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Correlations in Students' Reading Behaviors When the Teacher Consciously Focuses on Relationship Building as a Primary Teaching Tool

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Chapter One: Introduction

The bell rings and students walk into their sixth grade classrooms. One student, Emily (all names are pseudonyms), immediately seems disengaged during morning announcements. She sits alone, trying desperately not to draw any attention to herself from other students or from the teacher. The teacher is surprised to see Emily at school because she generally misses school at least twice a week. Meanwhile, another student, Brad, comes in the classroom and grabs everyone's attention by bullying other students while the teacher is taking attendance. The teacher quickly corrects Brad, reminding him of the consequences from last time he bullied others. Once hombase begins, the teacher introduces a continuation of yesterday's hombase activity. She asks her students to grab yesterday's materials out of their lockers (located in the classroom). Emily stays put in the corner because she has completely disengaged herself and did not hear the teacher's directions, while Brad sees everyone else get up but has no idea what he is looking for because he, too, did not hear the instructions. While at the lockers, another student tells Brad what he is looking for. All the students except Brad return to their seats. He continues to look for his materials in a locker that is spewing forth loose papers from math, science, Spanish, and technology classes. For three or four minutes Brad searches before returning with a paper he thinks might be the one he is supposed to have. As Brad sits down, the teacher asks if he has a writing utensil. As usual, Brad has forgotten his, and he quickly goes over to someone else's locker to get one. During the activity, the teacher calls on Emily who is writing or drawing something in her journal. The

teacher calls on her to emphasize the importance of paying attention, but Emily simply shrugs, not knowing the answer to the teacher's question. The teacher quickly moves on, leaving Emily doodling instead of engaged in the activity. Now that Brad has his materials, he sits next to a friend and does his best to engage in the activity. Once the teacher knows Brad is back on track, she calls on him to read. Enthusiastic about being involved, he reads a section of the text. He stumbles over many words, and students begin to giggle at his struggles. While the teacher can see the embarrassment and anger in his face, she knows he is determined to finish. After reading, Brad becomes very distracted, tearing pieces of paper, drawing, and breaking his pencil into a million pieces to throw at other students. After splitting the class into groups, the teacher walks around in order to listen to discussions taking place within these small groups. While making her rounds, she sees Emily still drawing and hears her group members complaining and questioning why she will not help them. The teacher intervenes, asking Emily to help her group members. Emily seems very nervous, but quietly sets her belongings down and pulls up to the rest of the group. Still, Emily doesn't completely engage in the activity. As the teacher walks past Brad, she overhears him discussing a party his mom had at their house last night. He boasts that some of his older friends were at the party. The teacher pulls Brad aside before the bell rings for students go to their first period class. Through her discussion with Brad, the teacher learns that he did not go to sleep last night because the party did not end until 5 A.M., and he also did not eat dinner last night or breakfast this morning. She is beginning to see why he acts out for attention. Just then, the bell rings and

Emily, Brad, and the rest of the sixth grade students are off to their first period class where their teachers will encounter many of the same problems.

This vignette paints a picture of two students that you might find within any classroom setting. Situations like these are why my class was created. My co-teacher and I take on these challenges. Our goal is to help students who are at risk of dropping out. We recognize that problems that occur inside and outside school affect our students. In fact, each of the students experience behavioral and organizational problems, become disengaged, and are frequently absent from school. Organizational issues can often result in students becoming frustrated and displaying behavioral problems. Or, organizational issues can simply result in that student being unprepared to learn that day. Students being disengaged from the lesson can result in no learning occurring, or the student becoming a distraction for other students and adults around them. The chronic absenteeism is an obvious problem. If a student isn't in school, they are likely not receiving the necessary instruction to become a proficient reader or learner in general. A lack of the necessary skills can snowball throughout the schooling causing gaps in learning and important life skills not being developed correctly. Each of these issues drastically affect students' literacy skills as well as their life skills. While not every student in my classroom has problems as drastic as the ones described in the vignette, each one of my students falls somewhere between the two examples given, presenting a unique challenge for my co-teacher and I to consider and address in a creative way. The program I teach in, developed by a local school district, is called LIFT: Learning through Integration Flexibility and

Teamwork. This classroom provides a unique setting in which the two teachers and a classroom aide work with students on academics, social behaviors, organization skills, study habits, life skills, motivation, and emotional issues. This classroom is unique in that it is a mixture of seventh and eighth grade students in one classroom (16 students maximum). While this classroom does allow special education students, this classroom was specifically designed to help any student by putting them in a smaller classroom setting that focuses on a variety of students' needs. Students are broken down by grade level for math, science, and social studies. However, they are mixed for ELA and Reading where a reading specialist pushes in with the two teachers and classroom aide. The teachers provide a family atmosphere in which students attend many field trips (some overnight), complete hands-on projects, enjoy celebrations of holidays and birthdays, and are granted many incentives to complete schoolwork. Building this atmosphere for our students has proven to be important to their success within this classroom. Now, with the first few years of my teaching career behind me, I have more recently begun to wonder what correlations can be observed in students' reading behaviors (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009 & Pinnell & Fountas, 2011) within my alternative classroom when the teacher consciously focuses on relationship building as a primary teaching tool?

Significance of the Problem

The administration, teachers, and other professionals at a school should have a common goal of promoting learning to every student within all of their reach. Many of the students within my classroom have been identified as students who are at risk

of dropping out in the future, or who may get lost in a larger group setting. At first, I struggled teaching in this setting. However, being given the chance to do this for four years, I have truly grown to love this setting and understand what these students need. These students are in my classroom because somewhere along the way, somehow, they lost their love of learning. It has been my observation, and hypothesis, that it is my relationship with students that sets the foundation, and makes the biggest impact, within this classroom setting. After completing a portion of my graduate classes, I was lucky enough to come across some of Lyons' (2003) research. I recognized my relationship with students in my classroom can affect their learning each and every day. Lyons explains how the brain works and how our students' emotions play such a large role in their cognitive ability to learn. She also discusses the importance of dealing with students' emotions and building positive relationships with each student, providing a productive learning environment. Based on students' previous failures, or lack of growth, it was identified that the way they were being taught, or the setting they were placed in, wasn't effective. An alternative structure provides exactly what it says, an alternative way to learning. In fact, things can be different from one alternative class to another. Our alternative environment includes multiple teachers, small group instruction, individualized instruction, frequent field trips, class wide behavioral management plans, less transition time from class to class just to name a few. The relationship built between students and teachers in an alternative setting can allow teachers to build these relationships with a small group of students as well as positively affect the way students' emotions affect their

cognitive learning abilities. Daniels and Zemelman (2004) report building supportive relationships with students is one of the best ways teachers can help struggling readers. Anderman and Kaplan (2008) believe there is a correlation between students' interpersonal relationships and their academic motivation, behaviors, and achievement. Knowing the research behind the strength and positive effects of relationship building, teachers in the alternative classroom setting focus on relationship building to influence students' behaviors and attitude toward learning. Though Lyons, Daniels and Zemelman, and Anderman and Kaplan have all reviewed current literature, there seems to be a gap between the literature and performing a study to support their hypotheses. Replicating their ideas and research in my classroom, while collecting data, will allow me to better determine if what they report and what I believe I have experienced can be verified in my alternative setting.

Purpose of the Study

As you can imagine, students in this classroom setting often lack the drive, the motivation, and the skills needed to successfully complete the necessary schoolwork. For a little over four years, I have searched for and utilized many different techniques to form relationships and motivate my students to do a variety of things. I have come up with some very effective ways of helping our students become more organized, more motivated to complete school work, and more driven to develop the skills they need to become better readers and writers. One of the biggest skills we've worked on has been increasing students' ability to read and awareness of the reading behaviors they currently exhibit and do not exhibit. Fountas and Pinnell (2009) and Pinnell and

Fountas (2011) describe such reading behaviors as actions we see students exhibit that may drive the strategies and techniques we as teachers use to teach them. I conducted this research to search for correlations for student improvement in literacy due to the relationship that the teachers in the LIFT classroom are able to form with our students due to the environment we create, flexibility we show, and strict routines that are provided within an alternative classroom. The students have the unique opportunity to get to know their teachers and for their teachers to get to know them on more than just an academic level. The teachers know the "ins and outs" of the students' everyday lives. The overall purpose of this study was to examine how a strong bond and relationship built over time with a student in my alternative classroom could effect the behaviors exhibited that lead to techniques used to build meaning while reading: What correlations can be observed in students' reading behaviors within my alternative classroom when the teacher consciously focuses on relationship building as a primary teaching tool?

Study Approach

This study included four eighth grade students, one female and three males, and a range of ability levels. All four students were experiencing their second year in the alternative program and had the opportunity to build a lasting relationship with the teachers and aide in the classroom.

A variety of qualitative and quantitative data was collected: observations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), a reading journal process, weekly reading conferences, and a survey (Gehlbach, Brinkworth & Harris, 2011) uncover how these particular

students viewed their relationships with their teacher. This mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods allowed me to uncover reading behaviors used by each student, to gain an understanding of how each of the students felt about the reading process as well as the relationships they formed with their teacher. Students missed no instruction to participate in this research study. All assessments and research methods were already incorporated within the students' daily reading routines. I analyzed the collected information through linking the data that was collected as described in Chapter Three.

Rationale

As stated, I currently work in, and am very passionate about, alternative education. Our goal is to help students who are at risk of dropping out. Problems that occur inside and outside school affect our students. In fact, every one of our students experience behavioral and organizational problems, become disengaged, and are frequently absent from school. The past four years have given me the belief that my relationship with these students can perhaps contribute the biggest impact on these students and their ability to effectively learn how to read. Carol Lyons (2003) examines the importance of addressing students' emotions and developing positive relationships with each of your students providing a productive learning environment. Daniels and Zemelman (2004) discuss building supportive relationships with students can be one of the most effective ways teachers can help their struggling readers. Anderman and Kaplan (2008) believe there is a correlation between students' interpersonal relationships and their academic motivation, behaviors, and

achievement. An alternative classroom, such as mine, focuses on: relationship-building to influence behavior. As discussed, Lyons, Daniels and Zemelman, and Anderman and Kaplan have all reviewed current literature on these topics. However there seems to be a gap between the literature and performing a study to support their hypotheses. By replicating their ideas and research in my classroom, while collecting data, it allowed me to better determine if what they report is successful in my alternative setting. Conducting research of my own, and analyzing these valuable results was to learn how my relationship affected past students' and future students' abilities to become more proficient readers. I wanted to fill the gap and provide actual research on the topic because it would allow me to better myself as a teacher in order to more effectively teach my current students, as well as future students. The data collected should allow me, as a researcher, to decide how our relationship within an alternative classroom setting has an effect on our students' reading behaviors.

