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Teacher Perceptions on the Impact of Professional Student–Teacher Relationships on Economically Disadvantaged Student's Effort

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Teacher Perceptions on the Impact of Professional Student–Teacher Relationships on

Economically Disadvantaged Student's Effort

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

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Doctor of Education in

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Abstract

The value of relationships in education continues to grow as educational leaders raise awareness for social emotional learning. This phenomenological research study examined teacher perceptions of the connection between student–teacher relationships and student effort with economically disadvantaged students. A brief overview of research involving popular educational leadership styles led to the evaluation of student–teacher relationships' impact on student effort. Answering the central research question, how do teachers perceive the impact of student–teacher relationships on student effort of economically disadvantaged students, study participants shared their experiences in education that yielded value to relational connections with students. Interpreted through the lens of social constructivism theory and analyzed from data collected from 8 one-to-one interviews, this study produced data from teacher perspectives of relational capacity in the classroom. Additionally, study participants furnished artifacts representing positive connections with students and discussed the relational value their artifact held. The study provided the following: characteristics of student–teacher relationships with economically disadvantaged students, obstacles study participants faced with economically disadvantaged students, effective teacher practices and needed supports with economically disadvantaged students. Educational stakeholders might be able to use the research findings to reflect on relational capacity in schools and make appropriate changes that may increase civility, effort and academic success in schools.

Keywords: relationships in education, educational leaders, teacher perceptions, relational capacity, social emotional learning, student–teacher connections, resiliency, economically disadvantaged, student effort

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, Sage Funk, Cassidy Funk and Guy Funk, whose curiosity and innocent trust provided the inspiration for this study. Your sacrifice of time with me while I worked, conversations about inspirational teachers and our shared belief that hard work and dedication accomplish goals, encouraged me to focus on my doctoral educational pursuits. I am excited to be lifelong learners together and enjoy celebrating our achievements together. I love and value each of you more than I can express in words.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Relationships in education form the foundation of success. When individuals have confidence in themselves and trust the staff in a school, performance increases. This is true for staff and for students. When an individual feels valued by peers and superiors, effort, work, and creativity increase. Roles that work with both the students and the staff have the ability to support positive and proactive relationships and goals.

Relationships between people in education, often directly affect effort and success in many areas of the education field. Often when a student has performed poorly or exhibited poor choices in behavior, this researcher has learned that the student has something else they are dealing with emotionally. Family relationships impact a student's performance in academics, teacher relationships encourage or discourage a child from performing to their potential in a class, teacher/administrator relationships impact the effectiveness of teachers in a school, and district administration/campus relationships impact the community in general. The enormous impact positive relationships have on a community and student effort and success is fascinating.

The students often facing the most challenges are students whose families are economically disadvantaged. Basic needs for these students like food, shelter, and emotional support, are often unmet. When students' minds are focused on finding a way to meet basic needs, the ability to give academics attention and effort is often not available. The impact of poverty on academics is demonstrated by Hollingshead (2012):

> The lives of students living in poverty today are filled with many struggles, and these
> struggles are evident in classrooms everywhere. The initiatives provided by schools and
> teachers to support students living in poverty are vital to their success in the future. (p.
> 15)

Teachers must be intentional in providing an emotionally safe classroom for students to achieve higher academic effort and success. This exploration of student–teacher relationships and the impact on student effort for economically disadvantaged students is a work to shine a light on the importance of relationships in education.

Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem

Legislators and school administrators have identified and continue to work to bridge the gaps in learning for socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Free and reduced lunch and breakfast are provided to students whose families earn less than a minimum annual wage determined to be the poverty line (National School Lunch Program, 2019). Providing food for socioeconomically disadvantaged students meets one of the students' most basic needs. Connections and emotional support are a basic need that must be met before students are able to perform to their academic potential. Hall (2014) explains:

> The problem of socioeconomically disadvantaged students' achievement continues in spite of financial support and assistance from other federally funded programs. Educators must continue to assess every option to ensure that disadvantaged students academically perform with their peers in accordance with the stipulation of NCLB. (p. 5)

Background and Context

A desire to increase learning and student achievement is a common goal for educators. Student–teacher relationships are known to impact achievement. In an effort to identify themes for teachers to strive for in professional, positive, proactive relationships, the focus of the study was to identify what teachers who demonstrate increased student achievement from one year to the next have in common when building relationships with students. This qualitative interpretative phenomenological study focuses on student–teacher relationships and their

perceptions of the impact professional, positive, proactive relationships have on academic student effort for students from socioeconomically disadvantaged families.

Texas legislators and Texas Education Agency, as well as federal legislators and other state legislators and education agencies across the nation, are identifying the additional need for meeting and addressing social and emotional student needs to improve and facilitate both behavioral and academic improvement Texas Education Agency (2019). Awareness has been brought to the impact social and emotional needs play on behavior and academic effort and success. As a result, this identified need is generating educational conversations and research to identify ways to better address the social and emotional needs of students in schools and classrooms across the state and nation.

Additionally, there is growing awareness of trauma-informed and resilience-focused practices. Starr Commonwealth (2019) advocates for educating all teachers and educators in these practices in an effort to facilitate healing and increased success in all children. Four areas are addressed in the model taught in trauma-informed and resilience-focused practices. The "circle of courage" is what Starr Commonwealth (2019) teaches for healing, addressing the needs for belonging, independence, mastery and generosity. Each of these areas needs to be achieved in the classroom for students to feel successful and be able to meet their social and emotional needs. All four areas are relational in capacity and greatly impacted by the relationships with other students and teachers at school. Teachers have the ability to influence the environment in their classrooms through fostering and building relational capacity in their classrooms. This ability for influence and relationship building is a fundamental principle of this research study.

History and Conceptual Framework

Teacher perspectives of relationships in the classroom were the primary lens for this research study. Social constructivism, and Lev Vygotsky's (1978) ideas and work, frame this study, seeking to cultivate a deeper understanding of student–teacher relationships and student effort. Through social constructivism, the perspectives of multiple teachers' individual experiences are analyzed for triangulation to develop collaborative themes and patterns between perspectives. Understanding the lived experiences from the perspective of the interviewee allows for identification of patterns and themes between study participants. The perspective of the individuals interviewed drives the data for research in social constructivism. The similar topics, patterns, and themes between interviews constructs the data collected through the social perspectives in interviews. Researchers are able to learn through the perspectives of study participants and identify new data. Collective experiences are deconstructed to build meaning by using these tools in social constructivism. Both Creswell (2012) and Plano-Clark (2011) teach that researchers are motivated to look for complexity of views, rather than narrow meanings into a few ideas or categories by understanding these meanings.

Social development theory demonstrates that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. Vygotsky (1978) states:

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. (p. 57)

Cognitive development occurs through engagement in social interaction. Vygotsky's (1978) theory narrows and complements Bandura's (1997) work on social learning. Responses from

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others in social settings provides the framework for assigning meaning. An example of Vygotsky's (1962) social development involves language acquisition as a baby learns to talk; at first the baby mimics spoken words, then the word is assigned meaning, this leads to conversations and finally allows the child to use language for internal dialog and thought. Meaning in physical movement is assigned similarly. Baby's learn to walk through social reinforcement and then this is carried into social movement in childhood and beyond through sports and other physical activities. Social environments at school and in classrooms provide opportunities for development of higher mental functioning in children. Teachers facilitate this continuation of Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory by creating an environment of social norms and expectations.

The idea that the social environment influences individuals in the root of the social constructivist framework. Vygotsky utilizes a social context lens to analyze social environments and the influence the environment has on the individual (Miller, 2011). Through the social lens, themes and patterns of understanding are developed. Social constructivism theory explains the data Maurizi, Grogan-Kaylor, and Delva (2013) found that depressive symptoms were associated with lower levels of academic achievement, parental involvement, connection to school and peer relationships. People are inspired by positive experiences and often replicate the practices to create more positive experiences. Mezirow (1991) identifies that it is reasonable to assume positive educational experiences inspire continued education.

Social constructivism theory applied in the classroom to the student–teacher relationship might allow for the development of positive mindsets for effort and achievement. Brown (2018) cites D'Angelo et al. (2009) as she explains, Vygotsky guided social constructivism through emphasizing awareness of interactions in relationships, individual, interpersonal, cultural and

historical factors, and the impact on learning. When teachers identify student achievement as a result of advocacy, motivation for student advocacy is increased. Robinson (2011) writes about adult's belief that they are not creative and children's contrary belief that they are creative. This innocence and confidence that children bring into the school can build on by teacher advocacy. When inclusive groups are formed moral is raised, tension is relaxed and achievement is higher. In building relationships, teachers can foster the creativity of students for a collective strength and encourage the formation of student groups.

Statement of the Problem

Student effort and achievement increases with positive relationships in education (Funches, 2017; Maurizi et al., 2013). Increased performance on standardized state assessment is an indication of student achievement effort and success. Economically disadvantaged students are at greater risk of not performing well on academic assessments (National School Lunch Program, 2018). Teachers have an opportunity to impact student effort and retention through emotional connections and advocacy. Teachers use leadership style, kindness, laughter, play and humor to engage and connect with students.

Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this study were to (a) identify themes and patterns in teacher perception of practice and advocacy that improve connections in student–teacher relationships, (b) demonstrate through teachers' lived experiences that teacher practices and advocacy impact student effort and academic achievement, and (c) contribute to educational research by empowering teachers with examples of how educators make a greater positive impact on their students through relationships. This was accomplished through asking teachers to reflect and

share their perspectives of relationships in public education. Teachers were asked about student–teacher relationships, student effort and their beliefs about best practices in public education.

Evidence through data supports the assumption that student–teacher relationships contribute to student effort and achievement is a powerful and positive indicator of student success (Funches, 2017; Maurizi et al., 2013). Student–teacher relationships in education and student educational effort are focused on in this study. Positive, professional student–teacher relationships improve student self-efficacy. Strong self-efficacy influences achievement and is a protective measure that prevents people from becoming overwhelmed and giving up when they face adversity (Bandura, 2008). In an effort to offer the educational community insight into teacher practices and mindsets that produce positive student effort and achievement, research was conducted with eighth grade English Language Arts teachers and eighth grade math teachers in one Texas public school district. Interviews were used to evaluate themes in teacher practices and advocacy that effect sociologically disadvantaged student effort positively.

Research Questions

One guiding question was central to this research study: How do teachers perceive the impact of student–teacher relationships on student effort of economically disadvantaged students?

The significance of the student–teacher relationship and importance of this relationship with economically disadvantaged students were explored. Furthermore, the way teachers define relationships and advocacy in education and how this relates specifically to students who are economically disadvantaged was addressed. The research examined how teachers advocate for students to overcome obstacles they encounter that impact self-efficacy, relationships and student effort with economically disadvantaged students and how teaching strategies can be used to

overcome these obstacles. Finally, the research addressed how teacher practice and advocacy improve connections in student–teacher relationships, student effort, success and self-efficacy with students who are economically disadvantaged. These questions were answered during the interview process by following replication procedures using the questions found in Appendix A.

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

The rationale for conducting this research study was based on the idea the teachers have an opportunity to increase student effort through student–teacher relationships. Attention was placed on the impact teachers make through appropriate relationships in education. The goal of this work was to identify strategies that teachers use to build these positive, proactive, and professional student–teacher relationships that increase student effort.

The efforts of teachers in connecting with students was investigated in this interpretive phenomenological study. The research findings were relevant to the education field because the data can motivate teachers to improve student–teacher relationships. Additionally, teachers are likely to benefit from examples of strategies identified through themes in the lived experiences of teacher study participants. Determining themes in professional, positive, proactive student–teacher relationships is relevant to the educational community.

Study results can be used to help educators reflect on their own ideas surrounding student–teacher relationships and the impact they have of student effort. Knowledge about strategies to improve student–teacher relationships may serve as a resource for teachers working to improve relationships in education and trying to build relational capacity with their students. This researcher's hope was to provide additional data that will serve to motivate teachers to be more intentional in relationship building.

Definition of Terms

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To identify the concepts being examined in this study, the following definitions were used to describe background information and relative terms.

Economically disadvantaged: This term refers to students meeting the criteria to be eligible to receive free or reduced-cost meals under the National School Lunch Act are considered to be economically disadvantaged. Family income at or below 130% of federal poverty guidelines qualifies students for free meals. Family income at or below 131–185% of federal poverty guidelines qualifies students for reduced-cost meals (National School Lunch Program, 2018).

Poverty: This term refers to students who are eligible to receive free or reduced-cost meals under the National School Lunch Act are considered to be living in poverty. Families with income at or below 130–185% of federal poverty guidelines qualify for meal financial assistance due to poverty (National School Lunch Program, 2018).

Professional student–teacher relationship: This term refers to relationships in which the teacher maintains appropriate professional boundaries with students while encouraging students to find intrinsic reward in academic success (Covey, 1989).

Student achievement: This term refers to academic success determined by standardized state assessments. State assessment criteria establishes if students approach mastery, meet mastery, or exceed mastery of academic content (Texas Education Agency, 2019).

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

Assumptions

For the purposes of this study, the researcher assumed that teachers are aware of the impact of their student–teacher relationships on the state assessment scores for their students. It is assumed that student effort increases student achievement. It is assumed that teachers participating in the study will give genuine feedback surrounding their student–teacher relationships. It is further expected that credible information about professional student–teacher relationships and strategies used to build these relationships are shared in all of the interviews.

Delimitations

This study is delimited to one Texas public school district. The small number of eighth grade English Language Arts teachers and eighth grade math teachers in the district causes additional delimitation. Finally, the small population is a further delimitation to the reach this study is able to provide. The school district used for this study had three middle schools that offer eighth grade course work. To address this delimitation, all three middle schools were used to encompass the demographics of the entire school district.

Limitations

There are inherent limitations in this study as with any study. Limitations for this study included sample size and researcher bias. This study was conducted with eighth grade English Language Arts teachers and eighth grade math teachers in one Texas public school district. Research findings from this study cannot be generalized to other school settings or populations. The school district had three middle schools with four eighth grade English Language Arts teachers and four eighth grade math teachers each, so the maximum study pool consists of only 24 teachers.

This researcher had a professional relationship with the school district from this study. In an effort to reduce the risk of researcher bias, study participant interviews were recorded, the recorded interviews were transcribed and then provided the transcripts to participants for verification. Verification of transcripts by study participants prevented misrepresentation of the data collected from the interviews. Study participants remained confidential and participation in the study was voluntary. The researchers' experiences in education can affect opinions about others in education. The researcher separated personal experiences in educational relationships from this study and maintained an open-mindset to allow the research to produce unbiased data. This was accomplished by following interpretative phenomenological analysis techniques, using bracketing and following Moustakas (1994) principles to synthesis meaning and essences.

Chapter 1 Summary

Teachers have the ability to positively impact students' effort and in turn academic success through professional, positive, proactive student–teacher relationships. Economically disadvantaged students face challenges beyond the classroom that negatively impact student effort and academic achievement. The relationships formed by teachers can provide an additional layer of student support. Student–teacher relationships are an integral part of student effort and academic success. This study was an examination of teacher perceptions of the impact of student–teacher relationships on the academic effort of economically disadvantaged students in order to recommend successful strategies for teachers to build student–teacher relationships.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction to the Literature Review

Chapter 2 provides a review of existing literature that has focused on student–teacher relationships in education. Included in the literature review are current and past studies that have been conducted by researchers in the education field of study. Subsections included in this study discuss influences on student–teacher relationships. Included in this study are the following key concepts: (a) educational leadership styles; (b) student perceptions; (c) humor, play, and laughter in the classroom; and (d) student–teacher relationships. The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis research study was to explore how teachers perceive the impact of connections in education on student effort and success.

"The stronger the affective (emotional) dimension of an interpretation and the more frequently it is made, the easier it is to remember" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 36). The literature presented a gap in research regarding teacher perspectives on the impact of student–teacher relationships on academic success. Teacher advocacy for students is a key part of the student–teacher relationship. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to examine student–teacher relationships and the impact these relationships have to student success.

