the other circle represented a person with whom they had a personal relationship. Participants were to select the picture that most closely resembled the relationship in question, as far as how close the participant felt to the significant other. Also, I liked the adaptability of the scale because you could use it to talk about many different types of relationships. This seemed like the perfect tool to begin a conversation with a teacher about how she felt about a particular student.

Much of the literature that will be discussed on teacher-student relationships is given from the point of view of the student. There is very little that discusses what teachers believe about the relationship. Also, when teachers are asked to talk about relationships, the tendency is to focus on general atmosphere of the classroom and not on individual students; or when they do, they then do not compare them to the other students. When surveys are used, teachers seldom see the result, which does little good in changing the classroom environment. My idea was to create a tool that would inspire a conversation about the classroom, each individual student one at a time, and then get an overview of the entire class. Thus, a teacher could see if there was an imbalance and where and with whom it is taking place.
Relating these ideas to the questions I posed earlier, there are several things that I hoped to learn. First, in a classroom setting, what role do relationship “connections” play and how are they achieved? Secondly, does the quality of relationships in a classroom affect the learning of the student and who is responsible for the creation and maintenance of such a relationship? And thirdly, what are teachers’ beliefs about classroom relationships and the effect on the learning of the student? If teachers see relationships as important, what do they do to maintain healthy relationships? If they see them as inconsequential, what factors do they see as more important? In what ways do they monitor their relationships with the students in their class?

This study is a look at teachers’ perceptions of classroom relationships. It is an attempt to begin a discussion about those classroom relationships. It is an attempt to develop a tool to aid teachers as they think about their classroom beyond the generalities of the class as a whole and to begin to think of the specifics of individual children. The goal was to devise a tool that may be helpful to teachers in exploring those relationships in a reflective manner. This goal was two-fold: 1) to benefit researchers as they continue to try to understand the relationship dynamics and socialization in classroom settings, as well as the impact of those relationships on learning; and 2) to aid individual teachers in understanding their own beliefs and conduct in a classroom.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE ON BELONGING AND CLASSROOM RELATIONS

It is in the classroom where most of us have our first social experiences that have lasting effects on our social development and view of ourselves. Relationship science is a relatively new area of inquiry as the field of social psychology narrows to focus on the aspects of human motivation and behavior. Reis, Collins and Berscheid (2000) suggest that because of the multidisciplinary nature of relationships, the theories and research in the field are still few and far between. However, there is still evidence that supports the belief that relationships have a great impact on human development within many contexts (Reis, Collins& Berschied, 2000). This plays out in the community of the classroom in the relationship between teacher and student.

The need that each of us has to be included and to feel a part of the larger whole is a topic of great study in the field of social psychology. How we identify ourselves within the group and how we attempt to relate to others is a large part of who we are as individuals (Brewer & Gardner, 2000; Leary 2003; Leary & Downs, 1995). In contrast to an evolutionary perspective, which focuses on the biological aspect, social cognitive theories of relationships focus on the social and emotional development of the individual based on what can be called an “innate need to belong” (Leary & Downs, 1995), which
drives the relationships that an individual develops and maintains. Leary and Downs (1995) suggest that, “a great deal of human behavior can be conceptualized as attempts to foster social ties and to minimize the possibility of falling into disfavor with others who are psychologically important.” Even though this process is largely unconscious, our interactions with others have a large impact on how we view ourselves (Leary 2003, Leary & Downs, 1995). It has also been shown that our interactions with others and our beliefs of their evaluations of us have just as large an influence (Leary, 2003).

Gardner et al. (2000) suggest that it doesn’t matter to what or with whom we feel a belonging as much as whether we actually feel that we do indeed belong. Others suggest that it is the not the quantity, but the quality of the relationships that we make and maintain (Aron, Aron & Smollan, 1992) that sustains us. Therefore, it is easy to make the link from the need to interact with groups to the natural tendency to seek out and form relationships with individuals within that group. Needs of the individual are sought out within the community of the group through interpersonal interaction. The need to belong is carried over into all parts of life. This plays out in the community of the classroom in several ways, including peer acceptance, but even more so in the relationship between teacher and student.

**Classroom Relations**

The parent-child model is the one most referenced when discussing classroom relationships and interactions between teacher and child (Davis, 2003) and is most relevant to our discussion. Another important theory of teaching relationships involves the ethic of caring. While this theory is based on the idea that caring is a moral obligation, the aim for caring in this ethical sense is that what started out as a *must do*
becomes a *want to*; that is we have a positive human regard for the one being cared for and therefore are motivated to attend to the needs of that person out of love (Noddings, 1995). Now this becomes a balancing act for teachers as care theorists believe in the reciprocity of care (Noddings, 1995, Gomez et al., 2004) which implies that the actions of the one caring are received by the one cared for. However, when those actions are not received or simply not recognized, this can result in a disconnected relationship because anything that is not explicitly viewed as acceptance may be interpreted as rejection (Leary, 2003). Yet the need for acceptance by the individual into a group or relationship remains of great importance. Noting how influential adult-child relationships can be, it is important that we understand how to implement theories of care and caring relationships into educational situations, including the maintenance of a caring attitude even when tempted to act otherwise (Noddings, 1995, Warner, 2001).

As the greatest social setting outside of the home for most children, the classroom is an obvious arena for making and creating influential relationships. As students spend the majority of their time inside the walls of the class, they will naturally seek to fulfill their relational needs through the community created there. Although the grouping of students is random, the individual will be inclined to seek belonging with whatever group is present (Gardner et al., 2000; Leary, 1995) to meet his needs of belonging. Connell and Wellborn (1991) found that belonging, as well as relatedness, are important factors in human growth and development as it relates to competence in many areas.

The feeling of belonging and the quality of relationships inside the classroom has an impact on the learning environment (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Symth & Hattam, 2000), the students’ participation and engagement (Turner et al., 1998; Wentzel, 1993) as
well as their motivation to achieve (Urdan & Maehr, 1995; Wentzel, 1993). Studies have found that supportive teacher-student relationships have a positive effect on students’ school related functions (Murray & Malmgren, 2005) and that early teacher-child relationships are predictors of academic and behavioral outcomes for students up through junior high school (Hamre & Pinata, 2001; Manzticopoulos, 2005; Wentzel, 2002) as well as emotional competencies (Murray & Murray, 2004) and motivation to succeed (Hamre & Pinata, 2001; Ryan, Connell & Deci, 1985; Wentzel, 2002). Conversely, a child’s adjustment to school and participation in class can be negatively affected when the relationship between child and teacher is distressed (Manzticopoulos, 2005).

Morganett (2001) states that students want teachers who are interested in their personal as well as their academic lives. This leads to greater classroom cooperation because when we feel accepted by others we tend to do all that we can to make their lives easier.

Goldstein (1999) suggests that an actual affinity can be developed between a student and teacher, meaning that both parties can develop a liking or kindred feelings for the other. This happens as teachers create a safe, learning environment leading to mutual learning and achievement. This emotional closeness and support creates a mutual tendency for relationship formation between the teacher and child as caring interchange between teacher and child is established and continually acted upon. As affinity for a teacher and the comfort level of the relationship stabilizes, it is likely that the burden of being accepted in the classroom will be alleviated, allowing learning to be the focus. It is the whole child that needs educating, and the promotion of achievement does not always come naturally. To teach effectively one must attend to the emotional well-being of students (Ryan, Connell & Deci, 1985). As the child’s most basic needs are met, other
areas of development are then free for attention. In the classroom, once the child is assured that s/he is in a safe learning environment his/her attention can then be directed to other activities.

Teacher Influence

In creating a learning environment, teachers do actually have an influence (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Deiro, 2005). In fact, although the parent-child model suggests that relationships between parent and child establish future interactive behavior between child and other adults, Davis (2006) among others found that good relationships between teacher and students in early elementary years have a greater influence on future interactions with teachers than do parental relationship quality. However, many times teachers are unaware of the communication style that they use and the relationship and climate they create (Babad, 1990; Turner et al., 1998). Teachers’ beliefs about whether relationships are important can also have an effect on the type of relationships established (Davis, 2006).

The idea that all teachers can create an atmosphere of learning, where the demand for achievement is coupled with a healthy dose of teacher support is one that cannot be abandoned. Many studies suggest that teachers should strive for that perfect balance of press to motivate achievement (Middleton & Midgley, 2002) and the development of a supportive relationship (Ryan, Connell & Deci, 1985) that meets the needs of every student in the classroom. Reeve (2006) outlines four teacher characteristics that aid in creating healthy student-teacher relationships. They are 1) Attunement, or sensitivity to the students’ state of being; 2) Relatedness, which is defined as feeling close to another person; 3) Supportiveness, or the teachers affirmation of a student’s capacity, and 4)
Gentle Discipline which is a strategy used to help the student understand why one way is better than another as opposed to just punishing student behavior. Improving individual relationships reduces stress. The more supportive teachers are in their relationships with students the more the comfortable and engaged students are in the classroom (Reeve, 2006). Feeling accepted by others opens up communication. There is a difference between an active and healthy connection between individuals working towards a common goal and an environment where individuals simply share space while completing tasks.

Many schools of teacher education, whether they be based on the theories of John Dewey or influenced by redefined state and national standards, have begun to practice child-centered learning styles and focus on creating learning atmospheres. But what does that actually mean to the teachers and students in practice? From a student’s perspective, it can mean that teachers care about them and their learning. Gomez et al. (2004, p862), quoting Goldstein and Lake, states that care includes “the establishment of meaningful relationships, the ability to sustain connections, and the commitment to respond to others with sensitivity and flexibility.” Many of the processes innate in what we recognize as relationships are linked to the closeness of the relationship; therefore researchers are starting to focus on the construct of “closeness” (Reis, Collins & Bersheid, 2000). Deiro (2005) outlines four types of relationships: Expressive-Emotional, used to fulfill ourselves and our emotional needs; Confirmatory, which are formed to confirm our personally held beliefs and social realities; Instrumental, created to accomplish tasks and reach goals; and Influential, which are formed to create change on one or both parties. She characterized the teacher-student relationship as an example of an influential
relationship. The relationship that is influential is one that is more than just instructive. Findings have indicated that having teachers that are emotionally attentive and responsive to the needs of their students often has a greater impact than the specific kind of instructional method chosen (Babad, 1993; Davis, 2003; Hamre & Pianta).