Summary

I am in my fifth year teaching in a rural school district in an alternative education classroom. The program is called LIFT: Learning through Integration Flexibility and Teamwork. This classroom provides a unique setting in which two teachers and a classroom aide work with students on academics, social behaviors, organization skills, study habits, life skills, motivation, emotional issues and more. This classroom is designed to help students by placing them in a smaller class focusing their many needs. The teachers in this classroom provide a family-like atmosphere in which students have the opportunity to attend many field trips (some

overnights), complete the many hands-on projects provided, enjoy holidays and birthdays celebrations, and are granted many incentives to complete their schoolwork. Building this atmosphere for our students has proven to be important to their success within this classroom. Recently, I have wanted to take a closer look at how our classroom setting affects our students' reading behaviors. What correlations can be observed in students' reading behaviors within my alternative classroom when the teacher consciously focuses on relationship building as a primary teaching tool? The purpose of me reviewing others research, conducting research of my own, and analyzing these valuable results is to better myself as a teacher in order to more effectively teach my students how to become proficient readers. This research and time of reflection allowed me to find out what has worked and what has not worked for other teachers as well as in my own classroom with my own students. The data I collected allowed me, as a researcher, to decide how our alternative setting has an effect on our students' reading behaviors.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

During this process, I considered research regarding a variety of topics. The topics include relationships between teachers and students, looping, and student motivation. As a researcher, the three areas helped me gain valuable information in thinking about my research question: What correlations can be observed in students' reading behaviors within my alternative classroom when the teacher consciously focuses on relationship building as a primary teaching tool?

Relationships between Students and Teachers

As teachers, it should be our goal to mold and develop our students into lifelong learners. What better way to do this than to build lasting relationships with our students in order to promote learning in our classrooms and in our schools? LeTendre (2000) researched the importance of the teacher-student relationship in China, Japan, and Denmark. LeTendre reports that most important in the classroom, before any teaching takes place, is developing a comfortable environment and an effective social relationship with students. Sato (1993) describes the process of teachers building relationships with students, explaining that in the beginning of the school year, teachers should be spending the necessary time building relationships before uncovering material within the curriculum or textbook. Hamre, Pianta, Bear, and Minke (2006) add to Sato's perspective by arguing that students' relationship with their teacher is an integral part of their success at school. Furthermore, Hamre, Pianta, Bear, and Minke report that the teacher-student relationship should be the focus of all intervention programs. These valuable relationships should not only be

built, but should also be fine-tuned and maintained throughout the school year.

LaTendre (2000) and Liu (1997) defend that the Japanese and Chinese educational systems focus more on the importance of developing and maintaining strong relationships rather than focusing on the importance of content expertise, as many other cultures currently do.

Due to changing family dynamics in American society, more and more pressure is being placed upon schools to serve as children's parents (Noddings, 2005). Students are expected to contribute to the growth and development of school-aged children (Simmons & Lawler Dye, 2003). Communities tend to struggle with issues of poverty and the related social problems they pose (Simmons & Lawler Dye). Unfortunately, many children in poverty live in a single parent home, or with an aunt, an uncle, their grandparents, or another extended family member. The National Middle School Association (2003) reported that in today's society too many students are continuing to grow up without sufficient supervision. Furthermore, the Census 2000 Brief reported that 2.4 million grandparents in the United States are child caregivers. In addition, the grandparents currently hold primary responsibility for grandchildren under 18 years of age (Simmons & Lawler Dye). Balfanz, Herzog, and MacIver (2007) discusses the unhealthy situations and dangerous interactions that young students are being exposed to. To combat this issue, Balfanz et al. expresses the importance of children having adult role models in their lives. Hamre, Pianta, Bear, and Minke (2006) explain that a poor relationship between students and teachers can result in students beginning or continuing down a path of failure because

students are not able to foster connections to the academic and social resources available to them within their community.

Nurmi (2012) reported that the relationship between students and teachers often hinges on student behavior and performance in the classroom. Teachers are more likely to build a stronger and lasting relationship with students who show better behavior and perform higher academically. Teachers are then less likely to develop strong and meaningful relationships with students who show poor behavior or perform at lower academic levels. This is unfortunate because Agirdag, Van Houtte, and Van Avermaet (2012) describe that students' experiences with supportive teachers can greatly affect their self-esteem inside and outside of school. Students' self esteem and emotions play a large role in what can be learned (Lyons, 2003). In addition, Jiang-yuan and Wei (2012) conducted a study on non-verbal communication between students and teachers. Teachers that frequently smile, wink, and show positive nonverbal emotional support to students are more likely to build strong relationships with their students. Ideally, a stronger relationship between the teacher and student builds a higher level of student self-esteem, which results in students demonstrating positive emotional behaviors and exceling academically.

With such high stakes testing, students, teachers, administrators, parents, and other stakeholders are more stressed than ever to produce higher-level results. Scales (1999) states the importance of schools' educators nurturing these delicate, yet positive relationships between their students and teachers. Students feel safer at school when developing strong and supportive relationships with their teachers.

Along with feeling more secure, students are able to have more positive interactions with their peers and achieve more academic progress (Hamre, Pianta, Bear, & Minke, 2006). School educators are more aware of the payoff that more engaged students achieve at higher academic levels (Scales).

Gehlbach, Brinkworth and Harris (2012) performed a study on teacher-student relationships. Through this study, they discovered the importance of the relationship between students and teachers and the effect it can have on students' achievement and motivation. The research suggests a link between students' increased academic achievement at school, with the positive meaningful relationship built with their teachers (Penrose, 2009). Furthermore, Crosnoe, Kirkpatrick, and Elder's (2004) research showed that students who had stronger relationships with teachers demonstrated higher achievement results and were less likely to exhibit disciplinary problems. Fewer disciplinary problems result in more time and effort on learning. More engaged students should result in higher achievement (Scales, 1999).

Gehlbach, Brinkworth, and Harris (2012) concluded that because of the importance of the student-teacher relationship, educators and researchers should continue to experiment with ways to build stronger relationships between students and teachers.

Looping

Nichols and Nichols (2002) describe looping as teachers who keep the same group of students from one grade level to the next. Nichols and Nichols also report that looping is most effective when taking place for a two to three year time span.

Looping is generally done in order to provide more continuous student-teacher relationships during adolescence, a time period in which students need positive adult influences (Scales, 1999).

Elliott and Capp (2003) stress the importance of teachers who understand the benefits of looping approaching administrators in order to share the positive results of looping and increase the motivation to attempt multi-year classrooms. Kenney (2007) describes the increased interest in looping in schools. Many educators are beginning to see the benefits of spending multiple years with the same group of students. Changing teachers from year to year generates higher anxiety in students and results in less academic time. Flinders and Noddings (2001) argue that children do not consistently change parents in order to experience and learn from varying parental styles. Most would agree that other than parents, teachers in today's schools are asked to play the most vital role in the lives of their students (Flinders & Noddings). Several researchers actually believe teachers could possibly be the most significant factor in students' educational achievement (Mood, 1970). Looping can eliminate the time at the beginning of the second, or even third, year that it takes for classroom teachers to learn their students' names, set essential instructional and important behavioral expectations, and begin to develop a valuable rapport with each of the students in the classroom. (Bellis, 1999, Chapman, 1999, & Simel, 1998). Kenney explains that looping produces a classroom in which students feel at home due to the strength of the relationships built with their teacher. Due to looping, teachers have fewer discipline problems, see increased attendance rates, and are able to recognize

students' needs resulting in improved instruction relating to individual needs (Kenney).

Kenney's (2007) research, gathered through a questionnaire given to students who looped, indicated that there are social and emotional benefits to looping. The survey's results suggest that students felt less anxious about the next school year when it came to developing a strong connection with not only the teachers, but their peers as well. In addition, after conducting a study for multiple years on a pre-school program designed for students who were at risk, Judge and Phillips (2006) found that looping had a positive influence on students' knowledge and attitude, or cognitive and affective skills. Students who had the opportunity to loop for a period of time demonstrated improved personal and social development skills when compared to those students who weren't a part of looping with teachers from one year to the next (Judge & Phillips). Judge and Phillips also explain the connection between students' developing personal and social skills in the early years of school, and their ultimate success in school.

Not only does looping help to develop valuable relationships between students and teachers, which results in decreasing anxiety for the upcoming school year, but it can also increase valuable instructional time allotted to teachers (Bellis, 1999, Chapman, 1999, & Simel, 1998). When surveying teachers from public schools throughout Nebraska, Missouri, Iowa, and Kansas, to discover if looping was a practical strategy within schools, Ford (2010) discovered that teachers who had looped with students from kindergarten to fifth grade found looping to be beneficial.

The teachers who agreed to complete the survey explained that looping had resulted in higher academic achievement academically, an improved instructional climate, and created stronger relationships between the teacher, students, and families.

By conducting a study to determine if looping resulted in academic achievement at a Minnesota school, Caauwe (2009) found that, specifically in the area of mathematics, students who looped with the same teacher for two years versus students who did not loop, scored significantly higher on standard achievement tests. In addition, Noddings (2005) suggests that in order to be most effective in schools, students should continue with the same group of teachers for multiple school years. In addition, she advises that in the area of mathematics, high school students continue with the same teacher their entire time in high school in order to most efficiently develop the necessary math skills. Similar to Caauwe's research, a study was conducted in Mississippi and, again, students who looped from sixth to eighth grade scored significantly higher or showed more growth on the Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT) than those students in eighth grade who were part of a traditional school system with different teachers each year (Franz, Thompson, Fuller, Hare, Miller & Walker, 2010) Furthermore, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status were monitored closely during this study. Franz et al. concluded that students who have the opportunity to participate in looping may actually academically reengage at the middle school level.

Though the research overwhelmingly supports looping, there have been multiple discussions about the potential disadvantages of looping programs. The

discussions relate mainly to the concerns about the potential teacher-student personality conflicts (Chapman, 1999 & Hitz, Somers, & Jenlink 2007). As we have seen throughout the research presented, many teachers are aware of how important their relationships with students are. However, the fear of personality conflicts with students causes many teachers to resist looping altogether. In addition, some teachers have reached a comfort zone in what they currently teach, and have developed a level of proficiency at that grade level or content area. The idea of changing grade levels each year also creates resistance from teachers on the topic of looping (Forsten, Grant, & Richardson, 1999). Forsten et al. argues that some teachers that choose not to support looping often claim that it's too challenging to plan for a two or three year period, as opposed to being able to repeat the same grade level curriculum year after year.

Motivation

Edmunds and Bauserman's (2006) research shows that one of the primary concerns of teachers today is the lack of motivation by their students. Teachers suggest that motivational issues are the roots to many of the problems they face while teaching. Gambrell (1996) suggests that reading motivation is a topic that teachers would like to see investigated further. Likewise, Pitcher, Albright, DeLaney, and Walker (2007) discuss that if educators understand what it is that inspires teens to read, they have the crucial piece of information to improving their students' reading instruction. Motivation can be described in terms of "beliefs, values, needs and goals that individuals have" (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997, p. 5). Teachers should learn from

and value the many strengths, experiences, and knowledge that their students offer and contribute to their classroom. This important gesture and action by teachers will likely result in students showing a high level of respect for their teacher. Hopefully, this level of respect translates to students wanting to learn within their classrooms (Mednick, 2003). Pitcher et al. (p. 378) explain that the more that teachers' activities match their students' beliefs, values, needs, and goals, the more likely the students will demonstrate effort and maintain interest in the text they are reading. Research supports the belief that motivation plays a significant role in learning. In fact, it has been shown that motivation is the difference between learning that is considered temporary and learning that is considered internalized or permanent (Edmunds & Bauserman). The teacher's goal should be to assist students in developing and internalizing the skills necessary to be successful in a variety of settings.