The motivation behind this study was to understand how teachers view themselves as student advocates, what personal and professional intrinsic motivation guide their passion and how they overcome obstacles to advocacy and student achievement. Student–teacher relationships serve to meet some of the students' basic psychological needs. Basic human needs are described in order of most basic to fulfillment by Maslow (1943) as physiological, safety, belongingness, esteem, and finally self-actualization. For the purposes of the research in this study, the focus was narrowed to the impact of positive, proactive, and purposeful student–

teacher relationship building on student effort. Literature regarding relationships in education and student effort were reviewed. A focus on concepts related to student effort in eighth grade English Language Arts and teacher advocacy, including educational leadership styles; student perceptions; humor, play, and laughter in the classroom; and student–teacher relationships were applied to examine the topic of the impact on student–teacher relationships impact on student effort and achievement more thoroughly. The characteristics of positive student–teacher relationships and student effort were specifically addressed.

Study Topic

Teacher perceptions of the impact of student–teacher relationships on student effort of economically disadvantaged students was examined in this study. Student effort and success increases with professional and positive student–teacher relationships in education. Teachers have an opportunity to impact student effort and success through emotional connections. Teachers use kindness, laughter, play, and humor to engage and connect with students. Brown (2008) states that the basis of human trust is established through play signals. Once trust is established, connections can be made with teachers and students. Student engagement is higher when a positive proactive student–teacher relationship is in place (Lauderdale, 2011; Maurizi, Grgan-Kaylor & Delva, 2013; McHugh, Horner, Colditz & Wallace, 2013; Sointu, Savolainen, Lappalainen & Lambert, 2017; Van Praag, Stevens & Van Houtte, 2017; Zee & Bree, 2017). Therefore, schools are focusing on leadership styles that promote transformational and servant leadership (Deaner, 1994; Greenleaf, n.d.; Hallowell, 2011; Mezirow, 1991; Nass & Yen, 2012).

<div align="center">**Conceptual Framework**</div>

An exploration of teacher perspectives related to relationships with students, passion for advocacy, and student effort and success were the structure of this research. Social

constructivism framed the study, specifically the ideas and work of Lev Vygotsky (1978). Creswell (2012) explains social constructivism as individuals seeking to understand the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences. Social constructivism seeks to triangulate multiple perspectives to develop collaborative themes from the ideas of individual experiences.

Identifying themes or patterns is a tool that can help facilitate positive change. Interview can be used to guide researchers toward themes they have not yet identified. Social constructivism utilizes these tools to build meaning of collective experiences. Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011) teach that by understanding these meanings, researchers are motivated to look for complexity of views, rather than narrow meanings into a few ideas or categories. Rochefort (2013) explains, "Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory can be linked to learning in a variety of ways" (p. 40). Social constructivism techniques strengthen the ability to look for complexity in themes.

Miller (2011) explains that Vygotsky's theory is used as a templet for many modern studies; as a result, his work is often diluted. The purpose of Miller's (2011) book is to present a picture of Vygotsky in as undiluted manner as possible. "Two key theoretical concepts that permeate all aspects of Vygotsky's work are discussed: the role of 'psychological tools' or signs in his theory; and the nature and role of sociogenesis in the development of higher mental functions" (Miller, 2011, p. 6). The social constructivist framework is rooted in the idea that individuals are influenced by their social environment. "Vygotsky's texts make it abundantly clear that he rejects the conflation of both signs and technical tools under a broader generic rubric such as that proposed by some contemporary 'sociocultural' or 'activity' theories" (Miller, 2011, p. 6). The lens used is a social context. Miller (2011) explains:

Following Vygotsky's arguments regarding the role of the social in the development of higher mental processes, it emerges that the meaning he attaches to the concept of social is closely tied up with the role of speech and the structure of the sign as a means of communication with others and with the self. (p. 6)

Brown (2018) cites D'Angelo et al. (2009) in an explanation that Vygotsky guided social constructivism through emphasizing awareness of interactions in relationships, individual, interpersonal, cultural and historical factors, and the impact on learning. Through this social lens, themes and understandings can be developed.

The theory of social constructivism can be applied to student–teacher relationships and developing positive mindsets for achievement. Maurizi, Grogan-Kaylor, and Delva (2013) found that depressive symptoms were associated with lower levels of academic achievement, parental involvement, connection to school and peer relationships. Positive experiences inspire people to continue similar experiences. It is reasonable to assume positive educational experiences inspire continued education (Mezirow, 1991). Teachers who see student achievement as a result of advocacy are further motivated to advocate for students. Robinson (2011) writes about children's belief that they are creative and adult's belief that they are not creative. Teachers can build on this confidence that children bring into the school and form student leader groups. When inclusive groups are formed moral is raised, tension is relaxed and achievement is higher.

Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature

There is a large body of data exploring relationships in education. This data can be simplified into some general themes. The themes identified were (a) educational leadership styles; (b) teacher and student perceptions; (c) humor, play, and laughter in the classroom; and (d) student–teacher connections and academic effort achievement. This body of research was

applied through continuing to explore specifically the relationships between students and teachers and their perceptions on educational success, both social and academic.

Educational Leadership Styles

Relationships in education are impacted greatly by the leadership, district and campus administrators and the leadership style of the teacher. An understanding of leadership styles is important to explore the impact of leadership style on the student teacher relationship. Cherry (2015) identifies eight different theories of leadership. The leadership categories are organized in a dichotomy of leadership philosophies, either the leader was born that way or individuals are capable of developing skills to be a leader. Cherry (2015) collected data through a literature review of leadership styles. The different styles of leadership are organized into eight categories. Cherry (2015) claims that leadership styles can be categorized in eight ways: "Great Man" theories, trait theories, contingency theories, situational theories, behavioral theories, participative theories, management theories, and relationship theories. This way of categorizing leadership theories breaks down the mindset of the leader and the goals for the organization.

Qualities and habits of leaders play a significant role in effective leadership as well. Covey's (1989) theory of seven habits falls into the leadership belief that leadership can be learned. By following the seven habits of highly effective people everyone can become more productive and successful. Covey (1989) identifies seven habits of highly successful people; be proactive, begin with the end in mind, put first things first, think win-win, seek first to understand, then to be understood, synergize, and sharpen the saw. The seven habits allow individuals to prioritize their lives and live purposefully. The habits of successful people are consistent with other self-help literature that encourages communication, planning, consistency and compassion. These are the tools often used to teach and encourage change that will improve

the lives of individuals. The concepts in the seven habits are consistent with concepts psychology has identified historically. Covey spent decades following case studies and teaching habits of success. The data they have collected remains consistent and applicable across all ages and socio-economic groups. The habits identified by Covey are not only effective for leadership, but also for inspiring organizational change.

Participation is important in encouraging employees to buy into the proposed change. Deaner (1994) explains that the needs of the organization and the needs of the employee need to be linked. These principles are congruent with leadership values in this literature review. The three principles Deaner (1994) values are "participation, shared power, and truth" (p. 437). This allows employees to find value in working toward change. Shared power allows those impacted by change to have some decision-making authority (Deaner, 1994). Deaner (1994) argues that truth throughout the organizational design process is a necessity for the change to be successful. The relationships among staff members are vital to the success of any organizational endeavor.

Relationships in education are protective factors and have the power to positively impact emotions in the workplace. Hallowell (2011) teaches that emotions in the workplace are contagious. Positive emotions influence others in the office to feel positive and negative emotions influence others to feel negative. Fear is a negative emotion; therefore, fear impacts the workplace negatively. Experiences working in organizations rampant with fear, the atmosphere is generally reactive rather than proactive. Stephen Covey (1989) explains that the first habit that highly effective people have in common is to be proactive. A proactive attitude looks for possible outcomes and considers potential problems or success prior to taking any action. It is necessary to think in a positive proactive manner to prevent reactivity and avoid fear in the workplace.

Relationships and positive emotional connections can increase positivity and reduce fear in the workplace. "The power of connection stabilizes and propels a person" (Hallowell, 2011, p. 76). Hallowell (2011) examines the second step to peak performance in the workplace, which is connection. "The all-powerful propeller of connection begins with a link to a particular person, then grows" (Hallowell, 2011, p. 80). Managers can increase connectivity by creating a cohesive environment where employees feel safe and comfortable with coworkers. Hallowell (2011) explains how toxic fear induces the fight or flight mentality where adrenaline in the body hijacks the brain. When the brain is in fight or flight mode, empathy is absent and aggression is present. "Connection is the best antidote to unnecessary suffering" (Hallowell, 2011, p. 96). Emotions involved in education play a role in academic success, social success and relationships in education.

Educational leaders model relationships through interactions with staff members. Helmer (2013) explains that campus morale is directly impacted by the way that a principal communicates with the staff. Helmer (2013) further explains that the teachers' perceptions of student academic success is similarly tied to the campus moral. Often when students engage in conflict it is a result of a greater issue involved for one or both of the students. When someone from the school contacts parents about behavioral issues, parents often share about a deeper problem the family faced. Rather than engage in conflict, students can be given a voice and a greater opportunity. Each time the power is given back to the student, the student that was failing becomes empowered to be successful.

The education system really benefits from developing a culture of positivity. "In meetings-and everywhere-try to make others look good" (Hallowell, 2011, p. 80). By making others look good, an environment of safety and reduce fear is created. Making others look good

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is a proactive and positive action. In many organizations, the habit of criticism leads to looking for mistakes others make. This is a negative and reactive action. A healthier leadership style is to redirect the campus to be proactive rather than reactive.

The habit of criticism works in conjunction with the manager habit of "remember, as a manager, the more you recognize others, the more you establish the habit of recognition of hard work and progress as a part of the organizational culture" (Hallowell, 2011, p. 81). Servant leaders model and lead by example. Teachers as a group tend to be pleasers. Most teachers are eager to meet expectations and want to know that they are doing the right thing. If administrators model recognizing the good teachers are doing, this can become a campus norm.

Campus norms are built through modeling and repetition. Hallowell (2011) discusses the power of transference in groups. "When people believe the leader is that powerful, in a sense the leader really becomes that powerful. His people make him so" (Hallowell, 2011, p. 79). This type of transference is also involved in creating a positive working culture. When the leader projects positivity on the staff, the staff becomes positive.

Recognition is not always needed for staff to feel valued; however, this is key to many people. Those that do not need recognition still need to feel valued and accepted. It is important to create positivity in the workplace and one way to do this is through making people throughout the organization look good. Sometimes direct recognition makes people look good and sometimes showcasing students indirectly gives the teacher recognition. Value, appreciation and safety are needed to have a positive work environment.

Positive educational experiences influence continued education. "The stronger the affective (emotional) dimension of an interpretation and the more frequently it is made, the easier it is to remember" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 36). Transformational leadership encourages

continued education. Encouragement provides awareness, creates beliefs, builds confidence, improves attitude and promotes action. The five powers of encouragement according to Eikenberry (2017) are, provides awareness, creates beliefs, builds confidence, improves attitudes, and promotes action. "When we put it in the organizational context and think about the role encouragement can play for us as a coach in helping others, it is a powerful tool at your disposal" (Eikenberry, 2017, para. 8). Continued education and professional development lead to personal and professional growth. Nass (2012) teaches that there are four fundamental personality types, introvert, extrovert, critic and sidekick. Leadership styles are associated with personality types. Case studies in school leadership personality types are used to identify key principles in organizational design that are most productive.

Administrators set the tone for advocacy by building relationships with both students and teachers to positively influence students. "If we don't see ourselves in this role (leaders and student advocates), we leave the door open for others outside the profession to tell our stories and determine the successes (and shortcomings) of our schools" (Cuthbertson, 2014, para. 7). Teachers know students best because of the time they spend with students in the classroom. Bridging the gap between home and school with positive communication builds positive relationships with students. "Advocacy can be as informal as a one-on-one conversation with a parent or as formal as preparing public comments and testifying before a local school board, state board of education, or other governing body. To prepare for advocacy work, it is valuable for teachers to get connected to other teacher advocates" (Cuthbertson, 2014, para. 9). The relationships between teacher advocates inspire action. Cuthberson (2014) states:

> Teacher advocates see the bigger picture and purpose of public education. We ask lots of
> questions. We problem solve and push back against the status quo. We take initiative.

We wonder out loud and imagine possibilities. We say "Yes" often when asked to

explain our work to others despite our busy schedules. We see advocacy as part of what

it means to be an educator. (para. 8)

While this claim is consistent with the claims in the literature review, this is an article based on

one teacher's opinion. This teacher is advocating for relationships in education through

connections.

Teacher and Student Perceptions

Teachers often develop relationships with students and are able to build on the

confidence that children bring into the school, then encourage and facilitate students to form

student leader groups. Robinson (2011) writes about children's belief that they are creative and

adult's belief that they are not creative. When inclusive groups are formed moral is raised,

tension is relaxed and achievement is higher. Children have not yet learned to be critical of

themselves and are able to have an open mind about their abilities. Teachers have an opportunity

to greatly influence students' perceptions through the student–teacher relationship.

Educational leaders' perspectives may be influenced by personal experiences and this

often leads to a passion for advocacy. "Educational leaders used their voices not only to fight for

what was right but also to encourage others to join their fight, and team building and relationship

building were important means to overcome obstacles related to change" (Brown, 2018, pp. 70–

71). Advocacy is a theme throughout all levels of education. Brown (2018) used his study to

uncover the passion, purpose and personal experiences behind advocacy in educational

leadership. The data collection through one-to-one interviews provides a picture of individual

relationships in education.

Leadership in education is the foundation of student achievement. Cherry (2015) used a literature review to categorize leadership styles into eight styles of leadership based on the mindset of the leader. Covey (1989) contributed to evidence of leadership style improving productivity. Covey used case study of highly successful people to develop a pattern of behavior that is common for successful people. Stephen Covey (1989) explains that the first habit that highly effective people have in common is to be proactive. A proactive attitude looks for possible outcomes and considers potential problems or success prior to taking any action. It is necessary to think in a positive proactive manner to prevent reactivity and avoid fear in the workplace or classroom. The three principals identified by Deaner (1994) are participation, shared power and truth. These principals can be applied to the student teacher relationship and student engagement. Hallowell (2011) shared concrete steps that managers can use to encourage positive connections in the workplace. "Allow for people's idiosyncrasies and peccadilloes" (Hallowell, 2011, p. 105). Select, connect, play, grapple and grow, and shine are Hallowell's (2011) steps to positive connections. These steps can easily be applied in a classroom setting as well. Robert Greenleaf (n.d.) describes a "servant-leader" as being a "servant-first" leadership style as opposed to other leaders being "leader-first" style. These positive and proactive leadership approaches set up the teachers and students for success in education.

Positive experiences inspire people to continue similar experiences (Mezirow, 1991). It is also reasonable to assume positive educational experiences inspire continued education. It was important to allow individuals in the organization to play a role that allows them to feel valued. Helmer (2013) surveyed and interviewed teachers to determine the impact of leadership style on teachers' perception of school culture and student achievement. The results of his research indicate that leadership relationships in education impact student achievement. Eikenberry

(2017) identified five themes of encouragement that can be applied by teachers to lead students. Positive student–teacher relationships are indicative of positive student achievement. Teachers must advocate for student success (Cuthbertson, 2014). Through positive leadership, teachers are encouraged to advocate for students and improve relationships in schools which in turn improve student achievement.

Teacher and student perceptions are directly related to achievement in the classroom (Robinson, 2011 and Brown, 2018). Robinson (2011) encourages teachers to make connections with students by encouraging their creativity and providing opportunities for leadership. Teachers have the ability to encourage student achievement through providing leadership opportunities and encouraging creativity. "This qualitative multi-case case study involved participants from one public school district in Texas. The target population included district-level administrators who had engaged in advocacy-related efforts. This population of educational leaders was chosen to highlight the importance of leadership at the district level in relation to advocacy" (Brown, 2018, p. 32). Teacher advocacy improves student achievement. Teachers who advocate for students form positive student–teacher relationships.