The relationship between student and teacher is reciprocal in nature and based on the interaction of caring between the parties. This would include teachers and students that enjoy a personal connection that is constantly nourished and maintained (Gomez et al., 2004). Yet teachers and students alike are not always aware of the influence the relationship has on one another. The reciprocal nature of the classroom relationship can be seen in studies that have shown that teachers tend to have preferences for students who are a) like them (Morganett, 2001), b) express personality compatibility and ease of management, c) demonstrate desired behaviors (Babad, 1993; Davis, 2006; Wentzel, 1993), d) have a probability for success (Babad, 1990; Davis, 2003) and, e) are unlikely to be involved in conflict with the teacher (Hamre and Pianta, 2001). Teachers also tend to be more drawn to students who demonstrate honesty and respect for self and peers (Davis, 2006). Couple this with the students preoccupation with the social acceptance from peers that prevails over the desire for education (Connell & Wellborn, 1991) and classroom culture can easily become a situation of “us” versus “them” (Juvonen, 2000, Sythm & Hattam, 2000).

With all of these factors, teachers are likely to spend their time with students who are easy to work with and to participate in greater quality instruction with those students. However, Wentzel (1993) found that working on the relationship improved the behavior and academic achievement of students, whereas the attempts to improve academic
achievement did not influence behavior. Teacher preferences for students lead to supportive relationships, which then lead to improved academic behavior and other positive school functioning (Murray & Malmgren, 2005; Wentzel, 1993). Likewise, children who have trusting and positive relationship with teachers are more motivated in their schooling endeavors (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Reeve, 2006) and are more likely to be cooperative in the classroom (Morganett, 2001). Many teachers and students are not aware that they act upon their preferences when working within the classroom walls (Babad, 1990), but studies would suggest that these relationships are so important and have such lasting effects that there is a need to develop a further understanding of how teachers and students interact and in what manner they do (Babad, 1993, Davis, 2006; Murray & Murray, 2004).

Teachers make decisions about how and with which students to spend their time based on several factors such as the likelihood for student success (Muller, Katz, and Dance, 1999), how they see their role with the student (Hoy, Davis & Pape, in press) and the propensity for rejection by the student (Davis, 2003). These judgments are likely not made consciously but are methods for the teacher to protect her own need to belong (Leary, 2003) and inability to deal with negative affect from students (Reeve, 2006).

Davis (2006) also found that teachers are reluctant to claim responsibility for the formation of classroom relationships, citing that they were unsure that it was their duty and not knowing if it was in the best interest of the student to do so. However, as the adult and the one more developmentally capable to rationalize choice, it would be prudent for teachers to begin to understand the importance of their relationships with students and look for ways to monitor them. Teachers’ beliefs about whether
relationships are important can have an effect on the types of relationships established (Davis, 2006).

Gomez et al. (2004) suggest that the aspect of a caring relationship is critical in understanding the growth of both teacher and student. Teachers may spend more time with lower achieving students, but when it comes to relationships, we want to focus on quality of the time spent, not quantity. Babad (1990) found that contrary to teacher opinion, students of lesser ability receive less emotional support, which begs the question, what do teachers consider as quality relationships? Seldom have studies examined the relationships of teachers and students based on perceptions of caring, or reviewed teaching practices and beliefs that examine the contexts in which such a focus is most beneficial for youth (Wentzel, 2002).

Measuring Teachers' Perceptions

As the student-teacher relationship continues to prove a factor in student achievement outcomes and childhood socialization, and as relationship science grows as a practice, there have been calls for more measures to help researchers and practitioners understand the inner workings of classroom processes and relationships. This includes personal interactions and relationships between the teacher and the student on a specific level. Although there are measures that attempt to describe the student-teacher relationship or classroom atmosphere from the student perspective, currently there are few models that assess the teacher-student relationship from the viewpoint of the teacher.

One such model is the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale, (STRS; Pianta, 1999). In its original form it was a five-dimension scale that measured the areas of Conflict/Anger, Warmth/Closeness, Open Communication, Dependency and Troubled
Feelings. It was a 31-item questionnaire with a 5-point Likert- scale. Eventually this scale was reduced to a three-dimension measurement, combining the dimensions of Warmth/Closeness with Open communication and eliminating the dimension of Troubled Feelings. The scale is used to assess the teacher’s perceptions of the relationship with individual students and is based on theory of adult-child attachment. As evidence of its validity, scores on the STRS scale correlate with behavior problems and competencies, peer relations, and behavior of teacher and students within relationships. The STRS also has accurately described teacher decisions and current student-teacher interaction as well as predict future adjustment of a child.

Another scale that has recently been used to measure the affective quality of teacher-student relationships from the teacher’s perspective is the Teacher-Student Relationship Inventory (TSRI; Ang, 2005). This scale is a 16-item Likert-type scale with three factors: Satisfaction, Instrumental Help and Conflict. Teachers in two studies provided information on more than 20 students who then either filled out an Anger Questionnaire in one instance or provided academic scores in another. This measure showed reliability in correlating teachers’ perceptions with student aggression to predict current relationship standings and positive academic outcomes. The restriction on both of these measures is that both the STRS and the TSRI are prepared questionnaires that limit the scope of personal relationships and are void of explanation or opportunity for any variation from the choices provided on the survey.

Results using both instruments describe relationships as they currently are but do not provide immediate feedback to teachers about the current situation because the questionnaires are gathered and transformed into graphs and charts for research purposes.
rather than being used by teachers for reflection and change. Both measures however, do verify the great impact that positive, close relationships with students can have for student success. Although both found that a three-dimensional measure best represented the factor structure of the data, the STRS by dropping the Troubled Feelings dimension, lost a chance for examination of a very important aspect of teaching. The Troubled Feeling dimension assessed a teacher’s fears of being unable to connect with a specific child. With the evidence that close, positive student-teacher relationships have an effect on so many aspects of a child’s development, I believe that this is an extremely important factor for teachers to recognize and consider in identifying ways to create a positive relationship with any child.

The interest in social connections in social psychology has a longer history and psychologist have been looking for ways to measure relationships there as well. In 1985 Pipp et al (as cited in Aron, Aron and Smollan, 1992) attempted to have adolescents describe their relationships with parents by drawing diagrams of two circles that were to represent the closeness they felt to that parent. The researchers found that the overlap and the closeness of the circles had a strong correlation to scaled ratings of emotions such as love and friendship (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992).

Another scale that has recently been used to measure close relationships is the Perceived Interpersonal Closeness Scale (PICS; Popovic, Milne & Barrett, 2003). This scale is a measure of how close a person feels to a variety of people in his/her life as compared to how close s/he would like to feel. The tool consists of six concentric circles, the innermost representing the Self and the closest circle to the Self representing “fully close” and so forth, to “distant” being outside the last circle. The participant is given a
list of possible people (parent, partner, friend, etc.) each with their own symbol and the participant is to place the symbol of each person in the appropriate circle representing how the relationships are currently. The participant then repeats the exercise with the same symbols, placing them according to how close s/he would like them to be.

Prior to the development of the PICS, Aron, Aron and Smollan (1992) created an influential model that was designed to visually represent the closeness of relationships. Their scale, called the Inclusion of Other in Self Scale (IOS) was designed to “tap people’s sense of interconnectedness with another” (Aron, Aron & Smollan, 1992). The IOS is a one dimensional, pictorial representation of seven variations of close circles; from adjacent and moving linearly to almost overlapping completely (see Appendix A, illustration 1). To use the IOS, the participant selected the diagram that most closely represented the relationship with a significant other. The IOS has been used primarily to describe intimate relationships, such as with a significant other like a mate or a family member. It has also been used to describe best-friend relationships and Li adapted it for use in comparison of friendship/family closeness across cultures. In his adaptation, Li (2002) compressed the original seven diagrams into five, added a diagram where the two circles did not touch at all, and allowed for participants to draw in their own diagram if they felt their relationship was not represented.

The IOS scale seemed to be a perfect device to get a dialogue started with teachers about their relationships with students if paired with questions that forced participants to answer why their relationships were as they reported. The combination would help participants to recognize how the relationships were and then to justify or reason out why that was so. There were limits to the IOS scale that its designers
recognized. First of all it was static. The measure was seven pictures and the participant had to choose the one that fit best, thus limiting a description of a relationship that was somewhere in between one or the other. Secondly, the circles were the same size, limiting the possibility of reasons for feeling/ not feeling close (such as an imbalance in power). Thirdly, the authors provided a questionnaire asking what the representation meant to participants, yet the questions were again closed rather than open-ended and answers pre- constructed, thus limiting the opportunity of the participant to provide meaning from their own experience (Aron, Aron & Smollan, 1992).

To begin the dialogue of how teachers see their relationships and to get the opportunity to visually understand what they describe, the IOS seemed the most appropriate tool. I adapted the tool significantly to make it more dynamic and to address some of the limitations described above. The result was an interactive scale that was used as a prompt to aid teachers in discussing the nature of the relationships that existed in their classrooms.
CHAPTER 3

PROTOCOL DESIGN AND USE

Influenced by the understandings of social acceptance theories, and guided by an interpretivist/constructivist perspective, the intent of this study was to create a tool by which a teacher could recreate classroom interactions and reflect on them for interpretation and understanding. Recognizing that relationships are an ever-changing and evolving phenomenon and that a teacher’s opinion of a relationship of a specific student could be influenced by the interactions of the day, classroom observation was not appropriate to capture and interpret a teacher’s relationship with her students.