Teachers play a significant role in introducing text to students, and can often have an affect on the student's motivation and excitement to read (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006). Building supportive relationships with students is one of the best ways that teachers can assist their struggling readers (Daniels & Zelman, 2004). Anderman and Kaplan (2008) believe there is a correlation between students' interpersonal relationships and their academic motivation, behaviors, and achievement. Lyons (2003) furthers the research by explaining how the brain works and how students' emotions play a large role in their cognitive ability to learn. She also discusses the importance of dealing with students' emotions and building positive relationships with each student in the hopes of providing a productive

learning environment. Strickland (2005) and Lyons stress the importance of creating ways to make students feel more comfortable in the classroom environment so that students are more physically able to learn. Students state that their classroom environments have motivated their reading. “Students described how classroom environments motivated their reading through open-ended responses, short answers, and checklist items (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001, p. 351).”

Wentzel (1997) describes her study on adolescents at the middle school age level. She explains how perceptions of students’ “pedagogical caring” will affect their motivation both socially and academically. Many of the students in Wentzel’s study who were successfully motivated, perceived their teachers as caring. Eighth-grade students characterize teachers who care by describing them as being fair and demonstrating a caring attitude. These eighth grade students continue by describing teachers who provide positive and useful feedback while creating an atmosphere where students are cared for individually while maintaining classroom wide expectations for every student (Wentzel).

Mansfield, Miller, and Montalvo (2007) further Wentzel’s (1997) findings by explaining that teachers certainly influence their students’ motivation and their achievement. In addition, teachers develop the many assignments or tasks that students are asked to complete on a daily basis. Teachers are also asked to provide constructive feedback and define consequences for completing tasks. In this study, the characteristics of teachers that students liked and enjoyed learning from were identified and examined. The study closely examines the fact that if students dislike a

teacher, it can drastically impact a their motivation to learn. Within the study, students expressed how important it was to have a caring and approachable teacher. Furthermore, students respect teachers who take an interest in their home life and extra curricular activities. Mansfield et al. also found that the teachers whose students aim to please have likely exhibited going out of their way to help their students in a variety of ways. These same teachers genuinely care about each of their students, providing frequent positive feedback. Students notice those teachers who demonstrate unnecessary acts of kindness to them, or their peers. Students also describe liking when teachers trust them as students.

An example of teachers going out of their way to provide a positive learning environment that students will value is Allen's (2006) literacy lunches with a group of young boys, where the boys became more motivated to read and write. Allen describes that the boys were motivated not just during this time, but for the years following the literacy lunches. Showing an interest and taking the time to get to know students can help in their literacy development.

Kelley and Decker's (2009) study with the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) showed that as students' grade levels increased, their motivation to read, as well as their value of reading, declined. Students' motivation to explore text and engage in reading, decreased as they grew older. The drop in students' reading motivation has been shown to be the highest in elementary aged students, and can be attributed to the fact that students are increasingly aware of how their performance is being compared to others around them (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006). Collopy (1995) stated that

students believe their success is measured by how they do in comparison to others. Their goal is to look smart, or not look dumb. Collopy explains that as multi-age level classrooms become more popular, students of both high and low achievement will benefit. Collopy describes the importance of teacher remaining with the same group of students for at least two years, noting that teachers could focus more on meeting learning objectives, rather than a set curriculum. As a result, teachers would witness their students progressing at individualized rates, rather than at the same speed of the overall group. Collopy explains that through high levels of cooperation, a classroom that focused in on student learning could use the multiple skills levels within the group of students as an opportunity to expand students' achievement and motivation levels.

Cooper, Patall, and Robinson (2008) explains that teachers can enhance motivation is by providing students choice. Cooper describes how choice enhances students' intrinsic motivation, resulting in students increased effort and higher achievement levels (Cooper, Patall, & Robinson). Half the battle is getting students to enjoy reading; then, teachers can more easily teach the techniques and skills necessary to become proficient readers. Fuchs and Morgan (2007) discusses a study that showed how students who enjoy reading, are likely to read more frequently. Furthermore, students who read frequently will likely become more proficient at it. However, poor readers are more likely to demonstrate a low level of motivation to read. Fuchs suggests that a likely explanation of this study's results may be because

students' reading skills and their reading motivation has a large influence on one another.

Summary

Based on my research, many researchers have shown that teachers' relationships with their students can greatly affect performance in the classroom. Today more than ever, that relationship is needed in order for children to develop socially and academically. Looping can be a valuable technique in building a positive environment where children learn. When educators create a positive, nurturing environment, it can help motivate students to become better readers as well as lifelong learners.

Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures

Teaching in an alternative classroom and having a small number of students has allowed me the unique opportunity to form lasting and impressionable relationships with my students. The opportunity to get to know them on more than just an academic level can often lead to more success in the classroom. I know the "ins and outs" of these students' everyday lives. This relationship, as well as this unique classroom setting, has proven time and time again to be the key in the progress these students make while being a part of this alternative classroom setting. The relationships built, the routines set, and the environment provided within our alternative classroom-setting combine to result in an increase in positive reading behaviors.

Participants

Seven students were given consent forms for parents and attached was a letter as recruitment script. Students whose parents returned the forms were asked to assent to research and attached was a letter as recruitment script. Parents saw all forms that were going to be used with their children ahead of time. I called each parent to be sure they had received the forms from their child. Only the four students, three male and one female, who returned proper consent forms and signed assent forms were included in the data collection process. These four students were introduced to the purpose of this study by me explaining that I would love for them to help me with my project for my own schooling. I also described to each of them that they would have the unique opportunity of helping me to learn so that I could hopefully better teach

them, as well as my future students. These students range from thirteen to fourteen years old. All of these students were placed in my classroom, and were experiencing their second consecutive year with my co-teacher and me. The participants in this study come from a variety of backgrounds, and they vary in ability. My classroom always includes varying abilities, and each student comes in with unique needs. Each of these participants was Caucasian. However, they ranged from middle to lower class families.

Context of the Study

This study took place within my classroom. Within this classroom there are two male teachers, including myself. There is also a full time, female, classroom aide. These three adults work on social behaviors, organizational skills, study habits, life skills, motivation, emotional issues and more. This classroom is also unique in that it is a mixture of seventh and eighth grade students in one classroom (sixteen students maximum). Last year, we had a total of fifteen students – nine eighth grade students and six seventh grade students. Out of the nine eighth grade students, seven were returning seventh grade students from the previous year's group. There were five females and four males. The seventh grade students included two females and four males. It is important to note that this classroom does allow for special education students; however, special education is not a requirement. In fact, most of our students are not classified. During the study, we had three special education students within the classroom. It has been determined that this classroom could help these students by putting them in a smaller class and focusing on a variety of needs. During

the time of the study, students were separated by grade level for math (co-taught by two teachers in the program), science (one teacher), and social studies (one teacher). However, they were mixed for ELA and Reading, where a reading specialist pushed in with the two teachers and classroom aide. These students were also provided with both Math and Reading/ELA AIS services. Some classes met daily and some met every other day, depending on assessment scores. The classroom teachers' goal is to help students who are at risk of dropping out. The teachers provide a family atmosphere in which students attend many field trips (some overnights), complete hands-on projects, enjoy celebrations of holidays and birthdays, and are granted many incentives to complete schoolwork.

The layout of the classroom is quite unique. (Appendix A) The classroom is approximately eight hundred square feet. When you walk through the door, to the left you will find two tables pushed together and surrounded by chairs. These tables are in the center of the kitchen area. In this kitchen area there are numerous cupboards, a sink, stove, miniature refrigerator, and plenty of counter space. This area is used for morning meetings, AIS (while AIS occurs there is often another class going on within the classroom), celebrations, and group work, if necessary. Located near the kitchen area are student lockers, as well as "cubbies" for classroom supplies, and the classroom library. Across from the kitchen area, you will find four student computers, and two teacher computers (which are often used for students as well). Once you pass through these two areas, you will find a teacher work area where two teacher desks and teacher resources are separated from the rest of the classroom. A bathroom and

closet space is located behind the teacher workstations. Adjacent to the teacher work area is the “classroom area” where four small square work areas are set up for students. There are classroom materials located on the built-in shelving units as well as a classroom smart board in this area.

My Positionality as a Researcher

Experience

I have spent the first four years of my career, and again this year, as a teacher in an alternative classroom in the middle school. I have truly enjoyed my time at the middle school. Given the high population of female teachers, I feel that being a male teacher at the middle school gives me the opportunity to set a good example and play a vital role in my students’ lives. As far as demographics, I am a twenty-six year old Caucasian male, who is married and currently experiencing middle class living. I value my experience at the State University of New York at Fredonia where I obtained a degree in Childhood Inclusive Education (1-6) with a Middle School Extension in Social Studies (7-9). I also hold certifications in 5-9 Generalist and 5-9 Generalist with Disabilities. Both of my student teaching placements provided me with valuable experiences in my teaching career. I was fortunate enough to find a job at Palmyra Macedon Middle School where I am in my fifth year of teaching and coaching. Currently, I am also completing my graduate studies at the College at Brockport, State University of New York in Childhood Literacy. Here, I have gained a better understanding of the importance of literacy in my students’ lives. My overall teaching philosophy is centered around my positive relationships with my students.

Because of this, I continually ask myself, how can I build a relationship and provide an environment within my classroom that is conducive to learning? Once I have figured that out with each group of students, their learning seems to accelerate throughout the school year. Learning includes the content, life skills, and who they are as a learner and a person.

Philosophy

Since literacy includes reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing, it is important to incorporate all five aspects into a student's learning experience. These life skills need to be acquired in order to learn, communicate, and understand the world. Before an educator can help a student build on literacy skills, it is important to determine exactly what a student is able to do. Finding out what students know can be done through frequent assessments, with or without the student knowing. Assessment should vary between informal assessment and formal assessment (Johnson, 2006 & Serafini, 2010). Students and teachers are more comfortable with informal assessments such as observations, checklists, self-analysis, tracking student progress, and so on. It is also important to assess students using the "Asset Model" (Vygotsky, 1978). The Asset Model is meant to identify and focus on student strengths, rather than concentrating on deficits like many standardized tests do. Teachers need to reinforce and build upon students' strong points (Roser, Miriam, Fuhrken, & McDonald, 2007). Assessment is important because educators must "know the known" (Johnson) in order to push, what Vygotsky labeled the "Zone of Proximal Development," the difference between what a student can accomplish independently

and what he/she can achieve with some support (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003, Lyons, 2003, & Vygotsky). If a teacher is able to successfully challenge a student without reaching a level that frustrates him/her, it is possible to accelerate the student's learning (Kozulin et al.). Educators should always be working toward students accepting responsibility (Johnson). Teachers should model activities; yet gradually let their students become more independent (Johnson). A balanced literacy approach does is an example of gradual release (Johnson).