Emerging research on humor, play and laughter in the classroom continues to strengthen the data confirming a relationship between positive relationships and positive student achievement. Brown (2008, 2009), Boerman-Corn (1999), Gobel (2009), Nesi (2012), Praag et al. (2017), Uitto (2011), and Van Azizinezhad and Hashemi (2011) all provide evidence of improved relationships in education through humor and laughter in the classroom. The positive relationships between students and teachers are vital to the success of using humor in the classroom (Van Praag et al., 2017). "While studies on the relationship between humor and learning are mixed, there is general agreement that when used in ways directly related to material

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and objectives being covered, there is improvement in attention, learning, and retention"
(Goebel, 2009, p. 38). Uitto's (2011) claim is the converse of other literature about using humor
in the classroom. This study indicates that when humor is used negatively it has a negative
impact on student success; the opposite of positive humor having a positive impact on student
success. Negative student–teacher relationships decrease student success. Used constructively,
the student–teacher relationship and student engagement improved with the addition of adding
humor to writing skills (Azizinezhad & Hashemi, 2011). The evidence presented in this article
demonstrates that laughter breaks down barriers in education by creating positive and proactive
student–teacher relationships. "This study quantifies recorded instances of laughter in lectures,
and analyses the contexts surrounding these instances in an attempt to discover what kind of
lecturer behavior provokes laughter, and what purposes this may serve" (Nesi, 2012, p. 81). The
emotional connections created through laughter make lessons memorable and can increase
learning.

Play encourages critical thinking and both academic and social success. Brown (2008,
2009) uses a case study design to gather data on the power of play. The students that
experienced play throughout their childhood are better problem solvers. Therefore, teachers who
engage students through play encourage student success. Humor was the medium Graban (2001)
used to make connections with students. After the connection was made student engagement and
achievement increased. Humor was an effective tool in this class setting to form a student–
teacher relationship and allow students to feel safe in the classroom environment. Boerman-
Corn (1999) teaches the teacher has the power to use laughter positively or negatively. Using
laughter positively builds student–teacher relationships. Using laughter negatively destroys
student–teacher relationships. While using laughter to connect with and engage students in the

content improves the positive student–teacher relationship and encourages academic growth and retention of information.

The connections students and teachers make in the classroom improve the classroom environment. Christakis (2010) and Seligman (2004) support this theory with the data they collected in research. Christakis (2010) encourages his audience to look deeper at the value and power of connections and their influence on individuals. There is a tendency to become more like those we surround ourselves with. Christakis' (2010) research demonstrates individuals are responsible for their emotions. The choices made and relationships chosen develop the emotions that individuals feel. Teachers are isolated from other adults the majority of the day. Social interactions in the work place must be sought out by teachers (Seligman, 2004). Case study of teachers work environment and happiness was used to determine factors that create a positive educational environment. This positive educational environment improves connections in student–teacher relationships and student success.

There are many ways teacher can improve student–teacher connections and academic achievement. Positive relationships in education occur with a proactive approach. In an exploration of PBIS, Funches (2017) states:

> I sought to discover teachers' perceptions of PBIS and whether utilization of PBIS is an effective classroom management strategy tool and its relationship with academic achievement. I examined the teachers' perceived ideas on PBIS relating to student academic achievement. The study participants noted that students with aggressive or challenging behaviors are at risk of academic failure. Several teacher participants shared that student disruptive behaviors hinder the learning process and disturb the classroom environment; therefore, creating a negative environment which affects student academic

achievement. According to 80% of the teacher participants, when the learning

environment was interrupted due to disruptive behaviors, not only was the student who

was being redirected affected, but also the other students in the classroom. (p. 86)

A positive correlation was found between positive relationships and academic success. A

positive correlation was also found between decreased depressive symptoms and positive

relationships (Maurizi, Grogan-Kaylor, & Delva, 2013). Through relationship building, teachers

create connections with students that work as protective factors emotionally, and allow students

to shift their energy and engagement to academic content.

Humor, Play, and Laughter in the Classroom

Play is practical and very important. There are many different types of play, and all serve

a developmental and socio-emotional purpose. The students that experienced play throughout

their childhood are better problem solvers (Brown, 2009). There is spectator play, ritual play,

full body play, imaginative solo play, and story-telling play. Social play is important to making

connections, rough and tumble play is a learning medium to develop emotional regulation. Play

has a biological place, just like sleep and dreams do (Brown, 2008). Brown (2008, 2009) states

that the basis of human trust is established through play signals. These signals can be vocal,

facial, body, and gestural signals. "It serves as a means of maintaining social order, building

rapport, relieving tension, and modelling academic and professional identities" (Nesi, 2012, p.

79). Goebel (2009) encourages teachers to give humor a space in the classroom setting. Goebel

(2009) claims, "in a school climate increasingly concerned with convergent thinking and finding

the right answer, humor challenges students to think divergently, creatively, and to welcome an

array of possibilities" (p. 38). Laughter in the classrooms may break the ice and ease tension

allowing students and teachers alike to feel relaxed, making learning fun and engaging. Humor

characterizes daily classroom interactions and strengthens or weakens student–teacher relationships" (Van Praag, Stevens, & Van Houtte, 2017, p. 393). Students are able to improve in the content area in a safe and comfortable environment when laughter is a part of the lesson.

When students find humor in a lesson they tend to be more engaged and retain the information from the lesson better. Azizinezhad and Hashemi (2011) explain:

> The present paper shows the impact/s of using humor and laughter in creating a relaxed and open atmosphere for language learning, to get and hold students' attention, increase retention of what is learned, foster a constructive attitude towards mistakes, and stimulate both creative and critical thinking during a language classroom. Humor in language classes reduces tension, improves classroom atmosphere, increases enjoyment and has a positive impact on the student–teacher interactions (p. 2092)

This power of laughter continues to provide benefits by encouraging less sociable students to participate and feel like they are part of the peer group, laughter decreases the feeling of vulnerability (Azizinezhad & Hashemi, 2011; Graban, 2001; Van Praag et al., 2017). When students feel comfortable and safe in the classroom setting, student engagement and success increase.

After using humor in the classroom students were more engaged and volunteering to participate in class. "I have found that humor has transformational powers beyond just spicing up the curriculum" (Graban, 2001, p. 83). High student engagement and volunteering was not the class behavior until humor was introduced. "By the end of the semester, I was better able to let go of my carefully crafted lesson plans and respond to them as learners; in turn, I found them to be inquisitive and resilient when they knew that their identities and were safe within the little community they had built" (Graban, 2001, p. 83). This was a single case study based on

relationships built through humor in one class. Combined with other data from further research this data has validity. This was a study of one class that demonstrated humor was effective in forming student–teacher relationships and increased student success. To determine accuracy further research with future classes would need to be added to this study.

"Humor is one of the most powerful tools teacher (or writers) have at their disposal. It can build up students and classes and make them excited about literature and writing, or it can rip them apart" (Boerman-Corne, 1999, p. 66). Used in a manner to develop engagement, humor and laughter contribute to the student–teacher relationship. "Laughter is a powerful and remarkable tool. Approval through laughter can be used to gain acceptance for the student with the nasal voice or the shunned student with a birthmark on her face" (Boerman-Corne, 1999, p. 69). Laughter can be used positively or negatively. "How we wield that humor can transform students into readers who gobble up everything from Aristophanes to Judy Blume, or transform them into bitter nonreaders holding a grudge against the teacher who made them the butt of a mean joke" (Boerman-Corne, 1999, p. 69). When used negatively, humor damages students' self-efficacy. "We can use laughter as a conduit for students to find humor in the literature they read and the material they write, or we can use it to gain laughter for ourselves at the expense of others" (Boerman-Corne, 1999, p. 69). The teacher has the power to use laughter positively or negatively.

Improving Classroom Environments Through Student–Teacher Connections

The collective of people and their relationships make what Christakis (2010) calls a super organism. Patterns of connections between people makes the whole greater than its parts. Christakis (2010) shares an analogy about carbon atoms making diamond and graphite that look and function very differently. This connection is profound. Happiness is a learned behavior and

frame of mind. Once true happiness is found, they will not tolerate anything else in their lives. Christakis (2010) encourages his audience to look deeper at the value and power of connections and their influence on individuals. There is a tendency to become more like those we surround ourselves with. Christakis's (2010) research demonstrates the individual's responsibility for their emotions. The choices individuals make and relationships they choose to form develop the emotions that they feel.

Personality types play a role in connections and advocacy in education. Nass (2012) identifies four fundamental personality types, introvert and extrovert personality types that are familiar to most, and two new personality types, critic and sidekick. Nass (2012) teaches "birds of a feather flock together. When you work with people with personalities similar to your own, you will like and trust them more, think they are more intelligent, and even buy more from them" (p. 80). This allows for a better understanding of workplace roles and dynamics. Success in advocacy can be found when sympathy for the student is developed with the teachers and staff. This is successful in making everyone happy and proactive. Principals can use this same strategy to connect teachers. Teachers can use the same strategy to connect students in the classroom. Robinson (2011) writes about children's belief that they are creative and adult's belief that they are not creative. Teachers can build on this confidence that children bring into the school and form student lead groups. When inclusive groups are formed moral is raised, tension is relaxed, and achievement is higher.

Emotional connections in education protect the educational environment. Hallowell (2011) teaches that emotions are contagious and spread throughout relationships. "Connected organizations thrive, disconnected ones perish" (Hallowell, 2011, p. 107). If managers understand the dynamics of connections in relationships, they can use this powerful tool to help

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create a positive workplace (Hallowell, 2011). Mathematical analyses of social networks demonstrate that happiness spreads through relational connections (Hallowell, 2011). Unfortunately, the transverse is also true. Discontent spreads through the workplace as well. In a school setting, the teacher's workroom in the mornings and afternoons, planning time and meetings are opportunities for social exchange (Seligman, 2004). Seligman (2004) wrote that happy people are extremely social. Teachers are isolated in their work and are often crave social time with other adults. Social exchanges of teachers in the educational environment are limited because teachers are typically in their classrooms and isolated from other adult conversation.

This phenomenon can be witnessed in the schools. An ebb and flow occur when a principal leaves and a new principal establishes new leadership. There is normally a honeymoon phase the first year or two of the new principal in which the school climate is really happy as everyone puts their best attitude and work on display for the new leader. As staff begins to view the principal as familiar, they begin to see flaws. This is where it is critical to nurture the connections and embrace differences among individuals.

Educational leaders influence connections in education. Halowell (2011) shared eleven concrete steps that managers can use to encourage positive connections in the workplace. "Allow for people's idiosyncrasies and peccadilloes" (p. 105). This is how the principal that has enjoyed a positive school environment initially, but begins to notice negativity, can once again infuse positivity in the workplace. Hallowell (2011) says "when you are relaxed about yourself as a manager, you give others permission to be the same" (p. 105). Some of Hallowell's (2011) other ideas like impromptu gatherings and food can be used in combination with this strategy to encourage connectedness and positivity.

Human nature allows for complacency and boredom when people are not using skills of innovation and creativity. School culture positivity often increases when a new principal takes the lead. Change in leadership sparks innovation and creativity. It encourages staff to become creative to impress and win the favor of their new boss. According to Hallowell (2011), an excellent manager will continue to encourage and fan this positive and innovative environment. The resources these authors provide give leaders a guideline and matrix for implementation of these positive and proactive skills.

Student–Teacher Connections and Academic Achievement

Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports or PBIS is a growing practice that encourages students to meet behavior expectations through positive interventions. "The results of the interview and survey can assist elementary teachers with being able to ascertain if PBIS (Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports) strategies work to increase academic achievement, if additional PBIS training or support from PBIS coach can affect their classroom intricacies, and if their perceptions of PBIS affect how they implement the behavioral management framework in the classroom" (Funches, 2017, pp. 85–86). Behavioral management is a critical element within the classroom structure that determines the type of learning environment provided for students. "Some teachers have found that creating a safe and pleasant classroom environment in which students were well-behaved was essential for teaching and learning" (Funches, 2017, p. 22). Individual interview sessions were conducted with each teacher participant during the second week of the research study. Interviews revealed teacher perspectives and attitudes of implementing PBIS. For the purposes of the study, Funches (2017) identified four behavioral strategies to focus on, follow directions, raise a hand for permission to move or speak, respect others, and exhibit self-control. The goal of these PBIS basic strategies were to create a

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disruptive free classroom that would improve student academic achievement. "The findings of this study indicated that effective management of student behaviors may increase the chances of student academic successes and limit reactive disruptive behaviors" (Funches, 2017, p. 87).

Building positive relationships in the classroom can increase the overall wellbeing of students. Positive relationships with educators, peers and family decrease depression and increase academic achievement (Maurizi, Grogan-Kaylor, & Delva, 2013). This study found that depressive symptoms were associated with lower levels of academic achievement, parental involvement, connection to school, and peer relationships. The reason for increase academic achievement is the increase in self-efficacy when students are engaged in positive relationships. This study observed approximately 900 students and a positive correlation was found between positive relationships and academic achievement.

While conducting a thorough review of literature on the topic of connections in student–teacher relationships with students' success both academically and emotionally data was consistently found to support this connection. Several themes became apparent in the literature review that allowed further exploration of this relationship. The themes identified are (a) educational leadership styles; (b) teacher and student perceptions; (c) humor, play, and laughter in the classroom; and (d) student–teacher connections and academic achievement. These key terms were used to conduct an extensive literature search and review.

The studies reviewed in educational research used a variety of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. One growing area of educational practice, with the goal of increasing behavior and achievement through positive student–teacher relationships, is Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). "The results suggest that multiple contributors at the individual, dyadic, and classroom-level are relevant for behavioral engagement over the

important period of transition to school" (Cadima, Doumen, Verschueren, & Buyse, 2015, p. 1). This social constructivist study observed the implementation of PBIS using teacher interviews and classroom observations. "The results at the within level additionally showed that behavioral engagement in kindergarten mediated the association between teacher–child closeness and high concentrations of perceived peer–teacher conflictual relationships, on the one hand, and behavioral engagement in first grade" (Cadima et al., 2015, p. 7). Data was collected over a 3-year time period using multiple schools. This data collection is consistent with the use of social constructivism theory. "Overall, our results suggest that jointly targeting teacher relationships and classroom organizational climate can offer complementary contributions to children's behavioral engagement in learning" (Cadima et al., 2015, p. 10).

PBIS is a growing practice in education for building positive student–teacher relationships and consistently demonstrates positive behavior and academic achievement. This study provides evidence of positive relationships, behavior and achievement. This study provided evidence that both behavior and student achievement improved when PBIS was implemented. "The goal of these PBIS basic strategies were to create a disruptive free classroom that would improve student academic achievement. The findings of this study indicated that effective management of student behaviors may increase the chances of student academic successes and limit reactive disruptive behaviors" (Cadima et al., 2015, p. 1). Positive student–teacher relationships are indicative of student engagement. This study provided evidence that both behavior and student achievement improved when PBIS was implemented.

Evidence of student success as a result of student–teacher relationships is presented that demonstrates a positive relationship. "In urban secondary schools where under preparation and dropping out are real world concerns, students understand that their relationships with teachers

affect their learning" (McHugh, Horner, Colditz, & Wallace, 2013, para 1). Social constructivist theory is used again in this study. Themes in student interviews were identified that support the concept of positive student–teacher relationships positively impact student success. "Using descriptive coding and thematic analysis of focus group data, we explore adolescents' perceptions of the bridges that foster and the barriers that inhibit supportive relationships with teachers, and the boundary expectations that function as both" (McHugh et al., 2013, para 1). Students' perceptions of their relationships with teachers and the impact on their success are evaluated to determine positive teacher characteristics that lead to student success. "The characteristics of supportive student–teacher relationships identified by youth participants suggest a number of teacher practices capable of meeting adolescents' developmental needs and, as such, are likely to positively influence adolescents' developmental and academic trajectories" (McHugh et al., 2013, para 1). Characteristics of supportive student–teacher relationships provide evidence that teacher practices influence student success. Qualitative research, through social constructivism, is used to identify themes in students' interviews through descriptive coding and thematic analysis of focus group data. The data collected in this study is consistent with other research in my literature review supporting positive student–teacher relationships have a positive impact on student success.