Outhwaite states that to remain objective, interpreters must develop a method that allows them to stay outside of the interaction and step away from their own historical perspective as well (Schwandt, 2000). Phenomenological sociology employs measures of reflexivity. Combining these ideas, it was the intent of this study to conduct an interview with a teacher, once removed from the situation by distance and time, and to encourage her to recreate as accurately as possible the feelings of the relationship so as to describe them without bias. In order to do this, I wanted a tool that would employ many forms of interaction that would work together to produce the most accurate form of recall and would allow for empathic identification by giving the teacher an opportunity to explain
and provide rationale for her actions. A one-dimensional questionnaire would not allow for this nor would a classroom observation in which unexplained interactions between teacher and student are merely observed and objectively tallied. To understand her motivations I needed a tool that employed visual display, reflective thought and verbal communication.

The measure that I developed is explained below. The timeframe for the interviews is also important in that each teacher was interviewed within a month of the beginning of summer vacation, thereby removing the teacher from subjective daily influences of classroom behaviors and routines. The interviews were conducted away from school grounds and the researcher never met any of the students from any of the classrooms, allowing for objectivity and ensuring that the teacher was free to give her view of the relationship with no knowledge from the researcher of the students’ personalities or behaviors.

*Measures*

The Inclusion of Others in the Self (IOS) Scale (Aron, Aron & Smollan, 1992) was the instrument that inspired the protocol for this study. Whereas the original IOS was a static tool with set options that participants could select, I adapted the scale and paired it with open-ended questions allowing for the participant to talk herself through the process. The original scale was a one-dimensional drawing featuring a set of circles, identical in dimension, presented in a series of overlapping progression (See Appendix A, Illustration 1). The participant was to select the illustration that most closely represented his or her relationship with a significant other.
As in the original scale, this adaptation is designed to have the participants identify the closeness of a relationship as represented by the visual display of interacting circles. In order to facilitate the discussion and ownership of the relationship, I constructed a dynamic version that allowed the participant to create her own model of the relationship. The adapted scale also consists of two circles, with the addition of a continuum. The circles are of equal size but of differing color (for differentiation purposes, pink representing the teacher and purple representing the student) made from construction paper. The continuum is simply a line drawn in the middle of a white, half sheet of paper (See Appendix A, Illustration 2). Participants were free to place the circles as close or distant on the continuum as they saw fit to represent the particular relationship.

A second adaptation to the tool consists of three pairs of circles of three different sizes (small, medium and large; two sets of differing color, again pink and purple, also made of construction paper) and the continuum as described above. This adaptation was designed to allow the participant to select circle size as well as placement in description of the relationship (see Appendix A, Illustration 3).

Participants

The participants for this study were three white, female elementary school teachers who had just finished the school year in second grade classrooms. The teachers all taught in different school districts and varied in experience. The recruitment of these participants, because of the exploratory nature of this project, was through a combination of convenience and snowball sampling methods; participation was voluntary. The
women chose their own pseudonyms for confidentiality and they will be referred to as such: Ms. B, Ms. C and Ms. George (see Appendix B, Table 1).

Ms. B had just completed her second year of teaching. She taught in a predominantly white, middle class suburban district. Her class consisted of 24 students with very little diversity but with varying degrees of academic achievement. The interview was conducted in late June in her home, seated at the kitchen table. The interviewer was seated across from her.

Mrs. C had just finished her last year as a second grade teacher after 27 years of service. She taught in an upper-middle class suburban area, ranging from very low SES to extremely high SES. Her class consisted of 17 students with great diversity of cultures and languages. She has been a Jennings scholar twice in her career (which is recognition for outstanding teachers in her state of residence). The interview was conducted in her home in mid-July. Teacher and researcher sat on opposite sides of the coffee table, which was used for the purpose of creating and displaying the diagrams.

Ms. George was a first year teacher. She started out as a permanent substitute and eventually took over the classroom. She taught in a suburban middle class district with little diversity. She had 22 students in her class and as a whole, her class was lower achieving as compared to the other two classes in the same grade. The interview was conducted at the home of the researcher, at the request of the participant, in late July. Researcher and participant sat on opposite sides of the kitchen table.

Procedure

The interview protocol has four stages of implementation that will be described below. Prior to the interview, each participant was asked to provide a list of all students
in her class by first name only (and last initial in the case of duplicate names). A continuum with each student’s name was prepared prior to the interview. Participants were asked to use the adapted IOS scale to visually represent their relationship with each student. Interviews were audio taped for later transcription and analysis. The four stages of the protocol procedures are as follows:

Stage 1. The Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (IOS) (Aron, Aron & Smollan) adapted. This is a Venn-like diagram that has been adapted for use to describe the influence and closeness of relationships, depending on how close, overlapping or distant the circles were. For purposes in this study, it was adapted as described above and made dynamic in order to give participants the flexibility and freedom to create a diagram unique to the relationship they described. Using the continuum described above, the teacher participant placed a circle of one color, representing herself, on the continuum and a second circle of differing color, representing the student, on the continuum in relation to the closeness felt in said relationship (See Appendix A, Illustration 4). The specific instructions were:

“The question of overlapping circles has been used in many studies of relationships. The purpose of our project is to understand what your relationship is like with each of your students. Place the circle representing yourself on the line and then place the circle representing the student on the line relevant to how connected you feel your relationship is with that student. For example, circle placement may range from touching or overlapping in the case of close relationships or anywhere from opposite ends of the continuum for less close relationships. Feel free to comment on the relationship, your rationale for the choice of placement, and/or what meaning it represents as you complete this task.”
After each diagram was completed, it was collected and stacked out of view of the participant before going on to the next one. This process ensured that each diagram was an independent judgment of each individual relationship.

Stage 2. Reflective exercise. Once the participant had completed a diagram for every student in her class, all of the completed diagrams were spread out in front of her. The diagrams were grouped in order of circle distance—overlapping/touching, separate and distant. After allowing the participant to see the complete diagram representation of her class as a whole, she was given the opportunity to make any adjustments that she would like to the representations she had made. The participant was then asked to comment on any patterns that she saw, groupings that she noticed, or make general commentary on the relationships that she now noted, as she was able to review the relationships visually.

Stage 3. The “Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale”-second adaptation. After the participant had been given the opportunity to discuss the above representation and all the observations that she had noted, six of the completed diagrams were selected for further reflection. Two diagrams from each category (overlapping/touching circles, separate and distant) were chosen by the researcher. The same premise as above applied with the use of the second tool. A blank continuum was placed before the participant and she was told the name of the student whose relationship with her she was to describe. However, instead of circles of the same size used to represent both student and teacher, the participant was able to choose the size of the circle (small, medium or large) for herself and for the student. The purpose of this exercise was to see if the selection of a circle
size would change the placement of the circles on the continuum and/or the way in which the teacher participant described the relationship with that student. Again, each diagram was collected upon completion, one at a time before being placed before the participant collectively for comment. Participants were encouraged to talk themselves through the process as they chose circle size and placement and correspond to the following instruction:

"The selection of circles representing both you and your students can be construed to have many meanings. Please describe your rationale behind the selection of the size of the circles for both you and your student and what significance the selection may have. Please also explain the meaning in the placement of the circles relevant to each other."

Stage 4. The fourth stage is the discussion that developed and actually took place throughout the entire interview as the participant worked. From the onset each participant was encouraged to talk openly about the relationship with each student as they worked. Many spontaneous questions arose depending on comments made by the participant such as when a participant described a behavior of a student that she found disruptive the researcher asked "how did you respond to that behavior?" When necessary, follow-up questions were posed prompting the participant to detail her thought process for purpose of clarification and explanation. Other questions that were asked of the participant were: 1. How do you think your relationship with this particular child affected your ability to teach him/her? 2. What does this measure mean to you? 3. How would you define feeling "connected" in the context of your classroom? 4. What impact do you feel relationships can/may have on the learning atmosphere of a classroom? 5. After completing this
exercise, are there any changes you would make in your teaching philosophy or your approach with students?

The use of the scale varied slightly among the three participants, especially the use of the second adapted scale where the determination of meaning of circle size was left to the discretion of the participant. Two of the teachers took advantage of the opportunity to change diagrams after the first run through, both to move circles closer. In the second phase of the scale the teachers each assigned different meaning to circle size. For Ms. B the circle size was a representation of the dominant person in the relationship as well as how well that individual fulfilled his/her role as teacher and student, i.e. a large circle for her indicated that she was at her best as a teacher. For Mrs. C, the size of the circle used to represent her indicated how much effort that she put into working with the child. The circle size used for the child dealt with their presence, or influence, in the classroom. For Ms. George the sizes indicated the role the student and teacher played in relation to each other. A large circle was indicative of an authoritarian role, where a medium one was less intimidating. For the students, the circle size depended on the students’ participation in the classroom and the influence they had on her.

Analysis

Interviews were audi-taped and transcribed for analysis. Names of the students were changed to pseudonyms. Analysis began by looking at themes as identified by each participant in their specific classroom and cross-checking them to the others, looking for similarities in groupings and themes. Each participant was profiled according to the responses to the questions. Profiling was also based on the participants understanding of connections with students and the perceived impact of these connections on her students’
learning and her teaching, and her reaction to the process and outcome of this activity.
Data matrices were used to organize, compare, and draw connections amongst the experiences and understandings of each participant and the use of this protocol. Several passes through the transcribed data were made in an attempt to exhaust the shared meaning and themes across interviews. Each interview was coded for terminology and thematic use of phrases. Through the process of coding, organizing and processing these data, emerging themes and sub-themes were identified that are present across elementary classrooms and are employed by teachers in the development and maintenance of classroom relationships as demonstrated by the reflections of participating teachers. These were then checked and validated through the identification of quotations from the interviews.