When teaching literacy, it is important to use a balanced approach (Johnson 2006). A balanced approach involves gradually leading students from a teacher-centered approach where the teacher takes more responsibility for the reading to a student-centered approach where a child is a motivated and proficient reader (Johnson, & Tompkins, 2010). At the proficient level, a student can decipher words independently by using a variety of strategies to determine a word's meaning, identify its grammatical and structural accuracy, and comprehend material. A balanced approach to literacy takes time to accomplish (Johnson). Student performance and assessment analysis will enable the teacher to gradually encourage students to work toward independent reading (Johnson). It also incorporates moving from one reading strategy to another: Read-Aloud, Shared Reading, Guided Reading, and Independent Reading. Each step allows the teacher to assume less responsibility for reading while the student assumes more. Teachers re-visit steps frequently in order to model expectations. Student progress is assessed during this process because teachers need to move gradually, reminding students of the strategies they've learned. Finally, a

balanced literacy approach should include a balanced writing approach as well. Like the reading approach, teachers gradually give the students more responsibility using Writing Demonstrations, Shared and Interactive Writing, Guided Writing, and Independent Writing. Using balanced reading and writing approaches simultaneously will result in greater success for students in both reading and writing (Johnson & Tompkins).

What happens when students do not become proficient readers and writers, how will they pass their academic classes and graduate from school? How will they find a job or read their mail? How will they become successful citizens of the modern world? It is a teacher's responsibility to reach all students, even those who struggle. Students who do not read to the "norm" are often looked at as if they have something wrong with them. Teachers need to change their view from what is wrong with students to what is wrong with instruction (Howard, 2009)? Teachers will need to find effective ways for their students to enjoy and respond to literature.

Finally, another key to my philosophy of teaching literacy is taking the time to get to know a student as a reader, a writer, and as a person. If teachers take an interest in what students enjoy, and are able to show enthusiasm with these students, a teacher's actions can go a long way in with their students' literacy development (Anderman and Kaplan, 2008, Daniels & Zemelman, 2004, & Lyons, 2003). A student's learning is affected by the classroom environment (Lyons). Each student and teacher in the classroom creates a unique atmosphere. Some classroom environments support learning more than others do. Teachers should try to create a

classroom culture that emphasizes respect and values (Noddings, 2005). This should result in students treating others with respect and creating a comfortable/positive learning environment. As teachers, modeling an optimistic attitude will result in students taking on a more positive role. If we listen respectfully and promote compliments from others, our students will eventually do the same. Building a trusting rapport with each student where he/she is able to take risks without the fear of failure, can be the difference in that student's success (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). Learning can be strongly influenced by students' emotions, and that emotions can play a vital role in the learning process (Lyons).

Data Collection

Data was collected in a variety of ways including observations, a reading journal process, a weekly conference with students, and a survey. Each of these methods was valuable in the research process. They were linked together in order to analyze and comprehend the data collected as a whole.

Observations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)- I observed students' reading behaviors and evidence of relationships between students and teachers over a six-week period. A data collection sheet is included (Appendix B). The data collection sheet was broken into our lesson structure. The lesson usually began with a twenty-minute mini-lesson, followed by independent reading, and some students were taken to a separate area for guided reading groups. While collecting data, the teacher looked for specific reading behaviors as well as evidence that there is a strong teacher student relationship. Through this data collection process, I searched for behaviors such as

being able to read independently, solving words using a variety of strategies, stopping when meaning breaks down, tracking their inner thoughts, and responding to text with specific evidence rather than prior background knowledge. With the behaviors being exhibited, teachers are able to hypothesize as to which strategies students are using. The observation instrument was open-ended to allow for a variety of unforeseen reading behaviors that students may have exhibited throughout the process.

Reading Journal Process- This is a unique process used in our reading block in order to help students and teachers recognize each student's reading behaviors. In this packet, I have included two instruments in Appendix C that are displayed in our classroom on each side of an open file folder. As students read, they placed Post-it notes according to categories in their opened file folder. The categories were as follows: Predict, Connect, Question, Infer, Summarize, and Evaluate. Once a week, students chose a thought from their file folders, and wrote the thought on a graphic organizer (Appendix D). They wrote the point, or their specific thought from their Post-it note, in the P Section (Point). They then developed three pieces of evidence from the book, jotting these down in the E Sections (Evidence). Finally, they gave their personal thought regarding the point in the Evaluation Section. After completing the graphic organizer, they were expected to complete a journal entry, writing to one of the teachers in the classroom, using a specific type of paper. This process was modeled numerous times in the beginning of the year in order to clarify expectations and format. I was able to read students' journal entries, as well as examine Post-it notes and graphic organizers to find reading behaviors such as being able to read

independently, and responding to text with specific evidence rather than prior background knowledge. This allowed me to determine if these valued behaviors, as well as other unforeseen behaviors, were contributing positively or negatively to students' meaning making process. I was also able to track their thinking based on the Post-it notes and the graphic organizers they provide. This data was tracked by completing a rubric, and hand written feedback, that was given back to the students on a weekly basis. For the purpose of this thesis, I tracked reading behaviors on the data linking form (Appendix E).

Weekly Reading Conferences- Conferences were used to obtain information on how the students used the reading process and whether they enjoyed reading. This was done on a normal basis in the classroom and did not affect the daily routine. Information from the students' conferences was collected, graded, and organized within a binder each week. Teacher documented conversations about reading that took place, including the suggestions that were made for the upcoming week. A weekly reading conference rubric has been included (Appendix F). Significant questions asked about the book, reading process, or reading behaviors were recorded on the back of the conference guideline or next to questions. It is important to note that the grading process (academic portion) was not used in the data collection process; however, I was looking for behaviors such as student comfort levels; Lyons (2003) describes how important it is to create a classroom environment in which students feel confident to develop socially and emotionally, as well as academically. The reading behaviors I searched for included being able to read independently,

solving words using a variety of strategies, stopping when meaning breaks down, and responding to text with specific evidence rather than prior background knowledge. I did not limit myself to only the behaviors previously listed.

Survey (Gehlbach, Brinkworth, & Harris, 2011)-Students that participated in this process were asked to complete a survey (Appendix G). This survey was adapted from a portion of Gehlbach et al.'s study measuring student and teacher relationships. The questions asked in this survey were to give me a clue as to how my relationship affected my students' attitude toward learning within my classroom.

Procedures

From Week One through Week Six of this study, I observed each student throughout the week, reviewed the weekly journal entry process, and used observations and the prior weeks' journal entry in weekly conference with student.

Data Analysis

Through constant comparative analysis of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), collected through observations, students' weekly reading journal processes, their weekly conferences with me, and the survey, I was able to determine what correlations, if any, were observed between my relationship with my students and their reading behaviors. The data being collected was linked together on a weekly basis (Appendix E) to facilitate analysis.

Observations- I observed students' reading behaviors over a period of time in order to see how the reading behaviors are used, as well as how they changed and developed. As a teacher, I use students reading behaviors to gain a better idea of how

students possibly use the many reading techniques and strategies taught to them. These decisions were based on data being collected, and theories being formed by my co-teacher and me (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Observations were discussed within the weekly reading conference, and taken into account when the student was given a weekly grade by their teachers. I also observed aspects of the teacher student relationship and how it directly affected students' reading behaviors.

Reading Journal Process- I was able to read students' journals to determine how students' reading behaviors helped them construct meaning while reading, as well as if they were making thoughts within or beyond the text. I was also able to track their thinking based on the Post-it notes and graphic organizers they provided. Based on this evidence, I was able to track observations about students. I was able to offer them feedback on behaviors they exhibited well, or behaviors they needed work on, each week, based on the data I collected each week. Feed back given was based on the theories my co-teacher and I were forming based on the evidence we were seeing from our students (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Specific evidence is shown and discussed in Chapter Four. I took students' topic sentences, into account, trying to be sure they were exhibiting higher-level thinking. I also discuss students using text-based evidence within their journal in order to further their topic sentences.

Weekly Reading Conferences - I conferenced with each student weekly to ask questions about his/her reading habits, behaviors, techniques, likes and dislikes about reading, and how each student felt his/her time in the LIFT Program had affected his/her reading. Data from the conferences are shown and analyzed throughout

Chapter Four by showing the suggestions and discussions that took place during these valuable conferences, as well as what these discussions mean. Making assumptions, or forming theories about the data collected, is part of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative analysis of data.

Survey- The questions asked in the survey provided me with clues as to how my relationship affected my students' attitude toward learning within my classroom. Data from the survey is discussed multiple times throughout Chapter Four in order to analyze the relationship between students and teachers.

Linking the Data- Through observations of both reading behaviors, as well as the teacher student relationship, students' weekly reading journal process, their weekly conferences with me, and the survey given, I was able to determine what affect, if any, my relationship with my students has on their reading behaviors. The data collected was linked together on a weekly basis (Appendix E). As students read, I was able to very carefully monitor their behaviors such as reading independently, solving words using a variety of strategies, stopping when meaning breaks down, tracking their inner thoughts, and responding to text with specific evidence rather than using only background knowledge. Other behaviors were exhibited and documented throughout this process as well. As I observed them I picked up on tendencies, as well as growth. These observations gave me a better idea of why and what they recorded in their weekly journal entries. Here, I was able to offer feedback in a written format. These two procedures link with the weekly reading conference because I was able to take the observations and journal entry to directly discuss them

with students. I was able to get a better feel by conducting a conversation and valuing what they had to say as the student. Evidence from these data collection methods are all shown in Chapter Four through the evidence of what data was collected and how it was used together in order to determine which reading behaviors were being exhibited by the students. Linking the data in Chapter Four allowed me to analyze the bigger picture of how the data fits together, as opposed to looking at single pieces of evidence. While collecting data on students' reading behaviors and information gained from the survey, I was able to build, maintain, and see how students value our relationship, and how the relationship affected them as a reader. Throughout this data analysis, I looked for particular reading behaviors; however, I was aware that there might be unforeseen behaviors that I intended to track as well.

Criteria for Trustworthiness

The duration of the research process was six weeks. The process included daily observations on students reading behaviors, as well as observations from the weekly reading conferences with the teacher. Observations took place in a setting where a group of students were within an alternative classroom setting. Here, the participants were observed, completed a weekly reading journal process, weekly reading conferences, and surveyed. Each stakeholder (students and parents) gave consent to participate in this study. The materials that were used were various novels in which students were reading and responding to in journal form, a weekly reading conference rubric, a survey, and a data linking form.

It was important to present the data and findings in an honest and professional manner. The researcher took careful precautions to protect the anonymity of each of the participants involved and was sure to provide consistent and appropriate instruction based on the students' literacy needs at the time. The researcher was also careful with the data analysis and did not report or list data in a way that was judgmental or perceived unprofessional.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this study was the different need(s) of each student in the study. Based on these needs, these students received different accommodations from my co-teacher and me. Another variable was the different teaching practices used within my classroom. Considering that my co-teacher and I had gotten to know each of these four students very well, we tended to know what worked and what did not work with each of them. Using different practices and classroom management techniques with each of them did not keep the research as consistent as I would have liked. A final limitation that should be considered is that the results could be considered skewed because as the researcher, I was also both the person in authority and the person collecting data in this situation. My plan was to limit the variations as much as possible while still attending to their various needs as readers.