  Each of these studies offers an approach to research student achievement in education through the Vygotsky's social lens of positive relationship building. The idea of developing positive relationships through an environment of positive relationships in education was the framework of this research study. The lens for this research was social constructivism, with the goal of exploring teacher perceptions of the impact student–teacher relationships on student success.

Review of Methodological Issues

Literature reviewed in this research were primarily qualitative in nature. The social setting of education lends to understanding of meaning through the perspectives of the lived experiences of the stakeholders. Qualitative research focuses on identifying, learning, and understanding the meaning of the experience help by the study participant rather than the meaning held by the researcher (Creswell, 2013). Gaining an understanding of the lived experience of the phenomenon was the focus of this study; therefore, qualitative research was employed for this study.

Data collection for phenomenological research explores the lived experience of the study participants to depict the perceptions held about the phenomenon (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). As this study examined relationships in in the social setting of education, interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to observe student–teacher relationships and the impact these relationships have on student effort. Creswell (2007) explains qualitative research allows for examining a phenomenon in its natural setting. For the purposes of this study, the classroom is the natural setting and the relationships between economically disadvantaged students and teachers, and the impact that relationship had on student effort is the phenomenon that was studied. "Phenomenology holds the potential to contribute to understanding the possibilities of self and others, and to mobilizing the energy and resources to create environments where everyone can do their best work" (Conklin, 2014, p. 118). Issues that may arise within interpretative phenomenological analysis and other forms of qualitative research often include researcher bias, the use of the researcher as the instrument of data collection, the very nature of qualitative research, and ethical concerns.

Passion for a topic often motivates researchers to choose a specific topic of study. This passion increases dedication and prompts intense study. As a catalyst for research, passion fuels the research to dive into exploration of the phenomenon; however, this same passion could generate researcher bias. Conklin (2014) identifies the subjective nature of qualitative research and the susceptibility to researcher bias where a researcher may influence the results of the study in an effort to portray the desired outcome. Safeguards in qualitative research protect the authenticity of the study. Reflexivity, the process of examining oneself as the researcher and the research relationship, provides an opportunity for the researcher to display personal biases. Utilizing safeguards in the quantitative study process protects the data and prevents researcher bias from compromising the study.

Similar to risk of research bias, there is possibility for error in instrumentation when the researcher is the instrument. Creswell (2013) explores data collection in qualitative research requires the researcher personally collect data directly from study participants through interviews, observations and examining documents. As the instrument of research, the researcher risks skewing data in isolation. The interview transcripts were reviewed, then sent to individual study participants in this study for study participants to clarify their own interpretations of the interviews if there were errors from the researcher as the instrument of data collection.

Through the study participants' perception of the phenomenon, the data for this research study emerged. Flexibility on the part of the investigator is necessary for the study to evolve as data is collected because qualitative research is emergent in nature and the data emerges through investigation. "This means that the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and that all phases of the process may change or shift after the researchers enter the field and begin to

collect data" (Creswell, 2013, p. 47). Data for this study emerged in interviews and was supported by the artifacts study participants brought to demonstrate their perceptions of emotional connections in education.

Tools in qualitative research designed to prevent ethical issues, protect the authenticity and integrity of the data collected include clarifying researcher bias; implementing member checking; providing rich and descriptive narrative of the phenomenon; and triangulation. Triangulation uses, "corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective" (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). In this research, interviews and artifacts in addition to analysis and coding to identify themes and patterns were utilized to allow the data to emerge from the investigation. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversees, reviews, and monitors studies in progress to ensure ethical standards are observed and utilized.

The researcher is responsible for being aware of possible ethical issues and providing safeguards in the study to protect study participants and other stakeholders from harm. Conklin (2014) advises the harm associated with qualitative research is most often mental or emotional in nature. Confidentiality and disclosure of how the research will be used and displayed may minimize potential harm. The research site used for this study used a process of approval through the district administrative offices to protect the site and ensure proper disclosure. Study participants signed the informed consent (see Appendix C) that disclosed the study purposes, uses, and confidentiality. Through establishing a research plan and following IRB and study site processes and procedures for qualitative research, every effort was made to ethically protect all stakeholders involved in this research and data collection. Following appropriate research procedures and guidelines for qualitative research and specifically for interpretive phenomenological analysis protects the research study and prevents methodological issues.

Synthesis of Research Findings

In the exploration of literature on leadership styles and teaching, the recurring theme is the best practices in leadership are also relationship building. The themes observed leading to growth as a leader are inspiring and encouraging others, understanding emotions and relationships, communication and interpersonal relationships, and connections between people. The literature search was guided by the understanding that for students to reach their potential, basic needs must first be met. Basic human needs are described in order of most basic to fulfillment by Maslow (1943) as physiological, safety, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization.

The literature review examined many concepts related to student effort/achievement and teacher advocacy, including educational leadership styles; student perceptions; humor, play, and laughter in the classroom; and student–teacher relationships. Evidence through the data supports the assumption that student–teacher relationships contribute to student achievement is a powerful and positive indicator of student success (Funches, 2017; Maurizi et al., 2013). Teachers have an opportunity to engage students in positive relationships in education. Brown (2008, 2009), Boerman-Corn (1999), Gobel (2009), Nesi (2012), Praag et al. (2017), Uitto (2011), and Van Azizinezhad and Hashemi (2011) all provide evidence of improved relationships in education through humor and laughter in the classroom. Positive relationships develop a sense of safety and community in the classroom. Building proactive and positive relationships in educational leadership positively impacts all relationships in education and in turn improves student educational achievement (Cuthbertson, 2014; Deaner, 1994; Helmer, 2013; Hallowell, 2011). Connections in education are powerful emotional protective factors.

Teacher perceptions of the impact of student–teacher relationships on student effort of economically disadvantaged students was examined in this study. Student effort and success increases with professional and positive student–teacher relationships in education. Teachers have an opportunity to impact student effort and success through emotional connections. Teachers use kindness, laughter, play and humor to engage and connect with students. Brown (2008) states that the basis of human trust is established through play signals. Once trust is established, connections can be made with teachers and students. Student engagement is higher when a positive proactive student–teacher relationship is in place (Lauderdale, 2011; Maurizi, Grgan-Kaylor, & Delva, 2013; McHugh, Horner, Colditz, & Wallace, 2013; Sointu, Savolainen, Lappalainen, & Lambert, 2017; Van Praag, Stevens, & Van Houtte, 2017; Zee & Bree, 2017). Teachers work to improve student engagement to provide increased learning and achievement. Therefore, schools are focusing on leadership styles that promote transformational and servant leadership (Deaner, 1994; Greenleaf, n.d.; Hallowell, 2011; Mezirow, 1991; Nass & Yen, 2012). The literature presented a gap in research regarding teacher perspectives on the impact of student–teacher relationships on academic success. "The stronger the affective (emotional) dimension of an interpretation and the more frequently it is made, the easier it is to remember" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 36). Teacher advocacy for students is a key part of the student–teacher relationship.

Critique of Previous Research

Upon reviewing the body of literature and research relating to a proactive and positive approach to the student–teacher relationships and success in education, the researchers identified consistency in their themes. The themes identified in the literature were (a) educational leadership styles; (b) teacher and student perceptions; (c) humor, play, and laughter in the

classroom; and (d) student–teacher connections and academic achievement. This section will examine the research methods applied by the researchers in this study.

Examining the theme of leadership in education the leadership styles that encouraged the relational aspects in leadership were found to produce better educational success in students. Helmer (2013) provides a thorough literature review and provides evidence that the communication and leadership in education impacts the teacher's perception and student achievement. Hallowell (2011) discusses the power of transference in groups. "When people believe the leader is that powerful, in a sense the leader really becomes that powerful. His people make him so" (Hallowell, 2011, p. 79). This type of transference is also involved in creating a positive working culture. When the leader projects positivity on the staff, the staff becomes positive. The argument by Deaner (1994) that participation, shared power and truth create an environment of collaboration is consistent with the qualities that build collaboration in other literature sources. Cuthbertson (2014) provides a professional opinion regarding the importance of teachers advocating for their students. Building proactive and positive relationships in educational leadership positively impacts all relationships in education and in turn improves student educational achievement (Helmer, 2013, Hallowell, 2011, Deaner, 1994 and Cuthbertson, 2014).

Each of these researchers based their exploration in the previous research on leadership styles. Cherry (2015):

Relationship theories, also known as transformational theories, focus upon the connections formed between leaders and followers. Transformational leaders motivate and inspire people by helping group members see the importance and higher good of the task. These leaders are focused on the performance of group members, but also want

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each person to fulfill his or her potential. Leaders with this style often have high ethical

and moral standards (para. 20).

The ethical and moral standards in education build the relationship between teachers and

students, in turn building trust. This trust allows students to engage in their own education

safely. The step of think win-win and the step of be proactive and the step synergize are used in

positive teacher/student relationships. It can be hypothesized that the positive proactive

approach of a teacher to the student will build a relationship that fosters these seven habits in

students (Covey, 1989). Relationship theories are based on an ethical leader that sees and values

the "importance of the higher good" (Greenleaf, n.d.). Both of these leadership ideas are rooted

in what Greenleaf (n.d.) describes as the "servant-leader" ideation. A case study of positive

educational experiences is used to predict continued education (Mezirow, 1991). Each of these

studies provide evidence that positive experiences in education that lead to student retention and

continued education.

Education can create positive changes both personally and professionally. Nass and Zen

(2012) teaches "birds of a feather flock together. When you work with people with personalities

similar to your own, you will like and trust them more, think they are more intelligent, and even

buy more from them" (p. 80). Professional experience and knowledge of psychological

principles of encouragement allowed Eikenberry (2017) to condense the powers of

encouragement into five themes. "By the way, don't miss that point—while I was the coach and

supposed to be helping other people learn and gain insights, I learned at least as much as they

did. It's one of the most interesting and powerful points about coaching—when you do it well,

you get as much as you give" (Eikenberry, 2017, para. 2).

The leadership theories of Cherry (2015), Covey (1989), Greenleaf (n.d.), Mezirow (1991), Nass and Zen (2012), and Eikenberry (2017) all indicate that being positive and proactive in relationships leads to higher group achievement. All of these theories build on the importance of relationships in groups to achieve success. This data supports the ideation of improving relationships in education to improve student achievement.

The perceptions of teachers and students also have a great impact on the student–teacher relationship and in turn students' educational achievement. Positive experiences tend to increase optimism (Robinson, 2011). Positive encouragement from teachers provides an environment for students to be successful. Brown (2018) used interviews of administrators to evaluate the impact of advocacy in education. The interviews consistently demonstrated advocacy in education builds relationships and overcomes obstacles to success (Brown, 2018). The passion and purpose of educators in general fits in the advocate role (Brown, 2018). Both Robinson (2011) and Brown (2018) provide data of the positive relationships in education leading to positive student and teacher attitudes toward education.

Humor, play, and laughter in the classroom build trust and relationships that lead to positive student achievement. Brown (2008, 2009) presents evidence that children who were deprived of play have decreased ability to problem solve and demonstrate critical thinking skills. The presentation of evidence of increased critical thinking in children who engaged in regular play provides evidence of this claim. Humor allows students to reduce anxiety and engage further in the content (Goebel, 2009). The student–teacher relationship and student engagement improved with the addition of adding humor to writing skills (Van Praag et al., 2017). "Making use of ethnographic classroom observations, we examine how humor relates to student–teacher relationships" (Van Praag et al., 2017, p. 393). "The students recalled that teachers exercised

power unfairly or hurtfully, treating students in an arbitrary way, humiliating and forcing them, physically assaulting them, punishing them unfairly, showing favor, and discouraging them" (Uitto, 2011, p. 274). This power differential is what allows teachers to positively or negatively impact students.

Student engagement increases with positive student teacher relationships. The evidence presented in this article demonstrates that through humor and laughter students make connections with their teachers (Azizinezhad & Hashemi, 2011). "Laughter in conversation seems to serve a number of social purposes, including the management of relationships and the organization of discourse" (Nesi, 2012, p. 80). Through his exploration of the effects of laughter in education, Nesi (2012) found a positive relationship between laughter and student engagement. This is consistent with other research on laughter in education.

Garban (2001) learned that using humor in writing was a great way for him to build relationships with his students. Humor as a transformational leadership skill is an effective medium for connections. This is supported by other research on transformational leadership. In this article, Boerman-Corn (1999) describes humor used for positive and negative in the classroom and in literature. Boerman-Corn (1999) demonstrates both positive and negative uses of humor and provides examples.

The educational environment sets the stage for relational connections in education. Christakis' (2010) data collected is turned into a visual representation of the web network created by social connections. The visual demonstrates the strength created through relationships. Christakis (2010) observes social networks and the power generated by relationships. Teachers that are happy in the workplace are able to make better connections with students. This concept is consistent with other literature about work environments in schools (Seligman, 2004). When

teachers are happy in their work environment, they are able to make better connections with students. Christakis (2010) and Seligman (2004) both provide data evidence that the web of relationships in an environment impact achievement.

There is a growing body of evidence to support student–teacher connections and academic achievement. PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) is a growing practice in education that consistently demonstrates positive behavior and academic achievement. Funches' (2017) study provided evidence that both behavior and student achievement improved when PBIS was implemented. This argument takes into account the positive effects on academics and depressive symptoms as well as the negative effects of the lack of positive relationships (Maurizi, Grogan-Kaylor, & Delva, 2013). Funches' study examined the role of positive relationships in the school, family and peer contexts in the association between depressive symptoms and academic achievement. Funches' case study research examined approximately 900 12–17 year olds within a community. Evidence through data supports the assumption that student–teacher relationships contribute to student achievement is a powerful and positive indicator of student success (Funches, 2017; Maurizi et al., 2013).

Chapter 2 Summary

The literature search was guided by the understanding that for students to reach their potential, basic needs must first be met. Basic human needs are described in order of most basic to fulfillment by Maslow (1943) as physiological, safety, belongingness, esteem, and finally self-actualization. The literature review examined many concepts related to student effort/achievement and teacher advocacy, including educational leadership styles, student perceptions, humor, play and laughter in the classroom, student–teacher relationships. The original plan for this research was to examine the degree of teacher caring in relationship to

student achievement. The current body of literature guided the idea of positive relationships, teacher advocacy and student effort. This morphing of the study topic is common for quantitative research as the study is driven by the constructed themes. The guiding theories are appropriate for this study as the foundation in social constructivism and constructivism apply to the educational environment and the relationships involved in education including student– teacher relationships. As a result, this study focused on interview, artifacts and thematic collection through social construction to identify strategies, mindsets, and values that contribute to advocacy and student achievement.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter portrays a detailed description of the methodology used to examine relationships in education between students and teachers, and the impact positive relationships have on student effort, success and self-efficacy for students who are economically disadvantaged. A review of the methodology best suited for this purpose is presented. Chapter 3 begins with an explanation of the context of this study and then proceed to the particulars of how research was conducted. The research methodology, design, research population, sampling method, data collection, and data analysis methods of this study were determined based on the overall guiding research question. Limitations of this research design, the expected findings, and an outline of the ethical issues of this study are presented as well.

Research Questions

One guiding question was central to this research study: How do teachers perceive the impact of student–teacher relationships on student effort of economically disadvantaged students?

The significance of the student–teacher relationship and importance of this relationship with economically disadvantaged students was explored. Furthermore, the way teachers define relationships and advocacy in education and how this related specifically to students who are economically disadvantaged was addressed. The research examined how teachers advocate for students to overcome obstacles they encounter that impact self-efficacy, relationships and student effort with economically disadvantaged students and how teaching strategies are used to overcome these obstacles. Finally, the research addresses how teacher practice and advocacy improve connections in student–teacher relationships, student effort, success, and self-efficacy with students who are economically disadvantaged.

These questions were answered during the interview process by following replication procedures using the questions found in Appendix A.