For usage of the scale, several passes over the diagrams for each class were made and compared to participant statements to validate use of tool and identify any discrepancies of verbal and visual description of relationships. This was done to check for consistency in use of this protocol by the participant.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND EVALUATION

This study is a look at teachers' perceptions of classroom relationships. It is an attempt to begin a discussion with teachers about those classroom relationships so that they might reflect upon the relationships and the influence they may have. The goal was to devise a tool that may be helpful to teachers in exploring those relationships. There were several themes that emerged throughout the interviews and that were common to at least two of the three participants, although their application and meaning slightly varied. I have limited the discussion to those five that were most frequently referenced.

I will introduce the findings by first discussing classroom constructs that were discovered through the use of the protocol by each of the teacher participants (See Appendix B, Table 1). These constructs were discovered through themes that emerged in each interview (See Appendix B, Table 2). I will review these interviews case by case. After reviewing each interview and the themes that were unique to the particular participant, I will discuss how each participant used the protocol in the exploration of her classroom relationships. I have broken the discussion of the use of the protocol into three stages. Similarities and differences in use will be discussed in each phase, along with
some points of interest that are indicative of the participants' teaching style and/or classroom role.

Perceptions of Classroom Relationships

As is understandable, the participants, being very different people, had very different personalities, styles of teaching, and ideas about classroom constructs. These differences are evident in how they define the constructs (see Appendix B, Table 1), which appears to be dependent on the personalities, experiences and the ability of each to reflect on their work and relationships.

Ms. B.

Ms. B knew her students well. She could recall specific instances with each of her students and she had a sense for who liked her and who did not. She was sensitive to the acceptance or rejection of her personality by the students. She categorized her students by behavior: those who followed directions and those who did not. She looked for feedback from the children through physical means (hugs, high-fives, body language). Many of the issues with discipline came from her concern for the large class size and the varied amount of capabilities of the children where the range was from barely reading, to reading three grade levels ahead. She had a few children with behavior disorders (2-3 ADHD and one bi-polar) and these children seemed to be the hardest for her to deal with as she could not keep their attention and felt that their behavior affected her ability to teach them. She describes a good relationship as one that has positive interactions that are good for both her and the student. The reaction of the students to Ms. B had an affect on her. At times she felt as if in competition with other students for the affections of those who were more concerned about pleasing their friends then pleasing the teacher. She felt rejected by a few students but worked hard not to reject them in kind. She recognized that some students were easier to teach than others and she did realize that she preferred the company of some students to others, but she tried to be fair. She does believe it is possible to love every student although she admits that she struggled to be able to do that with those that rejected her.

Ms. B had only been teaching for two years. The two most recurring themes that emerged in her interview were behavior, defined as what she needed to monitor so that she could do her job effectively, and "good students," which were those who cooperated, were intelligent, helpful, friendly, communicative, and likeable and who put effort into their learning. She saw relationships as being important in the classroom and used the
word "love" in some of her commentaries. When asked how love played a part in the classroom she stated, “I think the acceptance of my love helped out a lot. I feel like these students (close category) loved me and felt very safe and wanted to learn and wanted to please me and that is my greatest tool. If I can get them on my side then they’ll help me out and I won’t have to worry about managing as much.”

It could be argued that Ms. B valued good relationships and good behavior and that the two were somehow equivalent in her mind. She stated that she often told the class as a whole that she loved them and that one of the most important factors for a learning environment was “just feeling love and feeling safe and secure in my classroom and feeling that’s where they want to be…” As the interviewed revealed that class management was a big issue for Ms. B, she discovered that the students who she had placed in the most distant category were the boys that were usually off-task, roughhousing or more involved with their peers than with her. However, she was also surprised that some of her highest achieving students, who were also the more independent, were not the closest relationships. These were both surprising facts to her as she had not noticed how comparatively little time she spent with either group.

Contrary to her impression that she was most connected to the high achieving students, the description that accompanied the placement of the circles would indicate that she felt closest and most connected with students who not only accepted her, but also sought her out. She described her relationship with students who were not as dependent on her, or dismissed her efforts, by stating that those that “didn’t accept [my love], and were doing their own thing, I really had to work on more and they caused me a little more anguish and were not given the strongest lessons ever” (Leary, 2004; Babad, 1990).
She identified another important factor as the students’ love for learning and personal curiosity, which she felt that she had to encourage by example. She stated that both being excited about the lessons herself and loving each child “take a lot of energy, and to love some of these students and to be completely positive when they treat you not so hot…it takes a lot of energy too…But I think—I’m glad that I put that much energy into it.”

Ms. B admitted that it was hard to teach the children that she felt did not accept her because she could sense their dislike and it affected her sometimes (Leary & Downs, 1995). She stated that she tried very hard to hide the way that it affected her and tried to stay positive towards them. This ended up in what she referred to as “fair treatment, but not equal treatment” stating that she gave the two children who were the hardest for her to teach compensation through rewards and the majority of her time (Babad, 1990). As she reflected on the class as it lay before her she said that the thing she would change would be to seek out individually the students with whom her relationship was not as close and try to connect with them, by “spend[ing] more time near their desks, one on one time, or even on recess…I would seek them out and try to have more interactions, positive interactions with them...like I said earlier, if they feel that connection they’ll feel like they want to try harder to do well in school...”(Morganett, 2001).

Ms. C.
Ms. C was a seasoned veteran and it was evident that she truly enjoyed teaching and that retirement was not a decision that she made easily. She truly cared for each of her students and was confidant that she had done all that was in her power to help each of them as much as she could. She knew each of her students extremely well. She also spoke of the parents of each of the children in her classroom and is very conscientious of her relationships with the parents as well as with the students. She acknowledged that there were some with whom there was a language barrier but she still tried to make some kind of connection. To Ms. C a good relationship was characterized by a mutual liking between student and teacher. She tried to end the day positively with every student and
she practiced self-reflective techniques every day to monitor her relationships. She stated that the more that she taught, the more she realized the importance of the student-teacher relationship and put a lot of effort into making sure that she found something to like in each child and to treat each child in a way that they would like her as well. False praise was not something that she did because she felt children know when you are not being genuine with them. She believed that her own experiences were much more effective tools for improvement than any of her teaching preparation courses because the courses didn’t teach relationship issues. She got most of her foundation on relationship issues from her own mothering experiences and workshops as a Jennings Scholar.

Ms. C was the veteran teacher who had just finished her last of her 27-year long career. The themes that were most prominent with this participant were those of teacher effort and parental involvement. Teacher effort was defined as the amount of time and effort a teacher spent with an individual student helping with academic progress, including time taken from teaching activities to refocus off-task students. It also included effort to create positive interactions that didn’t happen naturally. Parental involvement referred to interference or cooperation of parents; how aware or supportive the parents are in the learning process. This relationship could be a help or a hindrance depending on the situation. In the case of Ms. C the majority of the time parental involvement was a positive aspect of the classroom culture. She reported that she had every parent in to volunteer at one time or another throughout the school year and that she made a special effort to keep them involved by sending home a letter to the parents each week, which took a lot of time but that she found to be invaluable. Also, she relied on the parents for feedback on how the students liked school through the reports they got at home and any perceptions of what goes on that she may not be aware of as the teacher. As Ms. C completed each measure, she mentioned the family situation of each student. This insight into familial circumstances gave her insight to the needs of each student.
The other theme that stood out was that of teacher effort. Ms. C felt that it was important to know each child and that took a lot of effort in some cases. She mentioned that a smaller class size, like the class she had that year of 17, allowed her to “get closer to the children, [because] you get to know them better.” By the detail that she gave on each child’s circumstance and situation, it was evident that she did know the child and the family personally. One example was with a student referred to as Wendy. Ms. C began by describing details of the child’s background, the different nationalities of the child’s parents, how and why the child got her name, and some personal characteristics she possesses. She then discussed personal observations that led her to believe why this particular student may struggle academically as well as socially. The following passage is a description that communicates how Ms. C was sensitive to the needs of the child because she both knew the parents and made the effort to get to know the child:

Wendy is very quiet for her mother holds her older sister up for, um well, her mother idolizes her older sister and Wendy is the “other” child so there was [sic] some problems there. Wendy is, um, not easy to get close to, but this summer she is writing to me everyday; not every day—she’s written to me like, five letters and I’ve written back to her.

She put this kind of effort into many of the relationships, trying to be cautious and sensitive to the feelings of the child (Reeve, 2006).

Evidence of Ms. C’s concern with how the students felt and her respect for what they needed from her when making decisions on how much and what kind of effort to put in with each student was apparent in the use of the second tool. One example of this was with the diagram for Mindy. She stated that for the student she chose as a small circle “because Mindy would be happy also if she could just do her thing and not have anyone pay attention to her—especially the teacher. She’s very shy and immature so she really
was not in step with the class. Being the youngest in the class can often make a big difference. And I'm giving me a middle [sized] circle because I could not hover around her too much; she felt intimidated.”

Ms. C stated that she was aware of the state of her class because she reflects on her teaching daily and makes sure that she ends the day on a positive note with each child, especially if the student had a particularly hard day. She said that it was her responsibility to make sure that the students want to come back to school the next day, which meant telling the child that she loved him or complimenting him on something he did that day, but she also noted that sincerity plays a large part because children can “ferret out that fake praise.” The importance of classroom relationships was evident by her statement when she said, “I can’t imagine not being close and not caring about the students. I can’t imagine what kind of classroom that would be; I don’t see how any learning would really go on.” When asked if she was a different teacher now than she was when she started Ms. C responded by stating how important she discovered that personal relationships were in the classroom. She stated,

“...there are a lot of teaching styles, teaching methods but the kids basically have to know that you care about them because they are not going to try to learn if they do not have the base sense that ‘my teacher cares about me,’ and you know that this is a safe place; this is what happens everyday. No matter what I do, she’s still going to like me. Now I may not like what he does at that particular moment but overall I’m going to like that child. So I think the longer I taught the more I saw that.”