Summary

Teaching in an alternative classroom and having a small number of students allows me the unique opportunity to form lasting and impressionable relationships with my students. This chapter discusses some of my philosophies on teaching

literacy; most important in that philosophy, and the basis of my entire research question, is whether discernible effects can be observed as a result of relationship building. The opportunity to get to know these students on more than just an academic level often leads to more success within the classroom. In my teaching career, this relationship, as well as this unique classroom setting, has proven to be the key in the progress these students have made while being a part of this alternative classroom setting.

This study included four eighth grade students, three males and one female, and a range of ability levels. All four students were experiencing their second year in the alternative program and had had the opportunity to build a lasting relationship with the teachers and aide in the classroom in order to more effectively incorporate other reading philosophies and techniques.

A variety of qualitative and quantitative data was collected and used while using the following materials/methods: Observations, a Reading Journal Process, Weekly Reading Conferences, and a Survey. This qualitative method allowed me to uncover reading behaviors exhibited by each student. Uncovering these behaviors was done through observing students in different reading settings, careful analysis of their reading journal process by looking at the specific thoughts and evidence students shared, and through the weekly conferences where I was able to discuss students' reading habits, routines, thinking process, and give suggestions. Uncovering students' reading behaviors allowed me to gain an understanding of how each of the students

felt about the reading process, as well as the relationships they had formed with their teachers.

Chapter Four: Analysis

Throughout my research I gathered data in order to determine if there were correlations that could be observed in students' reading behaviors within my alternative classroom when I, the teacher, consciously focused on relationship building as a primary teaching tool. There are many different aspects of teaching that contribute to students' reading successes. However, throughout this research, I found that building relationships is certainly a key part of success in the classroom, and can even possibly be related to a student's success in reading. Based on the data collected, there is a correlation between the student and teacher relationship and the development of student reading behaviors.

As the researcher, I was able to determine that positive student teacher relationships did affect students' motivation to learn. Students learned to respond positively due to student teacher relationship, students learned to feel safe, and students learned to attempt literacy techniques and strategies. Data collected supports that relationship building as a primary teaching tool affects overall success within the classroom. This data also includes indirect correlations between the relationship and improvement in reading behaviors. Valuable data was collected which helped the researcher to determine what reading behaviors students were exhibiting, and how those reading behaviors linked to the student and teacher relationship.

The results of the data collection methods used, as well as anecdotal notes collected throughout the research process, show that the students in this study generally responded to teachers' direction, redirection, advice, and overall teaching

methods. Results from the survey that was given show that these four students, Vern, Myrtle, Wilbur, and Eugene (all names are pseudonyms) had a strong relationship with me, their teacher. The results of this survey are shown in Table 1 Survey Results. With this relationship, students showed evidence of not wanting to disappoint their teachers, or let them down in any way. Students felt respected and safe in the environment in which they were learning. Furthermore, motivation was shown by student excitement when discussing texts, the writing in student journal entries, and the positive attitudes expressed by the students. It is important to note that the results could be considered skewed because as the researcher, I was both the person in authority and the person collecting data.

The researcher used the constant comparative analysis of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) by collecting data through observations, students' weekly reading journal processes, and their weekly conferences with the teachers. Correlations were observed between the teacher's relationship with the students and students' reading behaviors. While compiling and organizing data, it was apparent as to which categories needed to be analyzed. There were various consistencies across Table 2 Journal Entries and Weekly Conferences and Table 3 Observations Collected Throughout Various Reading Settings. The data analyzed will show the correlation between the relationship formed between the student and teacher and the students' reading behaviors. The data being analyzed will be categorized into following three sections: Students Learn to Respond Positively Due to Student Teacher Relationship, Students Learn to Feel Safe, and Students Learn to Attempt Literacy Techniques and

Strategies. It is important to note that these categories are strongly intertwined and each category affects the other two greatly.

Students Learn to Respond Positively Due to Student Teacher Relationship

It has been documented that during their time within the LIFT Program, these students had opportunities to form lasting relationships with teachers who have the advantage of pouring all their resources and time into a small group of students. With this being said, because of the strong bond with the teachers, these students' attitudes towards learning changed. I was able to see how this relationship affected students' actions such as engaging in side conversations, entering and exiting the class in a distracting way, arguments with teachers, giving up if frustrated, lack of confidence, or simply refusing to complete a task given to them. They began to exhibit much different behavior than they did during their first few months, and even their entire first year within the program. There is a large amount of evidence that shows students' new found excitement to read, and more importantly to learn in general.

The first piece of evidence is the survey results. This survey supports that the students truly feel they have formed a successful bond with their teacher in which they feel motivated to take an interest in their own learning. Students indicated they were motivated to learn and felt respected and cared for within this teacher's classroom. When a behavior was addressed, or a student was redirected, the student to teacher relationship was evident. The following are three examples of how these students learned to respond to teacher direction during individual situations within the classroom.

Table 1, Survey Results, includes the some results from a survey given to students. Students' names were left off the survey and the students were asked to be honest when answering each question. The results to this survey helped the researcher to understand how students viewed the student teacher relationship, and how this relationship affected students' reading behaviors. Six questions were chosen to be included in the results to most effectively illustrate the bond between the students and teacher. Each question included a range of five choices, moving from negative to positive, for students to choose from. However, in the results of this table, only the choices that students chose were included.

Table 1
Survey Results

Question	Range	Range	Range
How much do you enjoy learning from Mr. Hulbert?	X	Enjoy 2	Very Much Enjoy 2
How excited would you be to have Mr. Hulbert as your teacher again next year?	Neutral 1	Excited 2	Very Excited 1
How caring is Mr. Hulbert towards you?	Neutral 1	X	Very Caring 3
Overall, how much do you learn from Mr. Hulbert?	Neutral 1	Learn Some 1	Learn A Lot 2
How unfair is Mr. Hulbert to you in class?	X	Fair 4	Very Fair 0
How would you rate your relationship with Mr. Hulbert?	X	Strong 2	Very Strong 2

Vern was distracted from reading his independent reading book. He was engaged in a side conversation, and even when students would not engage, he was trying to find a way to get them engaged into his conversation. The teacher walked over to quietly remind Vern of the expectations. The teacher reminded him by quietly whispering, "Vern, remember that during independent reading we try to eliminate the

distractions for ourselves and the others around us.” Vern quickly return to reading and tracking his inner thoughts.

Another situation similar to this occurred with Myrtle. In the beginning of her seventh grade year Myrtle’s responses to teacher redirection or advice was often inappropriate and would result in a power struggle or conflict cycle. During the time of research, a specific instance occurred when Myrtle was seen off task and needed redirection, the teacher simply sat with Myrtle and reminded her of the many positive changes and gains she had made while in this classroom, as well as how hard both she and the teachers were working to accelerate her learning. Instead of an inappropriate response, this conversation re-motivated her and allowed her to refocus and continue the great work she was doing.

When Eugene was upset, or lacked confidence, he would often times blatantly refuse to do his work. A specific example occurred when Eugene was angry with a group he was put in for reading. The teacher watched as Eugene made eye contact with him, and he slid the reading, graphic organizer, and pencil away from himself on the desk. He sat back in his chair, folded his arms, and sat slouched in the chair. The teacher addressed this situation by reminding Eugene of the expectations, explaining to Eugene that it would be a shame to put in all the hard work he has put in over the past year, only to receive silly, unneeded, consequences because of a grouping he did not agree with. The teacher walked away to give Eugene a minute or two to think about the situation. When the teacher came back, Eugene was a full participant in the group.

Some other valuable evidence was collected when the teacher noted that Vern thanked the teacher for helping him during a lunch period and after school with his homework. This gesture showed that Vern valued doing his work and took an interest in furthering his education. When Wilbur demonstrated understanding of a concept, and was praised for participating, he glowed with excitement and began participating at a high level. The evidence the teacher collected through anecdotal notes indicates that it was very possible that when Wilbur did not participate, it could likely be a conceptual error as opposed to a motivational issue. Eugene's evidence is shown through his excitement when demonstrating his new found knowledge, as well as his accomplishments, to both his teachers. This happened frequently when he finished a journal entry. He would immediately ask me to read it, waiting impatiently for praise.

Though these examples show students' excitement for learning, it is important to show they were actually learning. Through the process of linking the data and the results shown in Table 2, it shows that from week to week suggestions were made to Myrtle and Vern in their learning process.

Table 2, Journal Entries and Weekly Conferences, shows the data over a six-week period that was pulled from the students' weekly journal process, as well as the data pulled or discussed with students during their weekly conferences. This information supports the findings that students learned to respond positively to teacher direction as well as students attempting new reading techniques and strategies because it included specific instances from the students' journal entries and the conferences between the student and teacher.

Table 2
Journal Entries and Weekly Conferences

Student	Data Collected from Journal Entry	Data Collected and Discussed in Weekly Conference
Vern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Vern used good predictions, but was lacking text based evidence -Vern excelled at retelling and attempted to summarize important parts -Teacher suggested to use Points to Ponder (3) -Vern turned in incomplete journal entry -Vern provided retelling only -Vern lacked evidence to support point -Teacher suggested Vern needed to think deeper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Vern was tracking inner thoughts on Post It Notes -Teacher shared the importance of using text based evidence -Teacher suggested to use Points to Ponder to direct your thinking (5) -Vern included great retelling of what was read, but teacher continued to suggest to try sticking to the important parts that are key to meaning.
Myrtle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Myrtle provided connections in order to help comprehend actions within the book - Myrtle provided excellent text based evidence to support points -Myrtle made inferences on characters based on text evidence and real life experiences -Teacher excused Myrtle from weekly entry -Teacher compliments great work summarizing key topics -Myrtle provided clear text based evidence showing understanding of what was read 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Teacher suggested to stop when not understanding something. Discussed strategies of what to do when not comprehending. -Myrtle did a great job with her use of connections! -Myrtle took time to reflect and think about what had been read, asking herself , "Did it make sense?" -Myrtle stopped when she are unsure of words or meaning -Myrtle provided good summarizing -Myrtle provided great thoughts -Myrtle expressed the need for her to become a stronger reader. Teacher agreed! -Teacher asked Myrtle if she was using accurate information -Teacher and Myrtle discussed strategies for solving unknown words
Wilbur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Wilbur had incomplete journal entry (2) -Wilbur included great point, provided some evidence -Wilbur's strong evidence from graphic organizer did not make it to journal entry -Wilbur was lacking accurate evidence from the text -Wilbur did not show evidence of deeper thinking and clear understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Teacher and Wilbur discussed how to eliminate distractions when reading independently -Teacher demonstrated and discussed how to read independently (2) -Teacher modeled how to eliminate distractions -Wilbur was tracking thoughts effectively -Teacher suggested trying Points to Ponder -Wilbur underlined text based evidence
Eugene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Eugene was able to summarize what has been read -Teacher suggested the need to think higher level -Teacher suggested Points to Ponder -Eugene was able to summarize. -Eugene was questioning authors points -Eugene provided great evidence supporting prediction -Eugene made predictions, but after her read -Eugene included good text based evidence, shared thoughts about what had been read (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Teacher suggested to slow down, not a race to get through a book or to get a journal entry done -Eugene needed to track inner thoughts while reading, not just after reading (5) -Teacher suggested Points to Ponder -Eugene conveys thoughts through discussion -Teacher suggested to stop to do a sticky note every two paragraph

Myrtle was asked to be sure she stopped when meaning broke down as opposed to pushing through a section of a reading she did not comprehend. Observations showed she showed that she had done this by asking teachers for assistance when meaning broke down, and teachers also observed her stopping to use techniques such as rereading while reading aloud to adults. Vern demonstrated that he understood the importance of understanding deeper thinking while reading through evidence of using the Points to Ponder charts within his journal entry. These are simple sentence prompts that help students to make deeper thoughts within the six categories shown in Appendix C. He also showed deeper meaning through his journal entries by providing inferences and questioning while writing, as opposed to simply giving a retelling of the text he had read.