Purpose and Design of the Study

This study is a portrait of the impact of student–teacher relationships through mutual emotional connectedness as demonstrated through eighth grade English Language Arts and eighth grade math teacher perspectives in one Texas public school district. Proactive and purposeful educational connections provide the structure and create an environment of emotional safety for students. Teachers perceive student effort increases with positive relationships in education. Increased effort and interest is an indication for student achievement and success (Funches, 2017; Maurizi et al., 2013). Teachers have an opportunity to impact student effort and success through emotional connections and advocacy. Teachers use leadership style, kindness, laughter, play and humor to engage and connect with students.

The purposes of this study are to (a) identify themes and patterns in teacher perception of practice and advocacy that improve connections in student–teacher relationships, (b) demonstrate through teachers' lived experiences that teacher practices and advocacy impact student effort and academic achievement, and (c) contribute to educational research by empowering teachers with examples of how educators make a greater positive impact on their students through relationships. This was accomplished by asking teachers to reflect and share their perspectives of relationships in public education. Teachers were asked to bring an artifact to the interview that represented positive student–teacher relationships to them. During the interviews, teachers were asked about student–teacher relationships, student effort, and their beliefs about best practices in public education.

Evidence through data supports the assumption that student–teacher relationships

contribute to student effort and achievement is a powerful and positive indicator of student

success (Funches, 2017; Maurizi et al., 2013). A focus on student–teacher relationships in

education and student educational effort was applied in this study. With the goal to offer the

educational community insight into teacher mindsets and practices that produce positive student

effort and achievement, research was conducted with eighth grade English Language Arts and

eighth grade math teachers in one Texas public school district. Interviews were used to evaluate

themes in teacher practices and advocacy that effect student effort positively.

Research Design

A qualitative study utilized an interpretive phenomenological approach. Qualitative

research allows for examining a phenomenon in its natural setting (Creswell, 2007). The

perceptions of teachers' experience working with economically disadvantaged children and how

they increase student effort was the phenomenon being studied. "Phenomenology holds the

potential to contribute to understanding the possibilities of self and others, and to mobilizing the

energy and resources to create environments where everyone can do their best work" (Conklin,

2014, p. 118). Robert Yin (2018) explains, "'how' and 'why' questions are more explanatory

and likely to lead to the use of a case study, history, or experiment as the preferred research

method" (p. 10).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) research, established as an accepted

method of research by Jonathan Smith in the 1990's, was used to learn through the stories

teachers tell about "how" teachers approach motivating and encouraging economically

disadvantaged students and "why" student–teacher relationships with this population are

significant. IPA became widely used for research after Smith's (1996) work, but has a long

history in philosophy and psychology. Philosopher Edmund Husserl advocated for phenomenological research through learning from experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). In the present study, interviews were used to explore teacher impact on student effort through educational relationships with economically disadvantaged students. The experiences and perspectives of teachers provides a framework of advocacy and pedagogical practice themes that lead to increased student effort. Narratives that were rich and descriptive were elicited from teachers through an interview process in an effort to allow teachers to describe their passions and practices that are most successful in working with economically disadvantaged students. Creswell (2013) explains that qualitative research designs allow researchers to learn the meaning that study participants hold about the topic being studied rather than the meaning assigned by the researcher. Through interpretative phenomenological design, the meaning teachers hold as truth about student–teacher relationships with economically disadvantaged students can be examined. The researcher focused on acquiring in-depth accounts of the participants' reality of their lived experiences through contextualized information in phenomenological research (Creswell, 2007).

In interpretative phenomenological design, researchers "share a particular interest in thinking about what experience of being human is *like*, in all of its various aspects, but especially in terms of the things which matter to us, and which constitute our lived world" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 11). For this study, the shared experience chosen was teacher perception in eighth grade English Language Arts (ELA) and eighth grade math of the impact student–teacher relationships make on effort and success for students who are economically disadvantaged. ELA and math in eighth grade were significant because in Texas public schools, students are required to pass the state assessment for eighth grade ELA and math in order to be promoted to the ninth grade. This specific subgroup of teachers was chosen because they are held to this higher

standard of academic success for their students. Therefore, eighth grade ELA and math teachers

must work to meet all students where they are when they start the eighth grade school year and

help them demonstrate mastery of the eighth grade ELA and math content by the end of the

academic school year. The increased accountability eighth grade ELA and math teachers face

forces teachers to ensure that all students meet the standard measure of academic success in one

school year.

Replication of the same interview questions and procedures were used for each of the

stakeholders interviewed. Replication is a part of the design often used in interview (Yin, 2009).

Replicating the interview procedures and questions for each interview allows for some

generalizations that would not be possible if only one interview was used for a study. Following

replication protocol allows for potential transferability and possible replication in future studies.

Conklin (2014) explains, "phenomenology holds the potential to contribute to

understanding the possibilities of self and others, and to mobilizing the energy and resources to

create environments where everyone can do their best work" (p. 118). Interviews with teachers

are applied for data collection in this study to allow multiple perspectives of the same

phenomenon being examined. One-to-one interviews explore the research question and sub-

questions found in Appendix B in thorough detail. The focus on student–teacher relationships

explored the impact that relationship has on student effort in students facing economical

disadvantages. Creswell (2014) claims phenomenological design allows the research an

opportunity to uncover meaning and the participants' perceptions of the phenomenon.

Descriptive interviews were obtained from teacher study participants for the purpose of

exploring their lived experiences developing student–teacher relationships in their classroom.

The intent of this study was to use rich descriptions through interviews of eighth grade ELA and

math teachers' experiences and the impact that professional, proactive, and positive teacher relationships have on student effort, student success, and the values that teachers hold around creating student–teacher relationship with economically disadvantaged students.

The rich reports of lived experiences are phenomenological in nature and provide deeper understanding and a glimpse into the real life experiences of teachers. The teachers' perspectives and view point of education is a front line view of educational needs. As a result, phenomenological research design was used for this study rather than case study design that would have observed the relationships without interviewing teachers about their lived experiences. Ethnographic design was not appropriate for this study because cultural influences were not considered in this research. Grounded theory was not applicable because this study did not seek to create a new theory or model (Creswell, 2007). The goal of this research was not to tell a story; therefore, although interviews explored the stories of study participants, narrative study was excluded.

Research Population and Sample Method

Research Population

Middle school eighth grade ELA and math teachers from one school district in Texas served as the research population. Eighth grade ELA and math are significant because in Texas public schools, students are required to pass the state assessment for eighth grade ELA and math in order to be promoted to the ninth grade. This specific subgroup of teachers are held to a higher standard of academic success for their students, increasing teacher motivation to improve student effort. Students enter the eighth grade expected to have prior knowledge base. Teachers must evaluate students' prior knowledge, identify gaps in previous education and motivate students to meet mastery of all ELA and math objectives by the end of the school year state

assessment. This criterion allowed the study to examine the impact of student–teacher connectedness and relationships on effort and success for students who are economically disadvantaged. The increased accountability eighth grade ELA and math teachers face charges teachers with ensuring that all students meet the standard measure of academic success in one school year.

Sampling Method

Purposive sampling methods were used to recruit teachers from the list of eighth grade ELA and math teachers generated for the research population. Creswell (2013) teaches that purposive sampling is a nonrandom technique that produces a sample of participants who have the ability to purposefully inform understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study. Three bowls were used to represent the three middle schools in Boulder ISD. For each of the three middle schools, the four names of the eighth grade ELA and six names of eighth grade math teachers were written on uniformly cut pieces of paper, each paper was folded twice, and placed in a bowl for the school where the study participants taught. Three names were then drawn randomly from each bowl with the goal of two to three representatives from each school participating in the study. The study participants selected meet the required criteria previously stated and represent a cross-section of eighth grade ELA and math teachers from all three middle schools. An additional name from each school was drawn when available to serve as alternates in the event a study participant was unable to participate in the study. Electronic invitations, including background information and ethical procedures for confidentiality, were sent to the potential study participants.

Study participants signed an informed consent that ensured them the right to withdraw from the study at any time. In the event one of the representatives chose not to participate or was

unable to participate, an alternate eighth grade ELA or math representative could be requested

from the same school. The sample size of nine study participants represents approximately a

third of the eighth grade ELA and math teacher population in the district and allowed an

opportunity to uncover rich and descriptive perspectives of the lived experiences of ELA and

math teachers in one school district. Creswell (2007) teaches that 10 or fewer study participants

is adequate for identifying themes in research.

Related Procedures

The proposal was first submitted to the Concordia University–Portland Institutional

Review Board (IRB) for approval. Following approval from the IRB, approval was obtained

from the school district and campuses intended for recruitment of study participants. School

district administrators provided guidelines through the district's research department. A research

study application was submitted to the district administration and middle school principals with

the summary of the study and the approval letter from Concordia University's IRB. After their

approval, the dissertation chair and committee were provided copies of the school district

leader's response to the request and their authorization to proceed with the research study in the

school district.

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Instrumentation

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Qualitative inquiry and research design allowed both the researcher and the study

participants to provide a rich and descriptive perspective of the phenomenon. Creswell (2013)

explains:

> Several aspects will make the study a good qualitative project: rigorous data collection
>
> and analysis; the use of a qualitative approach (e.g., narrative, phenomenology, grounded
>
> theory, ethnography, case study); a single focus; a persuasive account; a reflection on the

researcher's own history, culture, personal experiences, and politics; and ethical

practices. (p. 65)

To explore teacher perceptions of relationships with students and student effort, an

interview protocol and teacher artifacts were used as instrumentation for data collection. Data

collection for phenomenological research is best accomplished with open-ended questions to

ensure the participants perception is explored (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Open-ended

questions were used in the interview protocol to allow the data to emerge from the participants'

perspective of the phenomenon. Prior to this research, a pilot study was conducted with the

interview questions and a population not included in this study to ensure dependability and

consistency of the interview protocol. Interviews were recorded to protect the authenticity of

words chosen by study participants and ensure accuracy in research.

The interview protocol began with gaining general insight into perceptions of eighth

grade ELA and math teachers' experiences with the impact of student–teacher relationships on

student effort. Subsequent questions explored specific aspects of the phenomenon to gain rich

data with structured inquiry. Smith et al. (2009) explains, "Interviews typically move between

sequences which are primarily narrative or descriptive, and those where the participant is more

analytic or evaluative" (p. 59). Interview questions, found in Appendix A, focus on the four

sources of self-efficacy, mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and

emotional and physiological states, outlined by Bandura (1977, 1993, 1994, 1997) in relation to

the teachers' experiences with student–teacher relationships and effort of economically

disadvantaged students. The structure of interview questions was based on Smith et al. (2009),

"For adult, articulate participants, a schedule with between six and 10 open questions, along with

possible prompts, will tend to occupy between 45 and 90 minutes of conversation" (p. 60). Ten

questions were used in each interview with a duration of 45 minutes to 1 hour per individual interview.

Study participants were asked to bring an artifact that represented evidence to them of an emotional connection with a student. An explanation of the meaning held by the artifact was addressed in the interview questions. Prompts and probes were prepared to encourage participants to provide deep and meaningful perspectives of the phenomenon. Considerations were made in the event the need for a second interview developed based on themes that emerged in the original interview needing to be further developed. In the event a second interview was needed, the interview protocol for the second interview would be developed to further explore themes that emerged in the original interview protocol; however, there was not a need for second interviews in this study. The data produced from the initial interviews and artifacts provided by study participants explored the phenomenon thoroughly and provided the data needed for this research study.

Data Collection

Creswell (2013) explains that researchers often approach qualitative data collection by focusing on the types of data and the procedures for gathering the data, but it is actually so much more involved. "It means gaining permissions, conducting a good qualitative sampling strategy, developing means for recording information both digitally and on paper, storing the data, and anticipating ethical issues that may arise" (Creswell, 2013, p. 145). Using the tool of one-to-one interviews with teacher participants, the goal was to uncover personal experiences, motivation and passion that guide the student–teacher relationships. This allowed for better understand the themes in student–teacher relationships that lead to advocacy and student success.

One-to-one, in person, interviews were conducted with study participants: teachers. Interviews were conducted in the study participants' classrooms to create an environment that was comfortable and conducive to reflection about their teaching experiences. Creswell (2013) advises using a recording device in addition to handwritten notes, because handwritten notes are at times incomplete or partial because of the inherent difficulty level of transcribing questions and answers while in the process of conducting an interview. An interview protocol guided the research-related interview questions (see Appendix A). Note taking was used as a secondary form of documentation to capture the researchers' impression of body language and social cues during the interviews. The primary method of documentation used Microsoft Word functions to record, transcribe, and code attributes of the phenomenon in the interview sessions. Participants gave consent to recording their interview when the informed consent for study participation was signed. The recordings were then converted to text, reviewed for accuracy with the recording, then the participant-specific transcriptions were sent to study participants to be reviewed for accuracy prior to use in this study. Creswell (2014) recommends member checking to provide conformation that an accurate account of study participants' lived experience is represented.

To protect the school district, three middle schools, and teachers in this study, pseudonyms were applied. The district was identified as a Texas school district and the three schools were referred to as School 1, School 2, and School 3, identification includes the letter "S" for school, S1, S2 and S3. Yin (2011) encourages the use of pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality of the study participants. Pseudonyms assigned to teachers include the letter "T" for teacher and a study participant number, example T1, T2, T3, etc. Numbers were assigned by order of when teachers were interviewed. Interviews were scheduled at different times to avoid participant interaction. Teachers were informed that they could be excused from study

participation at any time without penalty. Table 1 presents the pseudonym for each study

participant and demographic information including ethnicity, gender, years of experience

teaching eighth grade ELA, years of experience teaching eighth grade math and total years of

experience teaching. Password protection was used for all related data collection tools to prevent

a breach of confidentiality.

Table 1

Study Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Ethnicity African Amer.(AA); Caucasian (C); Hispanic (H); Other (O)	Gender Male (M) Female (F)	Eighth ELA Years' Experience	Eighth Math Years' Experience	Total Years Teaching Experience
Teacher 1 School 1	H	F	9	0	19
Teacher 2 School 1	H	M	0	8	22
Teacher 1 School 2	C	F	2	0	8
Teacher 2 School 2	C	F	0	2	13
Teacher 3 School 2	H	F	0	5	5
Teacher 1 School 3	C	F	0	3	4
Teacher 2 School 3	C	F	5	0	16
Teacher 3 School 3	AA	F	4	0	8

Identification of Attributes

The very nature of qualitative research as subjective rather than objective introduces a

variety of attributes. Attribute data are qualitative data that can be counted for recording and

analysis. Careful research preparation and design are the key to eliminate individual bias and

identify common attributes. It was anticipated in this study that it would be most difficult to

avoid biases the study participants themselves brought to the study. Creswell (2013) advises

researchers to be aware of "a reflection on the researcher's own history, culture, personal experiences, and politics; and ethical practices" (Creswell, 2013, p. 65). These aspects add to the rich descriptive nature of interview when presented in the context of the data. Students each hold their own set of differences that apply to the student–teacher relationship as well. To prevent interference by variables, these aspects are presented in the research report.

Teacher's ability to form and maintain purposeful, professional proactive relationships with students is the main attribute examined in this study. An exploration of teacher perspectives related to relationships with students, passion for advocacy, and student effort and achievement are the structure of my research. Social constructivism frames this study, specifically the ideas and work of Creswell (2014), and Lev Vygotsky (1962). Creswell (2012) defines social constructivism as individuals seeking to understand the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences. Social constructivism seeks to triangulate multiple perspectives to develop collaborative themes from the ideas of individual experiences.

Data Analysis Procedures

Upon the completion of one-to-one interviews and exploration of artifacts, data analysis and interpretation modeled by Moustakas (1994) were applied. The four steps described by Moustakas (1994) to data analysis of phenomenological research: epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation and synthesis of meaning. Figure 1 demonstrates the structure of Moustakas' (1994) principles of phenomenological research data analysis.