This statement also indicates that she saw the value of personal effort and strove to separate the child from the behavior (Connell & Wellborn, 1991).

*Ms. George.*

*Ms. George believed that teaching was something that comes easily and she was confidant of her teaching and felt that she had done well in her first year. Although she recognized that as a first year teacher she had made some mistakes, she felt overly*
criticized by the parents. The parents had a lot of influence in the school district and she felt that sometimes they had too much influence. She described the classroom to which she was assigned as below average in achievement and stated that her class was the joke amongst the other teachers even before she took it over. Ms. George was very frank and open about her relationships and feelings for each of her children in the classroom and she had some definite opinions about whom she did and did not like. A good relationship to Ms. George was one in which she and the child “connected,” meaning that they had similar personalities and could share mutual interest. The more helpful the child was to her the more she accepted them. It was apparent that this was the first time that she had given thought to her personal relationships and how they affected the classroom as a whole and the students’ learning in general. Ms. George justified her relationships and found reason for the way that she treated her students. She stated that the preparation she received was not sufficient in being able to correct relationships that had gone awry. She could not pinpoint what things impact learning and really didn’t see that she could influence learning for every student.

The last participant was Ms. George, who had just finished her first year of teaching. She had started the year as the full-time substitute but was hired on as a permanent faculty member before the end of the year. In Ms. George’s interviews, the three most prevalent themes were that of behavior, teacher effort and personalities, mostly unfavorable traits that she observed in the students. Again, behavior is defined as those things that a teacher must monitor in order for her to be able to perform her job effectively. Teacher effort involved the amount of time and effort a teacher spent with an individual helping with academic progress and included time taken away from teaching activities to refocus off-task students in addition to the effort to create positive interaction where none existed. Personality was defined as those characteristics that are individual to a student, that are similar or opposite from that of the teacher. Unfavorable personality traits included being too shy and quiet, being too independent to the point that the teacher didn’t feel needed, as well as making remarks that were inappropriate in class.

Ms. George’s interview produced a large middle group, which when she saw it she stated was an appropriate way to have the class. These students were what she categorized as students that were average academically and rarely got into trouble. Her
distant relationships were those with whom behavior was an issue and in whom she found personality conflicts and those who she felt didn’t need her. All three themes are represented in the description of one student, Michelle. Ms. George stated in relation to Michelle that:

I don’t think that I ever developed a really strong relationship with Michelle either. I think she kinda [sic] kept to herself; even quiet in class. She was your average little girl—nice, sweet. Didn’t really have any issues with her, but she wasn’t someone who necessarily sought my attention so I think just because she was kinda average, middle of the road, not that she fell by the wayside, but she wasn’t one of the needy ones and wasn’t ones that excelled or a teacher’s pet.

As part as the second exercise, she stated that she had a distant relationship with Michelle because of some behavioral issues. She referred to her and the other five students with diagrams that represented distant relationships as “estranged” from her. Behavior and teacher effort combined resulted in a distant relationship. Ms. George mentioned a couple of times, in the case with two different students where both behavior and teacher effort were major themes, that these students wanted and needed her acceptance. The first student, Derek who was part of the “estranged group” started the year on suspension but she stated “he applied himself once he saw that I loved and accepted him.” However, he remained in the estranged group, perhaps for the reason she gave as his “needing an extra warm hand in guiding him,” which took a lot of effort. With another child, Myra who was in the middle group, the relationship was referred to as “temperamental” due to of the student’s aggressive behavior. This student also had some learning disabilities and Ms. George stated, “it was a difficult relationship, but she really wanted me to like her. She wanted me accept her, and I think that she is a great kid; I just think that she needs a different type of educational classroom.” These students also manifested personality
traits that Ms. George found unfavorable as the main factor as to whether or not she felt close to them in both the first and second exercises.

The close group, which was even smaller than the “estranged” group, consisted of students who did seek out the teacher’s attention or with whom the teacher felt a connection on a deeper level. An example of this was what Ms. George hesitated to call a teacher’s pet (although she said if she did have one, this student would be it). Mandy was described as an extremely friendly, helpful and empathetic little girl. Ms. George stated the she and Mandy became attached to one another mainly do the fact that Mandy was affectionate towards Ms. George. She stated, “[Mandy] was just such a pleasure. She always wanted to give me a hug, always very giving; really liked me and I think that made me really adore her because it felt good to be liked your first year.” Another student that fell in the close category was one that Ms. George described as being able to read her mind and who she thought was gifted academically, although we was not tested as such (Babad, 1990; Davis, 2006; Morganett, 2001).

As far as the importance of relationships in the classroom, Ms. George stated that she believes that they can have a big impact. Her explanation is very enlightening:

I think that subconsciously, teachers can shy away from certain students, or not react to certain students or help certain students as much as others. If they don’t feel connected with them or if the students bug them for one reason or another; I mean it comes to those terms—we love them but they do. And as far as the kids, if they don’t feel connected to their teacher and if they don’t feel welcome and invited into the group, they’re not comfortable. And if they’re not comfortable I think that their opportunity to learn isn’t as great.

Ms. George valued reaching a comfort level with each child and reciprocity in the relationships. She had a close connection with the students that sought her attention and with whom she most closely identified. After using this tool she stated that she would
make a greater effort to connect with some of those less connected relationships. Although she did think that there will always be one or two students who are difficult to connect with due to their personalities and shyness, and she did think it was appropriate to have a large group in the middle, but now that she saw how things really were, she stated, “I think that I need to make more of an effort to really get to know my kids and to find something that I like in them—all of them.” (Babad, 1993, Reeve, 2006)

Stage I: Teachers’ Use of Protocol

Overview of protocol use. For the first time use of the scale, the participants each received the same instructions, which were void of specifics about where to place the circles other than being instructed to place the circles on the line and in relation to each other. All three participants placed circles starting on the left end of the continuum before placing the second circle. One of the teachers did ask for more specific instructions as far as the rules about the placement of the circles (if they were allowed to overlap), and one of the teachers placed a circle representing a student in the corner of the page rather than on the continuum, but this was done for emphasis and the participant provided explanation for her placement selection.

The participants received little direction about what to discuss regarding their relationships or what information to include and no prompts other than the students’ names. Occasionally, follow-up questions were asked if the researcher needed further explanation for clarification purposes. Each participant was open and forthcoming with information about each student, almost eager to tell the story of the relationship. Each provided full descriptions of personalities, behaviors and anecdotes of classroom interactions to further illustrate the interaction between student and teacher. No student
was skipped or forgotten. The participants knew their classrooms well. They recalled each child without reminders and had no trouble remembering details of the relationship with each child.

*Differring use of protocol.* The major difference in use of this tool on the first run was which circle was placed first. The two newer teachers started with the placement of their own circle on the very far left end of the continuum, and then placed the student circle in relation to them. The veteran teacher began with placing the student circle on the continuum as she described the student and then placed her circle in relation to the student. Ms. B and Ms. George both began by placing their circle on the left then identifying a student and describing his/her personality traits, behaviors and how those factors impacted them or played out in the classroom as they placed the student circle on, near, or far from their own circle. Ms. C placed the child’s circle first, on the left but never at the very end, and then described the needs, circumstances, family situation and personality of the student before deciding where to place her own circle. This is may indicate the focus of the teachers—newer teachers focused on how the students related to them whereas the veteran focused on the students personality and needs and how she related to the student. Also, the two less experienced teachers took advantage of the chance to change the diagrams after they were all laid out together. The veteran teacher made no adjustments.

Further differences were the number of placements in each category (See Appendix B, Table 3). In the end, Ms B had the majority of her 24 students placed as having close relationships (the circles were overlapping or touching), with only three in a distant relationship demonstrated by the placement on the circles on the opposite end of
the continuum. Ms. C had only 17 students with an even greater majority of her students described as having a close relationship and only two as being less close, and only two being distant. Ms. George on the other hand had the large majority of her 22 students placed in the middle category, with more in the distant category than in the close category.

*Stage II: Second version of protocol*

*Circle selection and placement.* In the second version of the scale, each participant assigned different meanings to the use of the circles. Placement remained the same as signifying “closeness” of the relationship, but each made a unique assignment for the size selection (See Appendix B, Table 4). This may be indicative of how relationships are construed in their classrooms. Again, each of the two less experienced teachers began with choosing her own circle first and placing it on the left side, and then choosing the circle for the student and placing it in relation to her own; while Ms. C started by choosing the student circle first and placing it on the continuum and then choosing her own and placing it in relation to the child. This time around she was inconsistent with the placement of the student circle: two were placed on the left with her own circle placed on the right of it; two on the right with hers placed to the immediate left; and two in the middle, in one instance her circle was placed to the immediate left and the other time to the immediate right.

*Exploratory use.* With the use of the second version of the protocol, although the meaning of placement remained the same for all three participants, that of how close they felt to the student, each teacher made some changes in placement of circles as compared with the first diagram (See Appendix B, Table 4). Ms. B had one student diagram (which
was used as one of the six of the second set initially represent a closer relationship yet in the second exercise, become more distant in placement than in the previous. It was the opposite for another student where in the first run the diagram represented a more distant relationship, in the second it became a closer representation. In the case of Ms. C. four of the diagrams varied in closeness as compared to the earlier placement. Three of the circles were moved closer and one moved slightly farther apart. The other two remained the same. Ms. George adjusted the spacing for only two of the diagrams as compared to the prior run, but her description of the closeness of the relationship was inconsistent, which had to do with the dynamics that came into play with the selection of circle sizes.