There were eight specific instances in which students responded positively to teachers during time set aside for observations, completed assignments in a timely manner, or made positive decisions for fear of letting their teachers down. Again in the survey, students described their relationship with their teacher as positive and felt he cared about them. The attempt at relationship building went a long way with students considering the varying degrees of social needs of these students. Table 3 shows evidence that both Vern and Wilbur both reengaged in their reading, or the lesson being taught, when being redirected by the teacher.

Table 3, Observations Collected Throughout Various Reading Settings, includes observations in various reading settings. Settings included twenty-minute mini lessons, independent reading, and guided reading groups over a six-week period.

Table 3
Observations Collected Throughout Various Reading Settings

Student	20 Minute Mini Lesson	Independent Reading	Guided Reading Groups
Vern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Answered questions, highly engaged within the lesson -Attempted strategies (inference) -Underlined text based evidence -Took risks, attempted to develop questions (thick and thin) -Questioned the author -Engaged in lesson and class discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Distracted, engaged when teacher redirects -Some sticky notes, but mostly retelling -Good predictions on sticky notes -Summarized some of key events -Distracted from reading at times, but responded to teachers' redirections -Apologized for being off task. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Was willing to share, but most thoughts were lower level -Predicted -Inferenced -Struggled with thick questioning -Underlined text-based evidence (non-fiction) -Engaged in reading and discussions, attempted to use new strategies
Myrtle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Highly engaged, but did not participate in sharing answers -Underlined text based evidence -Shared inner thoughts on the read a loud -Developed questions -Questioned the author -Doodled in notebook but listened very carefully. Respond to class discussion some days, but not on other days. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Made inference, backing with evidence from the text -Tracked various inner thoughts -Summarized -Questioned -Questioned the author -Deeply engaged in text depending on seating arrangements -Asked for help when meaning breaks down. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Had great inner thoughts, needed to be prompted to share these thoughts with the group -Detailed predictions -Thick questions -Took notes in the margins (non-fiction) -Very opinionated about text, friendly arguments with classmates
Wilbur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lost in what happened in the lesson -Disengaged -Unsure of questioning strategy -Underlined text-based evidence with teacher's assistance -Very distracted with writing utensils, classmates, noises. Rolled eyes and showed emotion when redirected in front of classmates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Disengaged, not reading -Attempted to distract others -No sticky notes, no tracking of inner thoughts -Summarized some and predicted on sticky note -Very easily distracted, but responded to teacher redirection on individual level -Apologized for being off task. -Attempted to eliminate distractions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Fell behind -Summarized -Discussed book -Disengaged, did not participate -Shared prediction -Struggled with thick questioning -Underlined text-based evidence with teacher's assistance -Easily distracted, needed to experience success
Eugene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Used predictions -Tracked inner thoughts during read aloud (did not share aloud unless prompted to) -Underlined text-based evidence -Questioned the author -Struggled in group settings, anxiety issues when sharing or talking. Did not respond well to teachers in this setting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Tracked inner thoughts, mostly after reading -Inference-unsure of evidence -Most sticky notes were summarizing -Excelled individually, very engaged and was willing to have conversations with teachers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Discussed book with group -Inference, unsure of evidence -Questions -Detailed prediction -Thick questioning -Underlined evidence -Notes were in the margin -Still showed anxiety, but was more willing to share and responded better to teacher in smaller setting.

Within the teacher's observations, these same students apologized for being off task and again quickly return back to the task they were engaged in. This wasn't the case when these students originally entered into the program. The evidence collected shows that students routinely completed reading assignments/expectations such as tracking inner thoughts, completing journal entries, and reading sections of books with one exception. Wilbur still struggled at times completing these assignments, but showed improvement in doing so. However, with Wilbur's relationship with teachers, and excitement when something new was learned, it was the teachers' belief that these incompletions were due to conceptual errors as opposed to motivational or behavioral issues. As teachers sat down to discuss the journal writing process, there was confusion on organization and how to begin the process. Teachers could see that Wilbur had wanted to start and complete the journal entry, but was still perplexed as to how to complete it. The students in this classroom felt they were valued by their teachers in this classroom setting. Teachers took an interest in their success, and in turn, these students made improvements within their work habits for fear of disappointing these adults down.

Experiencing success was a huge part of these students being successful. The successes they experienced resulted in building of confidence within each student to take risks, and try new strategies and techniques, as well as established an understanding that they could be a learner. Their success helped them in understanding the importance of being engaged. Vern's apology when being distracted, or asking for help on his homework, Wilbur's getting back on task when

redirected, Wilbur's and Eugene's joy in experiencing success and new learning, and Myrtle's conversation with the teacher about the positive improvements she has made in her time in the LIFT Program showed that they understood the importance of bettering themselves and improving their educational behaviors.

Though the relationship with teachers helped, there were certainly times when students could have been more engaged in their reading development. Anecdotal notes and observation records show that students responded positively when redirected during a variety of reading settings. Teachers saw improvements in responses to redirection with more willingness to get back on task without negative effects. Through my research, shown in Table 1, the results of the survey given to students, Table 2, and Table 3, I think it is evident that the student to teacher relationship affected the students' engagement and willingness to work harder to improve their reading development. The data collected during this process and research throughout Chapter Two provide evidence that relationships with these students affected their excitement and motivation about learning and reading.

Students Learn to Feel Safe

It is no secret that if a student isn't engaged within a mini-lesson, small group, or independent learning activity that the chances of them learning is very slim. Considering that I am both the teacher in the classroom, as well as the researcher in this study, I can provide my observation that the rate of participation for these students from the time they entered my classroom their seventh grade year, to the time they left at the end of their eighth grade year, increased greatly. No student

participates at the level observed, unless they are comfortable, and feel safe, within their classroom setting. There were times these students refused to do any work, put their heads down on the desk, left the classroom, missed a week of school at a time, or responded to redirection or constructive criticism in a unacceptable way. Before their time was over in this classroom, and they left for the high school in June, they were able to independently read for extended periods of time (varied based on abilities but up to 45 minutes), engage in learning activities, respond appropriately to most teacher directions, value their time within the classroom, and generally change their attitudes towards school. In this case, it was not an understatement to say that engaging in any academic activity bettered their chances at improving their reading behaviors and general learning habits.

One of the biggest motivational issues within this classroom setting was the fact that, previous to being enrolled in the LIFT classroom (alternative setting), the students in this study never viewed themselves as learners. Somewhere along the way these students had lost their love for reading and learning. Teachers building a relationship with these students was the first barrier to be broken down to help students show themselves they were still capable of learning and that someone knew they could. The teachers were able to begin to instill confidence and a belief that each of these students was capable of learning as shown through the teachers' observations, survey, students' journal writing process, and weekly conferences. The survey again provides valuable information. Students described themselves as motivated to learn. The survey results also show that students categorize their

relationship as strong or very strong, think that he treats them fairly, and believe he truly cares for them as individuals. Two Individual occasions of students exhibiting feeling safe within this classroom are as follows:

Table 3, as well as the teacher's observations and anecdotal notes, provide an example of Myrtle shifting her thinking. She was motivated to become a better reader and overall learner. She also had multiple conversations about her improvements as a student, and that she wanted to change her habits and how others (adults) viewed her. Another situation occurred when Myrtle developed an excitement about learning, and asked her teacher to share in her new found excitement. As Myrtle read a book about hamsters, she came across new information she had not known before. She was excited, and felt the need to share that information with someone who would share in that excitement. She called the teacher over, and as the teacher sat down, she began to flip through the pages of the book, explaining the things she had learned. The teacher knew she had hamsters at home and engaged in a conversation with her to see what she had really taken from her new learning. The conversation was a great experience for both the teacher and the student. Neither of these situations would have occurred if she did not feel comfortable enough with her teacher to share this information.

During his time in my classroom, Wilbur often exhibited a lack of confidence. However a specific example of this occurred when Wilbur knew the answer to an inference question the teacher had asked. The teacher was using random calling sticks and called on Wilbur. I, as the other teacher in the room, knew Wilbur knew the answer because we had recently discussed it. Unfortunately, he did not have the

confidence to share that answer with the class. As the teacher directing the lesson allowed for wait time, I was blown away that Wilbur would not share the answer he knew. The teachers prompted Wilbur by asking him to take a risk, ensuring him that this was a safe environment that students were expected to help one another learn. They explained it was unfair if he withheld his knowledge from the class. He then shared his answer, glowing with excitement once he knew his answer was correct. In previous years, with previous relationships with his teachers, it is not likely he would have shared his answer with the class.

Another example of students feeling safe and comfortable due to the relationship formed with their teacher is shown in the way Vern and Wilbur responded to redirection. Before their time in this classroom, as well as early on in this classroom setting, both these students reacted inappropriately to redirection. It was clear they felt as though the teachers were attacking them. As time went on, both these students knew the teacher cared for them (shown in the survey) and simply cared about them learning. Their improvement in their response to redirection showed their comfort level with this teacher.

Eugene showed his comfort with these teachers with his improvement in his anxiety issues. When Eugene entered the classroom it took significant time and energy to get him to simply talk to teachers. Sharing his thoughts with teachers was something he could not do the year before. I was able to build a strong relationship, so strong there were times I could not get him to stop talking to me in a one on one situation in order to attend his next class or activity. As Table 3 shows, Eugene still

struggled greatly with sharing with the entire group. However he would share in smaller groups, and was praised by both teachers and other students for doing this. Eugene's relationship with his teachers was the key to this improvement with his anxiety issues. Though he still had a long way to go, and much to improve on, this was an issue that the relationship I formed with him certainly had a positive effect on.

The previous examples are specific evidence obtained by the researcher that would not have occurred without the teacher forming a strong relationship with his students. Students learned to feel safe and comfortable, allowing them to take risks and improve their reading abilities.

Students Learn to Attempt Literacy Techniques and Strategies

Students' willingness to change their view of themselves as learners was key in their success in this classroom setting. However, another important aspect was to instill trust enough in their classmates and teachers to take risks and try new techniques and strategies within their reading development. It was challenging because students were unable to see results immediately and needed to trust teachers that these techniques and strategies would eventually help them with their reading. Table 3 shows the growth when teachers suggest certain techniques and strategies they would like the students to try. For example, it is well documented that Vern was pushed to use the Points to Ponder chart in order to help him build deeper meaning while reading and writing his journal entries. Though he had to be reminded, and sometimes retaught, how to use the Points to Ponder, he still consistently attempted to use them throughout the year. It showed in his journal entries as he started to develop

higher-level thinking as opposed to the consistent re-telling that he had been doing.