Epoché	Phenomenological Reduction	Imaginative Variation	Synthesis of Meaning & Essences
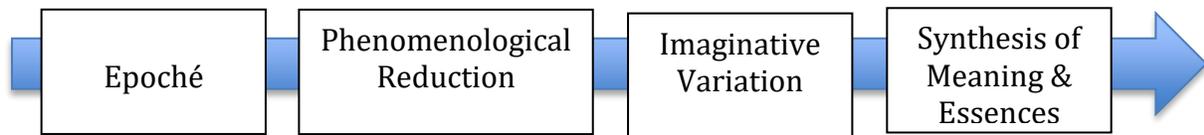
Figure 1. Moustakas (1994) principles of phenomenological research data analysis.

The initial step of Moustakas' (1994) principles of phenomenological research data analysis is epoché. The interviewer must set aside any assumptions or expectations during the interview process to maintain a non-judgmental approach to the interview process. Personal beliefs, presuppositions, attitudes, and experiences related to student–teacher relationships and student effort must not be disclosed or demonstrated before or during the interview process (Moustakas, 1994). Interviews allow the study participants to provide a detailed description and share their opinions and views on the subject being studied (Creswell, 2013). Epoché preserves the integrity of the data by allowing the data and findings to have credibility and reliability.

The second phase Moustakas (1994) outlines is phenomenological reduction. Phenomenological reduction is focusing on the analysis of experience. Moustakas (1994) recommends identifying patterns between the study participants' responses, categorizing these patterns and organizing the data into meaningful units. This provides the triangulation needed for validity and dependability. Triangulation between study participants was expected to demonstrate themes between student–teacher relationships that develop emotional connectedness and build safe relationships. Questions and sub-questions found in Appendix A, were used to divide interviews into smaller sections. Key words allow the data to be organized into meaningful categories that can be compared and contrasted. This allows for connections between interviews to be identified and examined. Patterns include common answers to each of the questions and subquestions.

Imaginative variation is the third phase of Moustakas (1994) phenomenological analysis. Imaginative variation is achieved through elucidating the structures of study participants' lived experiences more distinctively. Common themes identified in phase two are further analyzed to provide insight and make meaning of the experiences identified by research participants (Creswell, 2008; Moustakas, 1994). Themes and subthemes are identified by finding common words or words with common meaning between interview transcripts from study participants. Coding is when the text is analyzed and labels can be assigned to general ideas that reoccur within the data (Creswell, 2013). Using the same questions in each interview allows the data to present itself through codes and themes. Themes or categories are identified when several codes reveal a common idea (Creswell, 2013). By identifying codes and themes in the interviews the data for this study appear. Creswell (2007) claims that using visual representations allows for representation of conceptual findings, trends, patterns, unexpected findings and any preconceived expectation.

The final phase of Moustakas (1994) principles is to synthesis meaning and essences by exposing all of the aspects in the lived experiences of study participants. Good qualitative research reports multiple perspectives of the topic (Creswell, 2014). Interviews with multiple participants for this research are aggregated into data through the unbiased identification of themes. This multiple perspective view of student–teacher relationships allows for an unbiased view of the impact on student effort of positive, professional and proactive student–teacher relationships. Reporting direct quotes and paraphrasing from the teacher interviews will provide the concrete evidence to understand the perspectives of eighth grade ELA and math teachers. The statement of essences was generalized to the lived experiences of all of the teacher participants in regard to the phenomenon of student–teacher relationships impact on

economically disadvantaged student effort. Thus allowing for a deep understanding of the meaning derived by teacher participants' perspectives of the phenomenon.

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Limitations of the Research Design

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Qualitative research studies tend to evolve based on the collected data. "This means that the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and that all phases of the process may change or shift after the researchers enter the field and begin to collect data" (Creswell, 2013, p. 47). The emergent nature of qualitative research requires that the researcher be flexible in allowing the study to evolve as the data drives the research. Qualitative research is focused on learning the meaning held by the participants about the problem or issue, rather than the meaning that researchers bring to the research (Creswell, 2013). Research bias, the researcher themselves as the data collection tool, ethical issues, validity, and the nature of qualitative research are all possible areas for errors due to the researcher misinterpreting the meaning held by participants. The goal of phenomenological design is to reveal perceptions and lived experiences of study participants (Creswell, 2007). The researcher must be intentional about seeking to understand the study participants perception of the phenomenon.

The limitations specific to this study are mostly related to the small sample size. One school district was used to conduct research for this study. The study was further narrowed to eighth grade ELA and math teachers at the three middle schools in the district. Twenty-four teachers in this school district teach eighth grade ELA and math; and for this study three teachers from each school were interviewed to represent the population at each middle school. The researcher's professional relationship with the school district may also serve as a limitation. It was vital that the researcher maintain objectivity to conduct an ethical research design.

Validation

Creswell (2013) explains that validity in qualitative research is a reflection of the accuracy of the research findings. Creswell (2014) encourages implementing member checking in research as a validation process to establish credibility. The study participants were asked to review interview scripts, interpretations, analyses, data, and conclusions for accuracy and credibility of their account (Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2013) encourages researchers to clarify researcher bias and establish the researcher's position on the study topic in the initial stages of research. The researcher can begin to establish validity by disclosing any biases that could possibly influence the research.

Credibility

To maintain an ethical and non-biased study, it was important to remain objective as the researcher. Creswell (2014) explains internal validity indicates the absence of internal errors to the study design, fewer errors increase internal validity. Credibility is established through ethical research practices. "Because qualitative inquirers often spend considerable time at research sites, they may lose track of the need to present multiple perspectives and a complex picture of the central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p. 60). Transcripts of interviews with study participants were used to provide a rich and detailed description of study participants experiences with relationships in education. Creswell (2013) advises using multiple participant perspectives to avoid the phenomenon of "going native" (p. 60). Member checking was used to ensure the perspective of the study participant was clear and not changed or misinterpreted by the researcher. Through the shared experiences of eighth grade ELA and math teachers a multiple perspective view of student–teacher professional, positive, and proactive relationships is provided.

Dependability

Qualitative researchers look for corroborating evidence, or triangulation, of study participants to determine validity and dependability. Creswell (2013) teaches triangulation includes "corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective" (p. 251). Triangulation provides evidence from more than one source supporting an idea or phenomenon. Yin (2013) emphasizes that often qualitative studies combine data source and methods type triangulation to strengthen the validity of the research. To protect the authenticity of triangulation, it was important to observe the participants without projecting research ideation during interviews. Themes identified in the interviews provide triangulation for this interpretative phenomenological analysis research.

The structure of the interview questions and replication procedures provide consistent interviews. To support dependability, the researcher piloted the interview questions with three teachers unrelated to the study population. These pilot sessions established that study questions were clear and provided consistent and related answer from the teachers involved. Teachers participating in the pilot sessions were given background information, ethical considerations and signed informed consent prior to the practice interviews. These interviews occurred in the teachers' classrooms with an approximate one-hour duration. Following each practice interview, the interview transcript was provided to the teacher for member checking. After member checking, each of the pilot session teacher participants were given an opportunity to provide feedback about the experience, and make suggestions about possible changes, additions, or deletions of interview questions. Feedback form teachers after the pilot sessions were complete, served to verify consistency and alignment of questions with the purpose of the study in an effort to produce dependable research.

Expected Findings

The expectation of this study was to (a) identify themes and patterns in eighth grade ELA and math teacher perception of practice and advocacy that improve connections in student–teacher relationships, (b) demonstrate through teachers' lived experiences that teacher practices and advocacy impact student effort and academic achievement, and (c) contribute to educational research by empowering teachers with examples of how educators make a greater positive impact on their students through relationships. The outcome of this study was expected to provide an understanding of eighth grade ELA and math teachers' perceptions of how professional, proactive and positive student–teacher relationships create an environment where students feel safe learning. It was expected that in an environment where students' basic needs of safety are first met, and then higher levels of need like acceptance from the teacher are met, lead to a higher level of learning. Through interviewing teachers, the expectation was to uncover a theme of professional, positive and proactive student–teacher relationships creating a positive impact on students' effort. Findings from this research may contribute to information that is valuable to the education field by presenting examples of the positive impact student–teacher relationships have on increasing effort of economically disadvantaged students.

Ethical issues

Creswell (2014) emphasizes the importance of the researcher being aware of ethical issues in all phases of research and properly accounting for any ethical issue that arises. Obtaining permission from the IRB is only a step in maintaining an ethical study. "The qualitative research in a good study is ethical" (Creswell, 2013, p. 55). The researcher is responsible for ensuring ethical research throughout all phases of a study. The researcher must

remain neutral and allow the process of the study to guide the direction of the data. "The qualitative research in a good study is ethical" (Creswell, 2013, p. 55).

Conflict of Interest Assessment

Qualitative research is focused on learning the meaning held by the participants about the problem or issue, rather than the meaning that researchers bring to the research (Creswell, 2013). This researcher has served as a school counselor and was charged with providing social/emotional guidance, academic guidance, and support for students. Although the researcher had a professional relationship with the school district, the researchers' role was not an evaluative role. There was not a conflict of interest in conducting the research for this study because the researcher did not have an economic or evaluative interest in the outcome of the study. This preserved the role as researcher in this study and not an outside influence on the study participants.

Researcher's Position

It is important for researchers to clarify researcher bias and establish the researcher's position on the research topic in the initial stages of research to aid the understanding of any assumptions that could impact the study problem (Creswell, 2013). The researcher holds the belief that professional, positive and proactive relationships in education pave the way for student effort and success. Furthermore, the researcher believes that students' basic physical and emotional needs must be addressed for students to feel safe and truly engage in learning. This belief is rooted in 13 years as an educator and observing the impact of professional relationships with students and relationships that colleagues have with students. Similarly, the opposite impact on student success when the student–teacher relationship is negative may occur. This

researcher wanted to test this theory through interview with a random group of successful teachers.

Ethical Issues in the Study: Researcher as an Instrument

Creswell (2013) teaches about the subjective nature of qualitative research because it requires the researchers to collect data directly for the source through interview, observation and examining documents. By preparing study questions and consistently applying the same questions in the same way in each interview the study can be protected and the researcher can maintain an ethical qualitative inquiry design. The role as researcher is to allow the study participants to share their experiences and then gather themes and information from their experiences rather than allow personal experiences to interfere.

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Chapter 3 Summary

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The purpose of this phenomenological study was presented. Chapter 3 provides a description of the qualitative methodology and research approach to this study. Rich narrative through phenomenological interview was applied to (a) identify themes and patterns in teacher perception of practice and advocacy that improve connections in student–teacher relationships, (b) demonstrate through teachers' lived experiences that teacher practices and advocacy impact student effort and academic achievement, and (c) contribute to educational research by empowering teachers with examples of how educators make a greater positive impact on their students through relationships. It was expected that the teachers' professional, proactive and positive student–teacher relationships create an environment where students feel safe learning and increase the academic effort of economically disadvantaged students.

Lev Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism provided the framework for this research. Social constructivism seeks to triangulate multiple perspectives to develop collaborative themes

from the ideas of individual experiences. One-to-one interviews were used to collect data.

Transcripts of interviews were used to analyze data. The rich interviews from teachers were

used to make connections between student–teacher relationships and their impact on student

success.

Study participants were recruited from one Texas public school district. The target

sample size of nine teachers were chosen using purposeful sampling techniques. Creswell

(2013) describes purposeful sampling as a nonprobability technique using inclusion criteria to

select study participants. Study participant recruitment and data collection began after approval

from Concordia University's Institutional Review Board, the school district and the campus

administration.

Data collection utilized one-to-one interviews for an interpretive phenomenological lived

experiences of teachers' perceptions surrounding relationships and connections with students and

student success. Themes were generated as all data was analyzed through the process of coding.

Vygotsky (1978) establishes that individuals are influenced by their social environments. The

conclusion of the study may demonstrate, through a detailed narrative, the positive impact

student–teacher emotional connections have in meeting student needs that allow students to

reach their potential.

Chapter 4: Data Analyses and Results

Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to display the data collected through research provided by interviews with eighth grade English Language Arts and eighth grade math teachers. An exploration of eighth grade ELA and eighth grade math teacher perspectives in one Texas public school district will be presented. This exploration creates a portrait of the impact student–teacher relationships have on economically disadvantaged student effort. Proactive and purposeful educational connections provide the structure and create an environment of emotional safety for students. Teachers perceive student effort increases with positive relationships in education. Increased effort and interest is an indication for student achievement and success (Funches, 2017; Maurizi et al., 2013). Teachers have an opportunity to impact student effort and success through emotional connections and advocacy. Teachers use leadership style, kindness, laughter, play and humor to engage and connect with students. Factors including connections, leadership and laughter, that play a role in developing positive student–teacher relationships will be examined. Following the presentation of interview data, the data analysis process and procedures will be described, results of data analyses will be presented and findings of this research study will be examined in this chapter. Finally, comparisons will be drawn between teacher interviews, patterns between teachers' answers to the interview protocol, and themes identified through this research.

The purpose of this study was to (a) identify themes and patterns in teacher perception of practice and advocacy that improve connections in student–teacher relationships, (b) demonstrate through teachers' lived experiences that teacher practices and advocacy impact student effort and academic achievement, and (c) contribute to educational research by empowering teachers with

examples of how educators make a greater positive impact on their students through relationships. The study examined teacher perceptions of relationships in public education. Teachers were asked to bring an artifact to the interview that represents positive student–teacher relationships to them. During the interviews, teachers were asked about student–teacher relationships, student effort and their beliefs about best practices in public education.

Evidence through data supports the assumption that student–teacher relationships contribute to student effort and achievement; furthermore, data supports that academic achievement is a powerful and positive indicator of student success (Funches, 2017; Maurizi et al., 2013). Educational relationships and effort were studied and themes in teacher practices and advocacy that effect student effort positively were examined with the goal to offer the educational community insight into teacher mindsets and practices that produce positive student effort.

Description of the Sample

The study was conducted in one Texas public school district with eighth grade English Language Arts teachers and eighth grade math teachers. The school district was in a suburban area with a population of approximately 1,200 eighth grade students. The school district is unique in serving families from extremes of the socioeconomic population, the extremely wealthy as well as economically disadvantaged families, and families economically ranging between them. The diversity in family economic situations in the district provides teachers with an opportunity to observe and attend to the varying needs of students served in this population.

Teacher study participants were chosen through a combination of purposive sampling. Purposeful sampling of eighth grade ELA and math teachers was used because all eighth grade ELA and math teachers had experienced the phenomenon being studied and met the criteria

(Creswell, 2013). All eighth grade ELA and math teachers are responsible for preparing their students for a high stakes standardized state assessment that students must pass in order to be promoted to the ninth grade. Random sampling was used when more than three teachers volunteered from a campus to more equally represent teacher participants from each of the three middle school campuses. All 25 eighth grade ELA and eighth grade math teachers in the district were e-mailed a letter of recruitment and consent for study participation (see Appendices B and C). The goal was to interview nine study participants, three teachers from each of the three middle school campuses in the district. Nine teachers expressed interest in participation: two from School 1, three from School 2, and four from School 3. All volunteers from School 1 and 2 were interviewed to meet the goal of three interviews per school. The teacher volunteer names from the third school were placed in a bowl and three names were drawn for random selection.

A sample of eight participants resulted using these methods. Study participant demographic information was collected through questions at the beginning of the interview protocol and represented in graph form (see Appendices A and D). The sample of eight teachers consisted of seven females (two Hispanic, one African American, and three White/Caucasian), and one male (White/Caucasian). Each of the eight teachers represented an interview in the study. Total years of teaching experience ranged from four years to 22 years' experience. Experience teaching eighth grade ELA or eighth grade math ranged from two to nine years.

Interview protocol was used to gather raw data from teacher study participants (see Appendix A). Teachers were interviewed in their classrooms. Identities of the middle schools, study participants and school district was kept confidential through the omission of district name, school names, and teacher names. Each school was identified by a number (School 1, School 2, and School 3), teachers were identified by the number order they were interviewed in at each

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school in the district (Teacher 1 School 1 or T1 S1, Teacher 3 School 2 or T3 S2, Teacher 2 School 3 or T2 S3, etc.).