*Stage III: Assigning meaning to circle selection*

*Differing concepts of circle size.* To allow each participant to freely describe the relationship with each child, she was given the opportunity to assign the meaning to the circle sizes that she selected for the new diagram.

*Ms. B.* At first Ms. B stated that she would assign the size of the circle to indicate how “dominant they were in the relationship” and then at the end of the exercise she adjusted the definition to be “the impact of the relationship—almost like if you can reach your full potential.” She explained that if she were able to be the best teacher that she knew how to be when working with that child, then she chose a large circle for herself. The smaller the circle the less she was at her professional best as a teacher. Likewise, a large circle indicated that the student was at his or her best as a successful student through the relationship. She stated that for her “the circle sizes mean the impact in the relationship—almost like if you can reach your full potential. If, me, [sic] as a teacher can be the best teacher that I can be in that relationship then I put myself as a big circle and if
they could be the best student they could be in our relationship then I put them as a big circle as well.” The smaller the circle the less the student performed as a student in the relationship with her. Her commentary indicated that the ability to perform at her best was influenced by the student as indicated by her explanation of the diagram with one student, Bill whose diagram was the only one in which the two circle sizes differed. In this case her circle was the largest size and his was the medium sized circle. She explained saying “I felt like his behaviors didn’t hold me back at all, but maybe he didn’t reach his full potential because of...because of his own limitations with paying attention. But it didn’t really affect me.” In contrast with another student, whose diagram was created by having both student and teacher represented by small circles, she felt that his behavior did affect her and was the reason for the small circles. She stated “Geoff’s limitations not only affected him but really affected me as well and I didn’t feel I could be as good of a teacher to them (referencing his along with another student with a similar diagram) because of their inability to want to learn and just...their disruptions in the classroom.” Of course she would prefer that all of her relationships reflected that both teacher and student were at their best, as was the case with two of the six. However, she was satisfied with the relationship of her at her best and the child only slightly behind and gave the reason why when she stated, “I would rather have the relationship I had with Bill where I am the best teacher I can possibly be and he is just a little smaller than I would have two small circles, or even both of us medium, like with Lisa. I think that it is really important that a student’s behavior allows me to be the best teacher I can be to them but it would be so much better if Bill were a big circle as well.”
The circle sizes for the students of Ms. B were evenly divided with two of each size, which meant that there were varying levels of achievement and effort, and her own circles matched that of the students except for the case of Bill, described above. It appears that in most cases, the children’s effort may have affected her effort in teaching them, although she claimed that she spent the greatest amount of time with the two whose diagrams indicated that neither she nor they were at their best. In which case, it is not the effort that is lacking, but rather close relationship because both of these students were identified as the ones with whom she felt the least connection.

Ms. C. Ms. C reported that the circle size that she selected for herself indicated the amount of effort she was required to put forth to help a student, and the circle size for the student was to signify the child’s presence in the classroom. For example, with a student that she described as being quite shy, Ms. C selected a small circle for the child and a large one for herself and explained, “I’m going to put Wendy as a small circle because she—she’s quiet and unassuming. If you didn’t pay any attention to her she’d be happy—the less noticed the better. And I am going to put me as a big circle trying to draw her out; trying to help her.” In contrast to that, to explain the diagram where the student is a large circle and Ms. C is a medium circle she states, “Molly is a class leader…She set the tone for the classroom. Excellent learner—loved to learn, very excited about learning; often said ‘well, can we do this?’ And I’m going to put me in the middle, (next to student circle) because I was there encouraging her along, but boy, she didn’t need much encouragement. She’s a go-getter.”

Ms. C never used a medium sized circle to represent a student nor did she ever use a small one to represent herself. This would indicate that according to her designated
meaning of circle size, children either had great influence (2 of 6) in the classroom, or did not. Also, it would be a sign that she never failed to put effort into her relationships; she invested more with those who did not take classroom initiative, less with those who were more assertive, but never did she fail to make the effort.

*Ms. George.* For Ms. George, the meanings of the student circles were similar to those of Ms. C—the size indicated the student’s presence and influence in the classroom, but it also was a sign of their participation. However, the circle size representing her as teacher indicated the role she played with the individual student. The larger the circle the more of an authority role or intimidating figure she assumed in the relationship. An example would be with Vanessa. Ms. George selected a large circle for herself in this case because of her disciplinarian role and Vanessa as a large circle because her presence was always known; “she was either quiet or loud but in a very strange way.” She stated, “I chose a large one (for herself) when I felt like they viewed me just as their teacher, and not to say that some viewed me as a friend but I think that some of them felt really strongly about me and really enjoyed having me as their teacher. So I think for those, I put a smaller circle for me because I seemed less, the word isn’t ominous, but you know what I mean…they felt like they could approach me more easily than for maybe some of the others.” An example of this less intimidating role would be with the student, Chris. In this case, the circles for both teacher and student were the medium sized. Ms. George related that with Chris she had a relationship where she felt comfortable having inside jokes and felt closer to him.

Placement did not vary from any of the original six except for one, that of Vanessa—the only time that a student had a large circle, in which case the student circle
was at the opposite end of the continuum. According to her definitions, four of the six students participated well enough in class that they received a medium sized circle. One was a large circle because “she had a huge awkward presence in [the] classroom.” The sixth was represented by a small circle because she was timid and shy. Ms. George was never the smallest sized circle. By her definition, there was a clear, definite role with her students; either that of teacher or of friend. With four of the six students her circle was the largest size, indicating an authoritarian role and the other two were medium circles which she explained that she had very little need to discipline them and “connected with them on a more personal level.”

Results of Use

The comments about the use of the measure from the two newer, less experienced teachers gave great insight and proved that this protocol did exactly what it was designed to do; it got them thinking about their interactions and relationships in a way that they hadn’t before. It forced them to think out loud what they thought about situations and behaviors and to look at their own reactions to those students that displayed the behaviors. Their comments demonstrated that many times teachers are just unaware of how they are treating their students (Babad, 1990; Babad, 1993).

Having the participants talk out the relationship as they placed the circles in relation to each other was an effective way to understand what each teacher valued in a relationship. The things that they pointed out as far as what they knew and observed about the students answered a lot of questions about why they ventured to establish a relationship or not, which relates to the literature regarding teacher beliefs and risk in selecting which students to invest in (Davis, 2003). Ms. B valued students whose
behavior didn't interfere with what she saw as her teaching responsibilities and looked forward to positive interaction; Ms. C wanted to get to know each child's background to understand what forces had influenced the child up to the point s/he entered her classroom; Ms. George valued reciprocity in caring and friendship.

Letting the participants use the second measure and assign meaning to the size of the chosen circle was helpful in understanding the role the teachers played in creating their classroom culture. Ms. B saw herself as both a mentor and a disciplinarian. Ms. C saw her role as making the student feel welcome and getting them excited to come to school. She also believed that her role was to communicate with parents and to encourage the student. Ms. George described herself as a having a friendship role with some of the students, yet with others she had mainly a defined teacher role as an authority figure. Having the teacher complete the two different measures and forcing a deeper understanding of how they really interacted with particular students opened their eyes to nuances of relationships of which they had not been aware previously. With awareness came a desire to change how they managed their class and connected with students.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The results of this study support much of what has been studied previously concerning teacher-student relationships. It also delved deeper into the constructs that exist in classroom settings and how those constructs influence the relationships therein. There are many parallels to the literature that has been reviewed, the social psychology, educational psychology and philosophical literature, and where the three fields meet, the findings from this study emerge. I will first address what was discovered about relationships in general and teachers' beliefs about them, relating the findings to the literature that has been reviewed and pointing out where they align and where they contradict. Afterward I will introduce the new concepts and ideas that emerged from this study and suggest ways that this information might prove useful. Finally, I will discuss limitations to this study and implications for future use of the protocol. I conclude with some thoughts regarding classroom relationships.

Purpose of Relationships

The findings affirm those of Babad (1990) that time spent with a student does not necessarily signify quality in relationship or instruction. All three teachers admitted to spending more time with students that were lower-achieving, but they also admitted that
those are not the children with whom they shared a positive, connected relationship. Surprisingly, it appears that the teachers are not the most connected with the higher achieving students either, as they suspected. The students with whom they felt the most connection were the students who sought their attention for more than academic purposes. This would indicate that higher achieving students receive higher quality instruction; lower-achieving students get more personal attention but less affective support and lower quality of instruction (Babad, 1990); and the emotional support goes to those who seek it from the teacher. These findings also then indicate that many times teachers do subconsciously seek to meet their own social needs (Leary & Downs, 1995) and in doing so weigh their decisions of relational and time investments based upon preference and those social needs (Davis, 2003; Morganett, 2001). One is left to wonder about the middle-achieving students, those who bring no attention to themselves through academics or behavior and keep to themselves—much like my teenage mothers.

Not only do teachers use relationships to meet their own social needs, they also use them as tools in the classroom. Relationships that are positive have their advantages such as cooperation in lessons, improvement in conduct and behavior, and increased effort for achievement (Wentzel, 2004). One teacher stated that in addition to using relationships as a tool for motivation that:

...the kids need to like you because they are going to be working with you all day long and if they don’t like you...how would you like to work with someone that you didn’t care for? So it is very important that you like the students and the students like you. Because if they don’t like you and you don’t like them that’s a huge impediment to learning.