Another example of a student taking a risk is Eugene sharing aloud to the group. His social anxiety, and fear of sharing in a large group setting, was brought to the forefront as he was asked to share his valuable ideas. He put himself out there in front of his classmates, trying new things, and experienced success as he did so. Finally getting these students to take risks without fear of ridicule was a giant step in their reading development. The teachers knew by the time these students had ended their time in the class that many of the mistakes that were made, or non completion of assignments was likely due to conceptual errors, misconceptions, or lack of the development of their reading techniques/strategies as opposed to behavioral problems, lack of confidence, or lack of motivation.

At least once a week, I as the researcher, had the opportunity to observe each of these four students during a mini lesson, independent reading, and during guided reading. Each student wrote a journal entry based the inner thoughts they tracked during independent reading. These journals entries were analyzed, and feedback was given to students. Based on these weekly observations and journal entries, I as the researcher, was able to have an individual conference with each student, taking notes and giving suggestions. Compiling and linking the data allowed me to decide which weekly reading behaviors were exhibited, which weekly reading behaviors I suggested to work on, and what I needed to conference with each student about. A variety of examples follow, showing students learning that attempting literacy techniques and strategies is key in their development as readers.

Consistent evidence from both discussions with Vern and his weekly journal entries showed he needed to work on coming up with a deeper meaning. During his discussion he could very easily do a retelling of what he had read. This was the same throughout his journal entries. During his weekly conferences, teachers pointed out the importance of attempting to use the Point to Ponder Charts on the wall. This would be a helpful way to prompt having those thoughts that would show deeper understanding of the text. The evidence on both Tables show that Vern continually attempted the Points to Ponder and eventually improved in coming up with deeper meaning about what he was reading. He moved from a simple retelling of the story to including text-based evidence, making predictions, and tracking his thinking while he read. For instance, while reading a novel about a young boy in middle school, Vern was able to make an inference that the young boy was acting out due to his relationship with his father. It did not say this in the book, but because of Vern tracking thoughts while he read, he was able to look back at some of his thoughts recorded on Post-it notes and kept in his file folder in order to develop an inference. During various parts of the lesson, he moved from being a student with a lack of confidence to a student who took risks and attempted the strategies being taught.

Myrtle's journal entries showed everything the teachers were looking for. She showed connections, made inferences, made great predictions, included great text based evidence, all contributing to her having an evaluation at the end of her entries. These were all techniques and strategies she acquired by attempting new ways to address her reading throughout the year. Through discussions with her, as well as

through further analysis of her entries, it became clear that when Myrtle was unclear of the meaning of a word, or even a section she had read, she just pushed through the section and did her best to form an understanding. Often times these misconceptions showed in discussion and in her journal entries. She actually made up meanings in her head. This prompted discussions and teaching of strategies to address the importance of obtaining meaning while reading. Because of the strong relationship with her teacher, the teacher was able to bring this to her attention without her feeling attacked. This relationship resulted in her making improvements, practicing strategies for when meaning broke down at the word, sentence, and paragraph level.

The common theme while linking Wilbur's data was the fact he was distracted from reading and completing journal entries. Through observations of him not reading or having side conversations, incomplete journal entries, and discussions with Wilbur about being distracted, it became clear that he was having trouble, or did not know how to eliminate distractions as he read. Here, the teachers focused on teaching him how to eliminate distractions, and monitored him in eliminating distractions while he was reading. The strategies taught were often times observed, and are shown in Table 3. Before the teacher formed a positive relationship with Wilbur, and conveyed the message of how important it was for Wilbur to improve his reading skills, Wilbur likely would not have care enough to learn to read independently.

Eugene's journal entries and discussions were strong. Due to his motivation of not wanting to damage his relationship with his teacher, he exhibited many strengths within his journal entries including making inferences, making predictions, forming

connections that helped with meaning, and including text-based evidence. Through observations of his reading process, and discussions with Eugene about reading, our goal was metacognition. He did his thinking about reading after he read the text. Based on the conversations we had, the teachers were fairly certain there was thinking occurring while he read. We wanted Eugene to think about his thinking during reading. Recognizing the thinking that takes place during reading could push him to the next level of reading for meaning. The evidence of how the student to teacher relationship affected Eugene tracking his thinking while reading, and attempting new strategies, is shown in Eugene's constant need of teacher approval. Having a caring adult in his life allowed him to have the motivation to take risks when learning. For instance, as Eugene struggled with tracking thoughts while reading, the teacher sat down with him to discuss attempting this strategy. Though he was opposed to trying it, the teacher suggested tracking while he read, stopping every time the timer went off to record exactly what he was thinking at that moment. Seeing the look on Eugene's face, the teacher said, "Come on, try it...for me!" The teacher returned 15 minutes later to find Eugene attempting the strategy.

Summary

Each of these four students exhibited different strengths and weaknesses as a reader. Likewise, different reading behaviors were observed in each one of them. Table 3 shows the different behaviors, skills, techniques, etc. consistently observed during a mini-lesson, independent, and guided reading over a six-week period. Some students exhibited different behaviors; depending on which setting they were in.

Weekly Notes helped link data from what was observed, what students tracked on sticky notes, students' journal entries, and the weekly conferences that took place with the teacher. The Weekly Notes and Table 1 helped to show which behaviors were consistently being shown, which behaviors were needed, some notes on each student, and what was discussed and suggested to students during their weekly conferences. As shown in the surveys, each of the students within the study characterized themselves as having a good relationship with the teacher. Throughout Chapter Four, it is clear that the rapport built with these students drastically effected students' motivation, their comfort level within the classroom, willingness to take risks, and view of themselves as a reader and learner. Though there is no direct correlation from the teacher student relationship to the reading behaviors exhibited, or their performance in reading, there is certainly an underlying or indirect correlation between the student to teacher relationship and the overall efforts these students are putting towards their reading development.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

Throughout my research, I gathered various forms of data in my classroom to determine if there were correlations that could be observed in students' reading behaviors within my alternative classroom when the teacher consciously focused on relationship building as a primary teaching tool. In completing this research, I found that building relationships is certainly a key part of success in the classroom, and can be related to a student's success in reading. Due to the many variables involved in the classroom and with teaching in general, it was hard to determine how much relationship building directly affected students' reading behaviors. Through this research project, it was clear that the relationship with their teacher affected their motivation to become more successful. Students' willingness to work harder, and practice the techniques and strategies that teachers were teaching, ultimately resulted in their improvement with their reading behaviors, and overall reading ability. It was evident that building a positive relationship with students can have a large impact students' perspective of themselves as a learner. This perspective and willingness to learn ultimately expands the amount students will allow themselves to learn.

Conclusions

As the conclusions are discussed, there will be a close relationship between the three. The sections, Relationships between student and teacher affect motivation to be a learner, how relationship building affects reading behaviors, and motivation to be a learner results in improvement in reading all include data and results that are closely intertwined due to layout and process of the research project as well as the

environment the study took place in.

Relationships between student and teacher affect motivation to be a learner. Throughout my research, it was very apparent that these four students had developed a good working relationship with me as their teacher. Before entering this classroom, these four students were disconnected from school and had developed habits and traits that were hindering them as learners. These habits included being disorganized, behavioral issues due to poor relationships with classmates and teachers, chronic absenteeism, poor grades, and not considering themselves to be learners. Evidence presented and analyzed throughout Chapter Four shows the strength of the relationship formed between the students and teacher within this classroom setting. I as a teacher feel my biggest strength, and biggest teaching tool, is my relationship with my students. This study has furthered, and provided evidence, of my belief that building rapport with your students can have a strong effect on students becoming motivated to learn. Lyons (2003) research supports that students' emotions can contribute greatly to their cognitive ability to learn. Daniels and Zemelman (2004) suggest that building supportive relationships with students is one of the best ways teachers can help struggling readers. Anderman and Kaplan (2008) believe that a correlation exists between students' interpersonal relationships and their academic motivation, behaviors, and achievement. My relationship with my students motivated them on many occasions to complete assignments to the best of their ability and in a timely fashion. As these students formed a relationship with their teacher and experienced success, their attitudes towards learning changed drastically. They began

to view themselves as learners, as opposed to a student that no teacher wanted to teach. With the compiled research within Chapter Two, and the data collected on these students throughout this study, it is evident that the relationship with me, as their teacher, affected their motivation to become more successful in the school setting.

How relationship building affects reading behaviors. Throughout the data collection process, as well as the time spent analyzing the data, it became clear that it would be hard to find a direct correlation between students being motivated by their relationship with their teacher and their reading behaviors. There was no data that directly proved this. However, there was data that showed that the relationship built between the student and teacher helped in improving students' motivation to learn, and their perspective of themselves as a learner. Pitcher, Albright, DeLaney, and Walker (2007) explains that the more teachers' activities match their students' beliefs, values, needs, and goals, than the more likely it is that their students will show effort and maintain interest in what they are reading. There is an obvious correlation between the effort a student is willing to put forth, and amount that a student has the potential to learn. The willingness to work harder, and the practicing of the techniques and strategies the teachers were teaching, ultimately resulted in the improvement in students reading behaviors, and overall reading ability.

Motivation to be a learner results in improvement in reading. In analyzing the data collected, it was clear to see that the bond that the teachers had formed with the students resulted in these students taking risks, and attempting any new strategy

the teachers offered up. At times, students were hesitant, but in many instances you could see that these four students trusted their teachers when it came to furthering their education. My students knew the teachers had their best interest in mind. They did not know this about their teachers when they first entered this classroom, and it showed in the behaviors they displayed. With the trust they found in their teachers, and the new attempts at learning, these students became better readers. With their new perspective as learners, they will continue to grow as readers. Though no direct correlation can be asserted between the student to teacher relationship on reading behaviors, it is clear that building a positive relationship with students can have a large impact on their perspective of themselves as a learner as well as their willingness to learn. This willingness to learn expands the amount students will allow themselves to learn.

Implications for Student Learning

As a result of the research that took place during this study as well as the findings after data was collected, it is safe to say that students will benefit in a variety of ways. The students that took part in this study as well as the students I have had in the past have benefitted from forming a strong, lasting relationship with their teacher because they have once again become learners, and see the many benefits from learning. With this new found work ethic, and reconnection with school, they will be able to further their abilities in all subject areas. Being able to trust an adult is another benefit for the students who took part in this study. Forming a trusting relationship

with adults has allowed them to rely on someone, and have a steady responsible role model in their lives.

This study will not just affect the students who were a part of it, but it will also benefit my future students as well as the future students of my colleagues. I will take everything I have learned from this study into account when forming relationships with my students over the remainder of my career. Knowing that a relationship with their teacher can benefit students the way it does is a powerful teaching tool to have. Not only will it affect my future students, but if I can relay the message of the power of building relationships with my students to other educators I am in contact with, it will hopefully have a positive effect on their students as well.