Research Methodology and Analysis

Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to examine student–teacher relationships and the impact these relationships have to student success. Qualitative research was employed in this study as it focused on gaining an understanding of the lived experience of the phenomenon. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) explained that data collection for phenomenological research explores the lived experience of the study participants to depict the perceptions held about the phenomenon. This qualitative study utilized an interpretive phenomenological approach. Qualitative research allows for examining a phenomenon in its natural setting (Creswell, 2007). The perceptions of teachers' experience working with economically disadvantaged students and how they increase student effort is the phenomenon being studied. "Phenomenology holds the potential to contribute to understanding the possibilities of self and others, and to mobilizing the energy and resources to create environments where everyone can do their best work" (Conklin, 2014, p. 118).

The current body of literature guided the ideas of positive relationships, teacher advocacy, and student effort for this research to further examine the impact teacher caring in relationship has on student effort. The constructed themes in this study drove the development of the study topic. The educational environment and the relationships involved in education including student–teacher relationships are appropriately explored through the guiding theories of social constructivism and constructivism in this study. As a result, this study focused on artifacts, interviews, and thematic collection through social construction to identify strategies, mindsets, and values that contribute to positive student–teacher relationships and student effort.

Artifacts

Teachers were asked to bring an artifact to the interview that represents connections in education and positive student teacher relationships to them on an emotional level. Each teacher had an artifact that induced deep emotional connections and represented a part of their passion and advocacy for students (Table 2, Appendix E). Examples of artifacts included student projects, pictures and letters. Teachers were asked to share the significance the artifact holds for them and describe the artifact before the interview protocol was administered. Prior to administering the interview protocol, teachers were asked to please tell the researcher about the artifact that the teacher brought with her or him and how that represents connections in educations to her or him.

Interviews

A pilot study was conducted at the research site to discover and recognize any weaknesses or errors in the interview protocol, process or design. Prior to recruiting for the study sample population, the interview protocol was piloted using three teachers that do not teach eighth grade ELA or math. Teachers for the pilot study interviews were selected based on the fact that they would not be eligible to participate in the study because they did not teach eighth grade ELA or math and therefore would not limit recruiting for this research.

The interview protocol was applied to each of the three interviews and the interviews were recorded using the Rev Recorder App, transcribed and provided to the interviewees for verification, following the process and procedures to be used in the interviews for research used in this study. The Rev Recorder App stopped halfway through one of the pilot study interviews, which prompted using a back-up recorder in the actual interviews as well as keeping the app open and preventing sleep mode during the interviews. Some feedback that was given after the

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pilot interviews for adjusting the interview protocol included adding the sub-questions "How do counselors help teachers?" and "Is there anything you would like to add?", and the question "Do you have any recommendations for your campus or the school district to improve effort for students who face socioeconomic challenges?" at the end of the interview. Using pilot interviews prior to conducting the actual interviews for research allowed for practice with consistency in applying the interview protocol, feedback for improving the interview protocol and reducing risk of error in recording the interviews.

After recruiting was complete and consent forms for the study were received, the eight teacher interviews were scheduled at times requested by the teacher study participants and conducted in their classrooms. The consent forms included permission to record and transcribe interviews, then allow study participants to review transcriptions prior to using them in the study. All interviews were scheduled before school, after school, or during teacher conference periods over a two-week time period. During the interviews, the researcher took handwritten notes of emerging themes and new ideas that were identified for better understanding the phenomenon. Through the interview protocol, each study participant was able to draw upon their personal experience and practices to add to body of data collected. This design was intended to provide insight from each of the teacher participants' perceptions of the impact of student–teacher relationships on the effort of economically disadvantaged students.

The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore teachers' thoughts and practices in the connection between student–teacher relationships and improved student effort in students with economic disadvantages. Each teacher study participant had a unique view of the phenomenon, the connection between effort in economically disadvantaged students and the student–teacher relationship.

The structured interviews were conducted with minimal disruptions. Interviews with all three teachers at School 2 and School 3 were interrupted by a student or teacher entering the classroom. The Rev Recorder App was paused during the interruption and resumed recording when the student or teacher left the room. The teachers resumed answering interview questions without losing their train of thought in each instance of interruption.

A time block of 45 minutes was scheduled for each interview; however, the average interview lasted 21 minutes. Interviews were transcribed; edited to remove any names that would identify the teacher, campus or school district; and then e-mailed to the teacher study participant within two days of each individual interview. None of the teachers interviewed requested further edits of the transcription sent to them. Teacher study participants were given this opportunity for review and editing to ensure accuracy of the study data prior to coding and analysis.

Analysis

Social constructivism and the ideas and work of Lev Vygotsky (1978) provides the framework for this study. Triangulation is used to develop collaborative themes from individual experiences in social constructivism. Themes emerge in the data produced through the interview process. Meaning of collective experiences are formed in social constructivism by identifying themes or patterns. Researchers are inspired to identify complexity of understandings in this form or research design (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). Techniques used in social constructivism support the identification of complexity in themes to produce data.

After all of the interviews were conducted and verified by the study participants the data was analyzed. A comparison of all study participant answers for each question in the interview protocol was used to identify subthemes. To analyze individual questions and compare all study

participant answers by question, separate documents were created. A document was created for each interview question combining all eight study participants' answers. This process was followed for the storytelling about artifacts, answers to each of the 10 questions and study participant recommendations for a total of twelve documents. The repeated words identified through coding were then used to further analyze and identify themes present in the data. Themes were developed by grouping words that had similar meanings or related to similar concepts. Four themes emerged: relationships, support, teacher practices, and basic student needs.

Finally, subthemes and themes were used to compare and contrast sections of interview transcripts among the study participant interviews. As text involving coded words were compared and contrasted, similar ideas of study participants emerged as well as some contrasting perspectives. Social constructivism theory was used in generalizing constructs and theories to make sense of the complex and rich data collected. Patterns from individual teachers' perspectives materialized in themes for relationships, support, teacher practices and basic student needs were then grouped for discussion.

Summary of the Findings

In this section, the findings from the thematic analysis are presented. This study sought to explore teacher perspectives of the impact student–teacher relationships have on student effort. Once all data was collected, four significant themes emerged from the repeated code words. A representation of the themes, the code words used to develop the theme, number of mentions and number of study participants that mentioned the theme was created (Table 14, Appendix E). The themes that emerged were relationships, support, teacher practices, and basic student needs. Subthemes combined for relationships were the words relationship, relationships

and connect. The support theme emerged from multiple areas of supports that teachers mentioned including home, administration, counselors, and student resources. Teacher practices theme combined the code words expectations and routine. Basic student needs theme emerged through the code words need, eat, and parent. Relationships were mentioned 24 times, support was mentioned 36 times, teacher practices were mentioned 15 times, and basic student needs were mentioned 64 times. Each theme was addressed by all eight study participants, though the direct code words were not mentioned by each study participant.

Theme 1: Relationships. The theme for relationships emerged from the subthemes of relationship, relationships and connect. These subthemes appeared in the artifact section as well as interview questions #1, #2 and #4. Although all study participants addressed relationships, seven of the study participants directly referenced the code words. The study participants that directly referenced the subthemes were T2 S1, T1 S2, T2 S2, T3 S2, T1 S3, T2 S3, and T3 S3. The teachers referenced relationships including the student teacher relationships in the classroom as well as external relationships including student homes, community resources, district and campus administration, counselors and teacher peer relationships.

Teacher study participant T1 S3 expresses a connection between student effort and relationships by stating, "the more that you build that relationship, I feel like the more that they will work for you." While another teacher, T3 S2, continues to build on the impact relationships between students and teachers encourages students to engage by stating, "I feel like if you have a better relationship with students, then they're willing to learn more from you." T3 S3 discusses the impact of student–teacher relationships on student effort by saying, "I think the relationship that I have with them, I have a lot of kids is they don't want to let me down."

Theme 2: Support. The theme for support emerged from the subthemes of home, administration, counselors and resources. Subthemes for support were addressed directly in questions #1 and significantly in question #10. Teacher study participants that used the code words that developed this theme were T1 S1, T2 S1, T1 S2, T2 S2, T3 S2, T1 S3, T2 S3, and T3 S3. All teacher study participants used the frequently mentioned words that developed the subthemes for the theme of support. The teachers referenced support from multiple sources including peer observation, PLC, other teachers on campus and the district and the external relationships including student homes, community resources, district and campus administration, counselors and teacher peer relationships. Teachers expressed that outside supports are a vital part of allowing teachers to be effective in the classroom to increase student academic effort.

Support is another theme that emerged for question #1. Student support by teachers takes on a variety of roles from academic support to cheerleader. T2 S2 claims economically disadvantaged students need additional support they might not get somewhere else. Students tend to work harder when they know someone cares and is paying attention to them as an individual. When students are not able to blend into the crowd and avoid work, they are able to achieve far more success. Often parents provide this support at home, encouraging students to achieve, but in many cases this responsibility falls to the teacher to provide the extra support needed for success. Teacher study participant T1 S3 states, "They need support, they need you to care, they need to know that you respect them, and then they will tend to reciprocate that respect." Teachers interviewed express the additional need for external supports, such as administrator and counselor support, meeting student's basic needs and additional academic tutoring, to encourage effort in economically disadvantaged students.

Theme 3: Teacher practices. The theme for teacher practices emerged from the subthemes of expectations and routine. Teachers utilize the tools of setting classroom expectations and routines to develop a classroom culture for student achievement. The subthemes of expectation and routine that formed the teacher practices theme appeared in questions #2 and #6 for multiple teacher study participants. The teacher study participants who directly referenced these subthemes were T1 S1, T1 S2, T2 S1, T3 S2, T1 S3, T2 S3, and T3 S3. The male teacher study participant, T2 S1, did not directly use the code words of expectations or routines to address teacher practices. He discussed practices that lead to student effort and achievement by stating students know what to do in his classroom and he is consistent in day to day practice and procedures. Study participants all emphasized the important role teacher practices play in increasing effort for all students, including economically disadvantaged students.

Teacher expectations are another common idea addressed by teachers when discussing ways to increase student effort. When teacher expectations are high for all students, the students want to meet these expectations. Several teachers address the increased need for an expectation of perseverance with economically disadvantaged students. Students need many chances and encouragement to complete work. T1 S1, T3 S3, and T2 S2 explained that they do not allow failure to be an option by continuing to encourage and not letting students slip through the cracks. When students are not successful, these teachers work with them through one-to-one instruction and encouragement to bring them back up to meeting classroom expectations.

Classroom routines create a safe environment where students know what to expect and can focus on learning. T1 S1 explains that her daily routines (start class each day with bell

ringer work, log into google classroom for notes and assignments, turn in work to the class folder, etc.) and classroom procedures drive her classroom management:

> As soon as they see how the routine works and I don't have to keep reminding them of what we're doing and how we're doing and I start to loosen up, then they understand. It's a purpose. It's a process. It's a procedure. And once we do that, then the learning takes care of itself.

Teachers explained that they develop common practice, process procedures and routines that all influence their classroom management style.

Theme 4: Basic student needs. The theme for basic student needs emerged from the subthemes of need, safety, eat/food and parent. Although these direct subthemes were not addressed in discussion of artifacts, teacher study participants discussed that economically disadvantaged students' basic needs must be met for them to be successful academically when they were presenting about their artifacts. The questions that teacher study participants directly used the code words for the subtheme (need, eat and parent) that formed the theme of basic student needs were questions #2, #3, #6, #7, #9 and #10. All of the eight study participants, T1 S1, T2 S1, T1 S2, T2 S2, T3 S2, T1 S3, T2 S3, and T3 S3 used the frequently used code words (need, eat and parent) that formed the subthemes at some point during the interview protocol. Teachers identified that student who are economically disadvantaged are most often the students that are not able to have their basic needs met and this obstacle must be overcome for students to be able to be successful academically.

All teachers interviewed referenced free and reduced lunch and the need for students to be fed at school in order for them to be able to focus on learning. Economically disadvantaged students often eat breakfast and lunch at school, then have limited food at home. If students are

late to school and miss breakfast, they may have had nothing to eat since lunch the previous day (National School Lunch Program, 2019). Teachers are aware that students cannot learn when they are hungry and each discussed instances when they had to meet the basic need of food before learning could occur with a student in their classroom.

Another need that teachers recognize may not be met for economically disadvantaged students is parental nurturing. All teachers interviewed addressed varying reasons parental nurturing may go unmet including single parent homes, grandparent guardians, many children in the home, a need for parents to work long hours to make financial ends meet, domestic violence and more. Some teachers compared the student–teacher relationship to other nurturing relationships. Study participant T2 S1 compares nurturing as a teacher to the nurturing of parents, "students called us mom and dad by accident because of the bonds we built and the relationships that we were having with the children every day." Teacher study participant T2 S2 explains, "I feel like building those relationships, especially with our economically disadvantaged, whose parents might be working multiple jobs, might not be home very often, they need that." Both of these teachers reference their nurturing of students in a similar way of meeting parenting needs. The following section will explore teacher responses related to interview questions and examine further the emerging of themes and subthemes in this study.

Presentation of the Data and Results

The framework for this study was social constructivism theory in which individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work (Creswell, 2012). Following this theory, the presentation of the data and results are guided by the study participants' perspectives as teachers. Interview transcripts were analyzed and coded to produce data for this research. Subthemes were developed from frequently used words teachers used in discussion of the artifact they

brought and each interview question. The patterns identified in this processes demonstrated

commonalities between the study participants' perspectives.

Artifacts Subthemes

Each of the eight study participant brought an artifact representing positive student–

teacher relationships to the interview. The artifacts represented included the book *Promises and*

Prayer for Dedicated Teachers, a tree stump representation for multi-genre project about a

novel, a picture of a former student, a student drawing of the word love, multiple letters from

former students, multiple electronic messages from former students, and student presentations

for most inspirational teacher. All teachers had an artifact that represented student success and

inspired their passion for teaching. The general theme was the care teachers had for their

students. Teachers all had genuine desire for all of their students to enjoy learning, achieve, and

challenge themselves. The two subthemes represented in the narratives about artifacts were

connect and relationship. Connect was mentions three times by two study participants and

relationship was mentioned four times by three study participants.

Teacher 1 School 1 (T1 S1) presented a tree stump that was part of a multi-genre project

on the book *To Kill A Mockingbird*. The book happened to be the teacher's favorite book. When

the student chose this book for the project, the teacher shared that it was her favorite book. T1

S1 referenced the word "connect" twice while talking about her artifact, "When he found out it

was my favorite book, he was like, 'Oh, God, Miss you've got to see this. You've got to

understand how I got this connection.' I had not seen that sparkle in him or that work ethic." and

"He finished everything lickety-split to the best of his ability that I knew he could because we

made that connection. It was so cool." The connection between the student and teacher was the

shared love and enthusiasm for a book. Teacher 2 School 3 (T2 S3) also referenced connect

when discussing the two pictures of a former student she brought for her artifact. T2 S3 stated, "I keep both of those (pictures) up in my classroom at all times as just a reminder that those connections, and those relationships matter."

Teacher 2 School 3 continued discussing the pictures of her former student, "Even though they leave your classroom, they don't forget what you've done and said, and it's just a constant reminder for me to make sure that you're setting a positive example for kids." T2 S2 mentioned both connect and relationship while discussing her former student.

The code word "relationship" appeared three more times in the discussion of teacher artifacts. Another teacher, Teacher 2 School 3 (T2 S3), discussed a picture of a former student in his cap and gown at graduation. T2 S3 stated, "I was able to just stay in constant contact with him through the four years of high school, and tutor (him) for SAT's, stuff like that. We just developed a really good relationship." Another example of relationships was presented by Teacher 2 School 2 (T2 S2). She discussed the multiple electronic messages she received from a student that repeated a grade level in her class. T2 S2 claimed, "I don't feel if I wouldn't have taken the time to build that relationship with her, that she would (have passed) because the year before she was constantly getting in trouble and didn't care about grades." Teacher 1 School 2 (T1 S2) shared many student letters she received. She stated that the first time she received a letter she thought, "This, to me, tells me I'm doing something right relationship-wise. These kids appreciate what I'm doing in my classroom as much as I appreciate their being in my classroom, and learning, and being the great kids that they are."