So a positive relationship is a win/win situation for teachers. Yet it is one that is not so easily obtained.
Teacher Beliefs

It was evident from the interviews that teachers understand and perceive relationships differently. Many things contribute to the perceptions of how relationships should be including personality, teacher training, experience, attitudes and beliefs, as well as how they envision their role as a teacher (Hoy, Davis & Pape, 2006). Ms. B and Ms. George were different in the relationships in which they played a role of authoritarian than when they were mentors or friends; where their interactions were focused on discipline and gaining control of a situation in the prior, they were more open and casual in their interaction in the latter. How experience is a factor is evidenced by Ms. C’s comments when she stated, “the longer I taught, the more I saw how important personal relationships were” and by the fact that over the years she gained her own technique for reflecting on her teaching to monitor her relationships while the two new teachers had not yet done so, or perhaps, hadn’t even recognized a need to do so.

Effort. Not all children require the same amount of effort. Teachers also perceive effort in teaching and effort in relating to students as different concepts. The teachers spoke of effort in school instruction and effort in managing relationships in different ways. Where one teacher recognized that her effort to love two of her more challenging students equaled the amount of effort to love everyone else in the classroom, another stated that there were always going to be a few with whom you did not connect. Babad (1990) found that teachers think that they can hide their feelings of frustration from students and the teachers in this study did too. But even the teacher that was most aware of her students perceptive nature and tried her best to make sure that she was on good terms with every student, stated that at times when she had to discipline, even though she
tried not to come across as judgmental, in her mind she still was. This is where personality comes in and with experience, the ability to deal with varied personalities.

Effort in instruction varied from being a rewarding experience to being a taxing chore. The difference between the two was the feelings for and the relationship with the student who required the effort. With a student where the effort outweighed the reward the relationship never became a close one but when the effort reaped positive benefits for the teacher, the relationship was described as being close. This is also influenced by teacher personality and perception of their role. The teacher that saw her role the same for every student put in the amount of effort required to help that student achieve, regardless of any benefit to her. The teacher who switched roles depending on the student varied the amount of effort based on the amount she was willing to invest in that child. The result was a taxing endeavor if the child was difficult to work with or a rewarding experience when growth was observed and appreciation was expressed.

Davis (2006) claims that teachers are reluctant to take responsibility for creation and maintenance of relationships with their students. I found that responsibility is not always consistent. Two of the three teachers in this study put great amount of effort into relationships that lacked natural affection and one even claimed that it was her responsibility. However, two of the teachers stated that some times because of personality conflicts, the relationship is just out of their hands which aligns with findings that teachers tend to avoid relationships where they are likely to be rejected (Davis, 2006). The difference in responsibility for relationships seems to be a combination of experience, personality and self-awareness.
New Insights

Previously it has been noted that people in general gravitate towards others who are like them and who accept them. Teachers are no different. The constructs of experience, personality and self-awareness have been explored separately in varied studies. However, in this study I found that the combination of the three constructs makes considerable difference in how a teacher creates and maintains relationships with her students. Whereas all of the teachers in this study shared similar teacher beliefs, or at least professed to, their personality and experience influenced how they interacted with students. Without the third element of self-awareness through self-reflective teaching practices, they were unable to monitor the manner in which they interacted. Warner (2001) posits that people can change fundamentally. A requirement of that change is to be open to others and we do that by first being aware of how we treat them.

Another thing that came out of this study was an answer to my question about my young single mothers. Students that do not call attention to themselves miss out on many things including affective support and high-quality instruction. A student that is not a behavior problem or a teacher’s pet may get very little attention from the teacher. A student who may find school work difficult but is not struggling academically enough to need extra help may not get the encouragement needed to feel part of the class community. In effect, a student such as this “falls by the wayside.”

Limitations

It must be stated here that although the themes crossed over from participant to participant, it is noteworthy to mention that appearance of one theme in particular did not always indicate the same thing. When Ms. C spoke of parental involvement, the majority
of the time she was talking about a positive, helpful, active role that the parent was taking in the classroom. When Ms. B mentioned a parent it was in conjunction with contact that she had initiated for support of a disciplinary action that she had taken. When Ms. George mentioned a parent getting involved, it was what she saw as interference in what she was trying to do as a teacher. Although this is was a natural occurring phenomenon, this may be a coding error that should be reviewed for clarification because the relationships with the parents did seem to have an influence on the teachers’ relationship with the students in many cases. In fact, one of the teachers stated that she had an issue with one of the parents and she realized that it manifested itself in her treatment of the student—she was more strict with him, and it showed up in the placement of the circles even though she stated that she liked the student, he ended up in the most distant category due to the ill feelings toward the parent.

Because of the spontaneous design of the interviews, a variety of topics arose so none of the interviews discussed all of the same questions. This is positive because it allowed the participant to discuss relationships as she felt necessary, revealing what were the most important elements as she saw them. Yet, with such a small sample, this made it difficult to see patterns in teaching styles or even to see how unique their styles are. Future studies would need to include a greater number of participants with a range of experience. Also, because of the variance in response and topic, I feel that more in-depth follow up questions should be pursued for verification and clarification of meaning with less left to researcher interpretation.

The measure itself had limitations. The simple design was intentional, again for freedom of the participant to place the circles where she saw fit. But an addition of
incremental indicators on the continuum would make it easier for participants to decide how close or not close to place the circles. This would also make for easier grouping after the initial placements and comparison and review for accuracy. It could also prove useful for judgment and review while interpreting results by the researcher.

Future Use

Research. The data that were gathered from these three short interviews have not been exhausted. There are many more interesting things that came from the comments and patterns in the themes that could still be explored. Now that there is a list of themes that have crossed three interviews, a list of set questions might be included to further explore those themes. Also, the codes might be run through quantitative measures to look for patterns of pairings and overlap.

Because this measure brought up such a variety of topics that have yet to be explored, this tool may be helpful in probing teachers' beliefs on a variety of issues as seen in the classroom. A tool such as this allows teachers to discuss their beliefs and then justify them once they are realized visually. Some interesting areas to be explored might be how teachers in different settings use this tool. Different populations to test would be male versus female educators; teachers of differing SES districts; teachers in inclusion settings; studies on gender in the classroom; teachers of differing races in multi-racial classrooms; second career teachers as opposed to first career choice teachers; and teachers of differing levels of teaching experience. It might be interesting to flip it around and ask the teachers not how close they feel to their students but how each student might describe the relationship and do a comparative study with a select group of students of varying achievement levels. Perhaps changing the question to how accepted
they feel by each student would also produce information about how teachers view relationships and the need for the teacher to belong as well.

Application. The reaction of the teachers to the use of this protocol is indicative of its usefulness in beginning careers and even in pre-service instruction. The two newer teachers both believed this tool to be completely helpful as they were able to see all the relationships placed before them. As one stated, “even though I...unconsciously realize that we were separate; that’s not pleasant for me as a teacher, so I would go back and work on that.” The realization of it in her mind, as an abstract thought, did little to help her monitor her behavior in the classroom. She had yet to implement a method of reflection on her teaching beyond just thinking about the day.

The other teacher, although she also found it helpful, was much more distraught at the results. She stated that she thought that what she saw in front of her was how she had imagined it all along “but it is worse when you see it right in front of you like that. It makes you feel kind of bad.” She wanted to know if all teachers felt like this and if they just got used to it or rationalized away how they treated their students, yet now that she was exposed to this protocol, she was determined to improve her relationships with all of her students. Both benefited from the visual effect of the tool. The veteran teacher suggested that a tool such as this could be helpful for beginning teachers; with all the other things that new teachers are expected to remember, one tends to forget to focus on relationships.

Nancy Kraft (2002) stated that good teachers are good researchers of their own teaching. She outlines three tenets of good teacher research as including “1) a deliberate and systematic examination of practice with goals of first understanding practice as a
prerequisite to improving practice...2) an opportunity to examine how one
operationalizes her belief systems in the classroom and the validity of one’s belief
systems and 3) a process of critical self-reflection through an analysis of personally held
beliefs, values and assumptions.” This measure would allow teachers to do all three.
Implemented in pre-service instruction, it would make candidates aware of the need for
early and consistent application of reflective practices. This tool could have relevance
even in the student teaching phase of preparation and training.

Conclusion

From these three separate interviews it is evident how different the school
experience is, even for students who are in the same class with the same teacher.
Relationships are very personal constructs and there are always two people involved.
Therefore if they are not careful, teachers can end up reacting to their students in an
unconscious manner, almost like a reflex, instead of being proactive in the establishment
of a caring and accepting relationship. It is interesting to me that all three teachers
professed that relationships were a very significant part of the teaching work; that without
good, positive relationships in the classroom, without classroom belonging, without the
student feeling welcomed and loved and comfortable, then very little learning could take
place. And yet, as they talked about their relationships, they identified many of their own
behaviors or reactions to students that were not accepting, loving, or welcoming. These
women were all professionals who really care for children and believe in education and
wanted to teach in the truest sense of the word. Yet, they are still human.

It is fascinating to me how businesses and corporations and the like, those
industries that are not really considered “people fields” seem to have understood the
relationship issue so much more than a personal field like teaching. Having come from a social services background, and also having worked in "corporate America" as well as government, I was sent to leadership trainings on how to deal with different personalities and attitudes to make for a most efficient working environment or to learn how to inspire team building amongst co-workers. Yet teachers, people who are working in such intimate of settings with a greater variety of people and personalities, receive very little training on how to manage it. The literature reviewed has shown how important teacher-student relationships can be in areas such as achievement and social progression and cognitive development. If it can be so influential then teachers need to learn how to be more self-aware and receive training on relationship management. It's not enough to like kids; you have to be able to separate the child from the behavior and accept them for who they are as well as how they are.