Implications for My Teaching

Relationships between student and teacher affect motivation to be a learner. When students enter the program I teach in, they are often times disconnected from school. They no longer see learning as fun or beneficial in any way. Most times they do not like teachers, they do not like school, they do not like learning, and they are miserable while they are in school. Knowing what I have learned from this study, my primary focus in the beginning of the school year will be to find ways to build positive relationships with my students. It is imperative that students become motivated to come to school and to learn while they are there. Over time, hopefully this relationship blossoms into the students seeing the importance of learning, and seeing themselves as a learner and becoming reconnected to school.

How relationship building affects reading behaviors. As stated previously,

the relationship between teachers and their students can certainly affect students' reading behaviors by students being willing to attempt the new strategies and techniques presented. Delviscio and Muffs (2007) discuss the importance of creating meaningful teacher-student relationships that can result in a more positive impact on student motivation. McCown and Sherman (2002) explain that students are much less apprehensive in the classroom setting in the second year of the loop. Looping allows teachers and students, as well as teacher and parents to develop a stronger bond allowing them to better address student needs (Bellis, 1999, Hitz et al., 2007, McCown & Sherman, 2002, & Gausted, 1998). Lyons (2003) explains that the students' emotions need to be addressed before they can cognitively learn most effectively. Learning that this is true about students affects my perspective on not only teaching reading, but also every other subject I teach. Although I have not collected specific evidence to support other subjects, if students are willing to work harder, and put in more effort when it comes to their development in reading, then it seems logical to think they would do the same for math, social studies, science, and writing. Forming a strong, lasting relationship with students should result in their effort and development of skills and concepts across the board in school.

Motivation to be a learner results in improvement in reading. The relationship built with students often times results in them reconnecting with school and shifting their perspective of themselves as learners. Researching for, and completing this study has shown me that the way students view themselves can drastically effect the way they perform at school. Taking the time to instill confidence

in your students and finding ways to help them change the way they view themselves is key in them becoming successful (Lyons, 2003). When the students come to the realization that they can be learners, it is motivating, and often results in them improving their reading skills, as well as other skills needed to be successful in school (Pitcher, et al., 2007). Again, knowing this valuable information about students in general certainly changes the way I will approach students in building relationships with them. For me, if there is not some sort of positive relationship built, it minimizes the amount of learning that can take place.

Recommendations for Future Research

Throughout my research, many questions arose that I would love to further research or find answers to. Some recommendations extend aspects of this study, and some address the limitations of this study.

Larger scale using the general education population. One of the questions that came up during my research was how much does my relationship affect students because it is an alternative setting? Many of my students could be considered vulnerable or more in need of a positive relationship with an adult. Would this change with the general education population? I also think the results of this study could be different if it were done with more than four students. What would the results look like if you completed this study with a hundred or more students? I think addressing these questions, and finding data that researchers could form conclusions on could be extremely valuable for different types of educators everywhere.

Teacher should not be the researcher. I can not help but wonder what conclusions an outside perspective would have taken away from the data collected during this study. If the researcher was not me, the students' teacher, who had a vested interest in whether these students were improving, would they have formed the same conclusions? On the other hand, I think it is important to take into account the teacher's observations during this time. The teacher sees things through a different lens than an outside perspective might. Perhaps there is a way to have someone from outside of my classroom conduct research while taking into account my observations. I think research similar to mine should be done by an outside researcher in order to either prove, or disprove, some of my findings.

Motivation to learn. My research centered around how my relationship with my students affected their reading behaviors. I would like to adapt this study to not focus so much on reading behaviors, but more towards learning in general. I would like to see if the time of day, subject area, or even the day of the week affects students' motivation to learn. These issues are all ones I consistently hypothesize about, but have not taken the time to extensively research and find conclusions on. I think the results to a study like this could be beneficial to educators in being proactive and finding ways to combat some of the issues before it becomes a problem in the classroom.

Geographic Location. Throughout my research, I consistently thought about one question in particular, which then sparked more questions relating to the topic. How much does relationship building have an affect on motivating students in a city

population, rural population, or a suburban population? With that question, more questions arose. How much does the socioeconomic situation a student grows up a part of affect how much they have to be pushed, or motivated to learn? Does the region of the country in these settings have an effect on motivation? Furthermore, how much do these settings play a role in other countries? I would be fascinated to find out how much these questions play a role in students' motivation to learn. It could certainly be valuable information for educators everywhere.

Final Thoughts

When beginning this study I wanted to determine if my practices of forming a meaningful relationship with my students was truly affecting their learning, as well obtain information that may improve my teaching practices in the future. I think both of these objectives were met. I certainly obtained evidence that my positive relationship with students does affect their learning, and contributes to them making progress in their reading development. With the data obtained, I will not only continue to focus on the development of positive relationships with students, but also search for new and more effective ways to reach out and form meaningful relationships with my students and their families in order to increase the potential of my students becoming proficient readers and life long learners.

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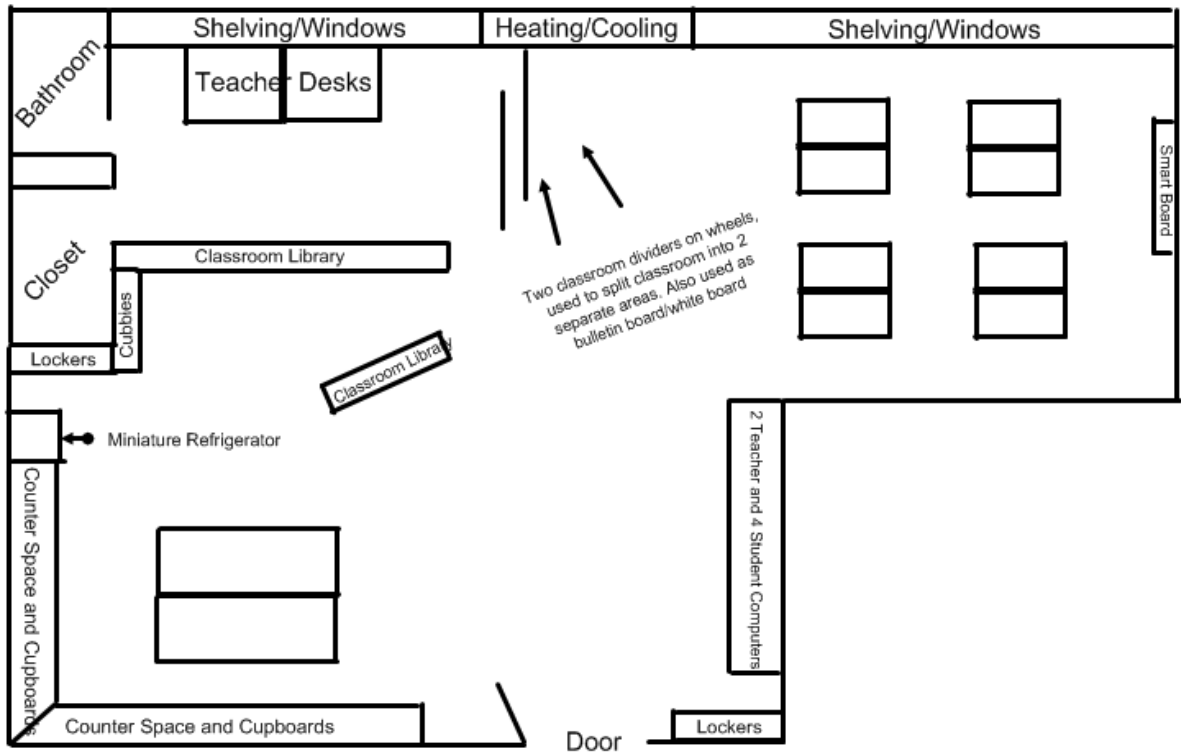
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Appendixes

Appendix A
Classroom Map



Appendix B
Observation Collection Form

20 Minute Mini-Lesson		
Independent Reading		
Guided Reading Groups		


Appendix C

Predict	Connect	Question

Tracking Inner Thought

Infer	Summarize	Evaluate (form an opinion)

Appendix D
Journal Entry Graphic Organizer

P	
E	
E	
E	
	Evaluate

Appendix F Weekly Conference

Weekly Reading Conference

Description	Attitude or behavior prevented student from participating in Independent Reading	Based on the conference student needs further intervention to meet standard	Student is approaching the standard and is expected to have made adjustments by next conference	Student is meeting expectation	Student is exceeding expectation while completing work.
Grade Book Equivalent	0%	60%	75%	85%	95-100%

Student has made satisfactory progress in Independent Reading book. Progress is in relation to silent reading rate and allotted time for independent reading that week.

Grade _____

Student proficiently can retell events/information regarding material they have read since their last reading conference, utilizing vocabulary from the story.

Grade _____

Student shows evidence of reading strategically through the use of sticky notes and consideration of their weekly "PEEE" entry.

Grade _____

Student is using his/her own interests and lists section of own binder to reflect on the interest level and difficulty of current independent reading book while considering what he/she might read next.

Grade _____

Student has added words to personal word wall from both independent reading book

Grade _____

Students Reading Binder is organized and managed appropriately.

Grade _____

Weekly Reading Conference Grade: _____

Appendix G Survey

DO NOT put your name on this survey. Please answer as honestly as you can. This will in no way be connected to you and/or your achievement in this class.

Circle which best describes your relationship with Mr. Hulbert.

1. How much do you enjoy learning from Mr. Hulbert?

Very Little Little Neutral Enjoy Very Much Enjoy

2. How friendly is Mr. Hulbert toward you?

Never Friendly Not Friendly Often Neutral Friendly Very Friendly

3. How often does Mr. Hulbert say something encouraging to you?

Very Little Little Neutral Frequently Very Frequently

4. How respectful is Mr. Hulbert towards you?

Not at all Not Very Neutral Respectful Very Respectful

5. How excited would you be to have Mr. Hulbert as your teacher again next year?

Very Little Little Neutral Excited Very Excited

6. How motivating are the activities that Mr. Hulbert plans for class?

Very Little Little Neutral Motivating Very Motivating

7. How caring is Mr. Hulbert towards you?

Not at all Not Very Neutral Caring Very Caring

8. How much do you like Mr. Hulbert's personality?

Not at all **Not Very** **Neutral** **Like** **Really Like**

9. Overall, how much do you learn from Mr. Hulbert?

Very Little **Little** **Neutral** **Learn some** **Learn a lot**

10. How often do you ignore something Mr. Hulbert says?

Very Frequently **Frequently** **Neutral** **Rarely** **Never**

11. During class, how often do you talk when Mr. Hulbert is talking (for instance, when you are supposed to be listening)?

Very Frequently **Frequently** **Neutral** **Rarely** **Never**

12. How often does Mr. Hulbert say something that offends you?

Very Frequently **Frequently** **Neutral** **Rarely** **Never**

13. How unfair is Mr. Hulbert to you in class?

Very Unfair **Unfair** **Neutral** **Fair** **Very Fair**

14. How angry does Mr. Hulbert make you feel during class?

Very Unfair **Unfair** **Neutral** **Fair** **Very Fair**

15. How would you rate your relationship with Mr. Hulbert?

Very Weak **Weak** **Neutral** **Strong** **Very Strong**