So I learned the answers to some of my questions; I learned that yes, teachers do know what impact they can have on a child both academically and socially. But no, they are not always aware of how their current relationships are formed or what they can do about them if they go awry. When I asked the teachers how they learned about forming classroom relationships, one said that she picked it up from a mentor teacher who was especially loving toward his class. Another said that she learned through teaching and being a parent herself, and then over the years she had attended many conferences where they emphasized classroom relations. The third stated that in her pre-service classes they talked about building relationships of trust, but they never taught you what to do when a relationship is damaged. The findings of this research show that the first step is to
recognize your own behavior. I offer this protocol as a method to help teachers reflect on their own behavior as they learn to deal with those of their students.
LIST OF REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

ILLUSTRATIONS
The IOS scale with instructions

Please circle the picture below which best describes your relationship

Illustration 1: The Original IOS (Aron, Aron & Smollan, 1992)

The adapted IOS
Participant places each on the line representing the relationship
Purple circle = self (teacher); pink circle = other (student)

Illustration 2: The Adapted IOS, first version
The adapted IOS Scale #2
Participant chooses circle size and placement as they describe relationship
Pink circle = self (teacher); purple circle = other (student)

Illustration 3: The Adapted IOS, second version

Examples from interview with Ms. B

Illustration 4: Example use of both versions of adapted IOS scale
APPENDIX B

TABLES
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher role</th>
<th>Ms. B</th>
<th>Ms. C</th>
<th>Ms. George</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operational definition</td>
<td>Mentor/disciplinarian</td>
<td>Communicator facilitator</td>
<td>Disciplinarian/Friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative quote</td>
<td>&quot;...to her I felt more like a mentor and someone she could look to for guidance...he knew me like a disciplinarian...I felt they knew me in many different ways.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;...it's my job to make sure that they want to get to school and are happy at school&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Some of the kids I would be able to have inside jokes with...That would not be the case with her...And I think there was that clear teacher relationship.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choices</td>
<td>Good, positive interactions; enjoying each other</td>
<td>Knowing the child well; having the feel safe</td>
<td>Reaching a comfort level; knowing the child well and vice versa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative quote</td>
<td>&quot;As far as connected in my mind means good, positive relationships where they enjoy being with me and I enjoyed being with them, and yes, had good experiences.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;You know I can't imagine not being close and not caring about the students.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;...they were the girls that I never really made that connections with...I don't feel I got to know them as well as I got to know some of the of the other kids and vice versa.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for classroom relations</td>
<td>Student teaching</td>
<td>Being parent workshops</td>
<td>Teacher prep courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative quote</td>
<td>&quot;...probably through my mentor teachers in my student teaching that kept saying the greatest key is to love them.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;No, they don't prepare you for that. How did I learn it? Well, by my own children, being a parent and going to parent conference...Also as a Jennings Scholar they had a lot of wonderful lectures...&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;In teacher prep courses they teach you to accept all children, but they don't tell you how to fix a relationship once it's gone wrong.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love and feeling safe; student curiosity</td>
<td>&quot;either just love and feeling safe and secure in my classroom and feeling that's where they want to be; and also love of learning because if they have the love for learning and that curiosity, that helps me so much.&quot;</td>
<td>Safe and caring environment</td>
<td>Relationship with teacher; parental support; student ability/effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative quote</td>
<td>&quot;The kids can fake it, you know they can stick a book in front of their face and pretend to read or they can go through and do math problems without really thinking, you know. But to learn and to understand, they have to know that they are in a safe and caring place.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Obviously the relationship with the teacher; their own intellect, their ability to learn and interpret information; parental support, concentration, effort. I think that they all go hand in hand.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Table of participants.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Exemplary quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>What was monitored so that the teacher could do her job effectively</td>
<td>&quot;Their behavior demanded that I addressed their concerns in many ways...&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Parental Involvement  | Interference or cooperation of parents, how aware and supportive the parents are in the learning process. This relationship could be a help or a hindrance depending on the situation. | **Negative:** "I think the mom had it out for me from the beginning. I think she had some expectations that were really hard to follow through on... I was very glad to be done with that family."

**Positive:** His mother volunteered right away to come into the classroom so I knew her fairly well. They were the most appreciative parents, just going above and beyond thank yous; participated fully when we had after school programs. |
| Good Student          | This is a student that is cooperative, intelligent, helpful, friendly, communicative and likeable and puts in effort into the learning process | "First of all because he was an inquisitive learner, and I was able to teach him by answering his questions. And the same thing with Christy; she was just very self-aware and able to start things and to do the next step in the lesson or the next activity without being told to stay on task." "She was a huge help to me” |
| Teacher Effort        | How much time and effort a teacher spent with an individual student helping with academic progress, including time taken from teaching activities to refocus off-task students. Also includes effort to create positive interactions that didn’t happen naturally. | "...I really tried hard with him...I’ve only retained two students in my teaching career and he is one of them; and I think it will be excellent for him.”

"...in subjects that she wasn’t sure about though, it was kind of irritating because it took her forever to get an answer down, like with math. She was so unsure of herself and didn’t want to do it without help...it was difficult to get her to open up and just develop more confidence in her own skills.” |
| Personality-Unfavorable | Unfavorable traits include making nasty remarks, being too quiet, independedent to the point that teacher didn’t feel needed | "She was a crier and I would get irritated with that truthfully. If something was wrong she’d cry and couldn’t hold it together, and I felt like saying, ‘Grow up. Get through this. This is not something to cry about.” |

Table 2: Table of themes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Class size</th>
<th>#close circles</th>
<th>#middle/separate</th>
<th>#distant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms B</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. C</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. George</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Circle placement was determined by the researcher. Close circles were those overlapping/touching to nearly touching; middle/separate were those that had visible distance; distant were those more than half of the possible distance apart.

Table 3: Circle placement by teacher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ms. B</th>
<th>Bigger the circle the better they fulfilled their role. “Circle sizes mean the impact in the relationship—almost like you can reach your full potential.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diagrams</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Configuration</td>
<td>L-l</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ms. C</th>
<th>Teacher circle size is equivalent to effort; student circle size is equivalent to presence in classroom. “I’m going to put a big size for Josh because...his presence was always known. And I’m going to put me the middle size. I tried to keep [him] on task, keep him motivated.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diagrams</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Configuration</td>
<td>L-s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement</td>
<td>Closer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ms. George</th>
<th>Teacher circle size is equivalent to the role of authority; student circle size equivalent to participation. “I would also take a big one for me because there was a very definite teacher-teacher relationship there, but for [him] I’ll put the next size (medium) circle because I think he was less timid and more outgoing more assertive in his actions.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diagrams</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Configuration</td>
<td>M-m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher circles= capital letters; student circle= lower- case letters (L/l= Large; M/m= medium; S/s=small)

Table 4: Circle size by participant.
APPENDIX C

FORMS
BEHAVIORAL/SOCIAL SCIENCES
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

ACTION OF THE REVIEW BOARD

Research Protocol:

2005B0173 IOS STUDY OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER’S PERCEPTION OF CLASSROOM RELATIONSHIPS, Heather Davis, Melissa Newberry, Educational Policy and Leadership

presented for review by the Behavioral/Social Sciences Institutional Review Board to ensure the proper protection of rights and welfare of the individuals involved with consideration of the methods used to obtain informed consent and the justification of risks in terms of potential benefits to be gained.

The protocol was APPROVED by EXPEDITED REVIEW.

Approval for proposed research includes all materials submitted by the investigator unless otherwise noted.

It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to retain a copy of each signed consent form for at least three (3) years beyond the termination of the subject’s participation in the proposed activity. Should the principal investigator leave the University, signed consent forms are to be transferred to the Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board for the required retention period. This application has been approved for a period of not more than one year. You are reminded that you must promptly report any problems to the Review Board, and that no procedural changes may be made without prior review and approval. You are also reminded that the identity of the research participants must be kept confidential.

Date: ______ June 16, 2005 ______ Signed: __________________________

Chairperson

hs-025b Behavioral approval letter (08.04)

Copy of IRB approval
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN
SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

Protocol Title: The IOS Study of Teachers' Perceptions of Classroom Relationships
Protocol Number: 200580173
Principal Investigator: Dr. Heather A. Davis

The purpose of this study is to ascertain in-service teachers' own understandings of relationships in the classroom and to compare the level of non-connectedness on relationships between teacher and student to the learning that takes place. The researchers hope that this interview process will also serve as a reflexive teaching exercise to help teachers identify their level of interaction with students and the extent that those relationships may play in time and quality of teaching practices.

I consent to my participation in research being conducted by Dr. Heather A. Davis and Melissa Newberry of The Ohio State University.

I understand that in this study I will be expected to discuss my perspectives and experiences regarding:
- My relationships with the students in my classroom
- My philosophy of teaching and approach to relating to students
- The impact that relationships may play in teaching
- My experience in using a new method of describing relationships

The investigators have explained the purpose of the study, the procedures that will be followed, and the amount of time it will take. I understand the possible benefits and risks if any, of my participation.

Benefits:
- Learning a new reflexive teaching method
- Identifying and understanding individual relationships in the classroom

Risks:
- It may be uncomfortable to discuss relationships where there was conflict
- The nature of relationships may be personal and hard to explain

I know that I can choose not to participate without penalty to me. If I agree to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time, and there will be no penalty. I also know that I can omit all or part of the content of the interview from the data without penalty. All data is confidential unless disclosure is required by law. I consent to the use of audiotapes. I understand how the tapes will be used for this study.

I have had a chance to ask questions and to obtain answers to my questions. I understand this research is being supervised by Dr. Heather A. Davis, Educational Policy and Leadership. I can contact the investigators at (614) 688-0500 (EDUC P&L) or (614) 292-0449 (Dr. Davis). If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I can call the Office of Research Risk Protection at (614) 688-4702.

I have read this form or I have had it read to me. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Print the name of the participant: _______________________________________________________

Date: ____________________________ Signed: ____________________________

(Participant)

Signed: ____________________________ Signed: ____________________________

(Principal Investigator) (Co-investigator)

Copy of consent form 73