All eight of the teacher study participants referenced the theme relationships in education. Both the key word subthemes of connect and relationship that emerged through discussions of artifacts represent positive student–teacher influences. The teachers discussed that these

relationships and connections drive their passion and purpose as educators. The teachers were all enthusiastic and demonstrated pride when presenting their artifacts.

Interviews

Consistent with the emerging theme present in artifact data, the subthemes of relationship, relationships and connect continued to emerge in the data obtained from teacher interviews. Each of the 10 questions and the final recommendations were analyzed for frequently used words to uncover subthemes in the data. Subthemes appeared in each question that contribute to the overall data for this research. The following section presents the data subthemes by question number.

Question #1: Relationships impact effort. The first question addressed teacher beliefs about the impact of student–teacher relationships on effort of economically disadvantaged students. Do you believe that student teacher relationships impact student effort of economically disadvantaged students? If so explain. Three subthemes emerged for this question, relationship, behavior and support. Relationship was mentioned nine times by six of the eight study participants, behavior was mentioned twice by two study participants and support was mentioned three times by three study participants.

Teachers unanimously indicate the student–teacher relationship impacts student effort of economically disadvantaged students. Study participant T2 S3 expresses her perspective of the importance of positive student–teacher relationships:

> I've felt like the relationships I've built with my students was the only saving grace I had. That was the difference between myself, and some other teachers on campus that maybe were not as successful. It wasn't the curriculum, it wasn't the tutoring, or anything like that, but it was the relationships that we were building and developing.

The idea that relationships in education form the foundation of academic success is repeated throughout the interviews in this study. Teachers T1 S2 and T2 S2 believe that when a student is successful in their class, but not in another teacher's class, the positive student–teacher relationship is the significant factor.

Behavior is an additional factor that all teachers interviewed believe impacts student learning and is influenced by the student–teacher relationship. Teacher study participant T1 S2 discusses negative student behaviors decrease when students have engagement and interaction through positive student–teacher relationships. Teacher T2 S2 addresses behavior as well, "Our students who are economically disadvantaged also unfortunately typically tend to be more of our behavior problems. I'm a firm believer that if you show them you care, they'll give that right back to you." Discussion about behavior are directly related to student–teacher relationships.

Support is another theme that emerged for question #1. Student support by teachers takes on a variety of roles from academic support to cheerleader. T2 S2 claims economically disadvantaged students need additional support they might not get somewhere else. Students tend to work harder when they know someone cares and is paying attention to them as an individual.

Question #2: Teacher leadership. The second question in the interview protocol addresses leadership and classroom management styles' impact on effort of economically disadvantaged students. How does the relationship between teacher leadership or classroom management styles and the relationship between that and student effort impact economical disadvantages students? Four subthemes were identified for this question, relationship, classroom management, expectation and routine. Relationship was mentioned four times by two study participants. Classroom management was mentioned seven times by three study

participants. Expectations was mentioned by three study participants once each. Routine was mentioned once each by two study participants.

Relationships is the first subtheme for question 2. T2 S3 and T2 S1 express that mutual respect and positive relationships are needed to maintain proper classroom management. T2 S3 states, "If you haven't taken the time to build a relationship with your students, and build that mutual respect, then you're not going to have classroom management." Treating students with respect is a factor teachers identified in building positive student–teacher relationships.

Classroom management is another area identified by multiple teachers as a tool that aides in increased student effort. Several teachers share similar experiences in the effect of successful classroom management. T1 S3, T2 S1 and T2 S3 discussed how early in theirs teaching careers classroom management was lacking. As teacher skills in classroom management improved they noticed students' effort improved not only in his class, but in the students' other classes as well. Students began showing up to class prepared and completing their homework.

Structure is another tool teachers identified that helps improve student effort. T2 S2 says, "I'm typically very structured, everything has a place, everything has a purpose and most kids respond really well to that because if they know what to expect there's no room for out of the ordinary." T3 S2 explains that all students don't need exactly the same thing. She points out the importance of knowing individual students and meeting their needs. For some students that is giving them an extra push and for others it is recognizing when they need the teacher to back off and give them space. Teachers explain that negative behavior tends to escalate when students are pushed to the point of feeling overwhelmed. The importance structure plays not only in the classroom is emphasized by T1 S3 in preparing students for adult life. She states, "I think those

are important skills for them, just in real life, in general, past school. I feel like the more structure, you can provide to that classroom management, the better off students will be."

Teacher expectations are another common idea addressed by teachers when discussing ways to increase student effort. When teacher expectations are high for all students, the students want to meet these expectations. Several teachers address the increased need for an expectation of perseverance with economically disadvantaged students. Students need many chances and encouragement to complete work. T1 S1, T3 S3 and T2 S2 explain that they do not allow failure to be an option by continuing to encourage and not letting students slip through the cracks. When students are not successful, these teachers work with them individually with positive reinforcement and tutoring to encourage student effort.

Classroom routines are a tool used by teachers to aide in learning. T1 S3 says, "I think it's important to have routines in place and then hold the students accountable, so that they feel like they're fulfilling that role." Teachers explained that they develop common practice, process procedures and routines that all influence their classroom management style. Together these things represent the teachers' individual leadership style.

Question 3: Relationships differences. The third question explored teacher perspectives about any differences in the way they teach economically disadvantaged students. Are student–teacher relationships different than with other students for economically disadvantaged students to create the best environment for increased effort? Frequently used words for this question were different, yes, and eat. Different was mentioned seven times by seven of the eight study participants. All eight study participants agree that differentiation is needed with economically disadvantaged students. The word *eat* or *eating* was discussed by two of the study participants and repeated seven times.

All eight teachers interviewed described differences in the relationships with socioeconomically disadvantaged students to some degree. Teachers agreed that trust needed to be built in order for students to feel safe. Teachers specified that all students need to feel safe in the classroom, but socioeconomically disadvantaged students often have a greater need for this safety in the classroom and with teachers than the needs of other students.

Teachers' responses about treating students differently varied between the seven teachers that addressed differences in the way they work with economically disadvantaged students. T2 S1 said, "I don't see different students or treat students differently." Then T2 S1 continued to add that that making allowances and having flexibility is needed at times. T2 S2 also made an effort to treat all students equally, but acknowledges the need for extra effort with economically disadvantaged students.

> Ideally, they would all be the same, right. We could interact with them however we needed to, but in GEMS (Response to intervention group) class specifically, I interact with that group of students different than I do in any of my other groups. That group of four kids, they know about me. They know about my personal life, they know about my husband, they know about all the troubles that he or I had growing up and the things that got us to where we are now, like successful and with our kids and all of that. And all four of them are all economically disadvantaged. So yes, I guess only if it is going to impact them academically.

Teacher study participant T3 S3 is hesitant to admit to treating economically disadvantaged students differently and clarifies by saying, "So, are the relationships different with socioeconomically disadvantaged students than with other students? To some extent. In my

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other school, I had kids that I didn't even teach, but because I took on the mom role they would come in and I could get them to do their work."

Unmet needs that often contribute to a need for students to be treated differently is addressed by T1 S2, stating:

> I always dig before I scold. "Tell me why you're acting like this before I'm about to have, you know, some words with you," and sometimes, it's just, "I'm moody because I'm 14," and sometimes, it's, "Well, we didn't have any food, so I didn't eat dinner, and I haven't eaten breakfast," and then it's like, "Well, no wonder. You're starving," you know? So yeah, sometimes you do treat them a little differently.

An examination of differences in material possessions is provided from T1 S1 by telling about a student who she purchased Christmas gifts for one year. She explained, "When you have someone tell you they didn't get anything (for Christmas), you're not going to go buy gifts for all the other kids. But, doing things like that for those kids is different. So, those are some of the things that you do for them showing them you care." T1 S3 also addresses the need for compensating for unmet needs in the students' home life. She states, "I feel like a higher percentage of the economically disadvantaged have different lives at home. And then they need to know and you need to have actions that show that you care about them."

Often when students are economically disadvantaged they do not have the resources for food that other students take for granted. T1 S2 explains, "A lot of times, I do. I think I coddle them a little bit. I give them a little more grace. I might be a little bit more forgiving when maybe they didn't eat the night before, haven't eaten breakfast." T1 S3 expresses noticing students are hungry and making sure they eat before addressing academics. When students' basic needs are unmet they are not able to perform as well academically.

Question 4: Professional relationships. The fourth question asks teachers how they maintain a professional relationship with students. How you define professional student–teacher relationships in connections and education? Four frequently used words are addressed in this section, like, respect, relationship and effort. Teachers discussed the value of students liking them or not, of the two teachers that mention like, the word was repeated 15 times. Two teachers also addressed the importance of respect seven times in discussion of a professional student teacher relationship. Relationship was mentioned four times by three teachers. Effort was mentioned once each by two teachers.

Teachers addressed the relationship between students liking a teacher or believing the teacher likes them and the effort they are willing to give in class. Teachers tended to fall into two categories; either they worked to earn the students liking them or they didn't care if the student like them or not they just expected and gave mutual respect. T1 S1, T1 S2 and T2 S3 discussed the boundaries they set with students establishing that they are not buddies or friends, but they truly care about students and want them to learn. T3 S2 and express that when students like them and they have fun in the classroom, effort and learning increases. These teachers express that when students feel liked or like a teacher they increase academic effort.

Respect is the next term that repeated as teachers discussed professional student–teacher relationships. T1 S1 discussed her respect or lack of respect for students when she stated, "I respect you or I don't have respect for you. Because it's all about your effort in my class and you wanting to get smarter that I appreciate or don't." Teachers T1 S1, T1 S2 and T2 S3 defined the differences in professional student–teacher relationships as focusing on academics, but developing mutual respect while maintaining boundaries.

Relationships with students continue to be a theme in question four discussing the differentiation between being friends with students versus professional relationships. Teachers maintain authority through professional relationships with students. One teacher, T1 S2, says, "Staying a professional in my classroom and maintaining those relationships, is basically establishing those boundaries at the very beginning of the school year." Teachers T1 S1, T1 S2 and T2 S3 emphasize the need for students to have a relationship with their teachers in order to learn and engage in the academic work.

Student effort was identified by teachers as a necessity for academic achievement. Both teachers at School 1 addressed the significance of student effort. One teacher was very specific about her role as a professional. T1 S2 outlined her role as:

I'm here for a purpose. I will listen. I will engage. I will take care of you. I will keep you safe. But I will not be your friend, and my expectations are that you come into my room, you sit down, you work, you give me the very best effort you can, and we're good.

Teachers from each of the three schools in the district addressed the importance of maintaining authority in the student–teacher relationships rather than being friends with students as an important factor in keeping high expectations and encouraging increased effort.

Question 5: Humor, play, and laughter. In building relationships teachers often use humor play and laughter to connect with students. Do you integrate humor, play, and laughter into your classroom? If so, please provide reasons for doing so and some examples. In discussion about using these tools in the classroom, humor was discussed by three teachers and laugh was mentioned 20 times by six of the teacher study participants. When teachers discussed laughter, they often laughed thinking of the memories they discussed.

The subtheme of humor appeared in this section addressing making learning fun. One teacher study participant, T1 S2, discussed that she enjoys her work more when she uses humor, "I can't live life without humor and being . . . I'm the single-most sarcastic person I know, and the wonderful thing about eighth graders is they get it." This idea is supported by T3 S3, "You have to. I really think that's one of the reasons that I did become a teacher because it allows me to be myself." Another teacher, T2 S3, discusses the addition of humor, but being cautious not to direct humor at an individual:

If somebody messes up, we can laugh together, not at them, and a lot of times, it creates that environment where it is okay to laugh, and be humorous, and have nicknames, and funny things, and we just know we don't cross the line, things like that.

The discussion continued as T3 S3 addresses age appropriate humor, "I had to make adjustments from high school to middle school as being humorous and what not because it takes them a minute to get on." Study participants are all eighth grade teachers and address the middle school students' immaturity and the proper use of humor in the middle school classroom.

Laughter is a tool that even the most serious teachers are able to utilize. One teacher, T3 S3, says, "I am serious, but after they get to know me, we can laugh about it and move on. And, then that opens up the door for them to ask questions about whatever we're talking about. Teaching is more fun for the teachers when they are able to laugh and have fun." T3 S2 claims the day is more enjoyable for everyone with laughter by stating, "Just finding little things to laugh about as a class." The idea of learning is more fun with laughter is support by T2 S2 when she says, "I try to make them laugh and joke because then it puts me on a little bit more personable level and if they can connect with you there, then they're going to connect with you

academically too." Teachers and students alike find more engagement in the content through the use of laughter in the classroom.

Careful use of laughter in the classroom is established by T2 S3, "I establish is a safe environment for my kids. They understand that bullying of any form will not be tolerated. That we laugh together, we don't laugh at each other, and that I think helps people feel free to be who they are in my class." The middle school immaturity is addressed by T2 S3, "Absolutely, every day. I think as a middle school teacher, we would go crazy if we didn't laugh, and joke with our students, and so would they." The importance of laughter in the middle school classroom is identified by T2 S1, "This is a great question. The very first day of school almost every year I've taught, I say, if you don't laugh a little bit every day, I'm not doing a good job. If you don't laugh a little bit every day you're not going to feel as comfortable coming here." This teacher adds, "Of course students want to keep laughing but I had another statement about every day, all right, let's have fun but let's get back to math." Teachers are able to use laughter as a segue to encourage engagement.

Laughter is used to build trust by T1 S2, "They know that if I can let my hair down and we can laugh and cut up together in the same moment, and then the next moment, I'm saying, All right, guys, back to work. Here we go. I think that just builds that trust with those kids." Teacher study participants addressed the positive uses of humor and laughter in the classroom to improve the learning environment for students.

Question 6: Teacher practice and advocacy. Advocacy for students is a topic teachers tend to be passionate about. Can you identify things in teacher practice and advocacy that improve student effort for economically disadvantaged students? Through discussions of advocacy, frequently used words were eat, structure, routine, need and expectation. Eat was

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mentioned by two study participants one time each. Structure was mentioned three times by two study participants. Routine was discussed by three of the study participants six times. Need was mentioned nine times by two of the teacher study participants. Expectations were discussed by three of the teacher study participants and mentioned four times.

The subtheme of eat appeared as teachers discussed that often economically disadvantaged students are not able to have the basic need for food met due to limited financial resources in their homes. Several teachers, T1 S2, T2 S2, and T2 S3 admit to keeping a supply of snacks in their classroom to feed hungry students and meet the basic need for food. Another teacher, T3 S3 supports this concern by saying, "You usually can really tell those things closer to lunchtime or the end of the day, when students are leery about even heading home or trying to gather things prior to going home or getting ready for lunch because they didn't have an opportunity to eat." She identifies that lunchtime and the end of the day are times she sees this need more. This teacher express that in her morning classes and middle of the day classes it is more difficult to ascertain if a student is struggling because they haven't eaten if they don't tell her they are hungry in her English class.

Study participants discuss that structure sets the expectation for the classroom. Having a structured classroom allows students to know what to expect. Study participant T2 S3 claims students have a safe environment when they know there is structure. Another teacher, T3 S2, addresses the need for structure by stating, "And then coming to middle school where they're moving from class to class and it's more chaotic having structure in the classroom is not necessarily always what they want. But more or less what they need." Both of these teachers speak to the balance of freedoms and structure at the middle school level.

Routines are another tool that teacher utilize to increase student effort. Study participants T1 S2, T3 S2 and T2 S3 express similar opinions and observations about routines. T3 S2 explains that routine is an important part of her classroom management, "I think having a routine is very crucial. Especially, now in middle school. I feel like in elementary they have very strict routines that the kids are kind of accustomed to." Study participant T1 S2 discusses the value of structure, routine and consistency:

> I think for this one, a lot of it with those kiddos is routine is big, routine and consistency, continuity. Every day, they know they're going to come to my room. They're going to get their journal. They're going to get their novel. They're going to sit down. There's a bell ringer on the screen.

Teachers typically establish classroom routines at the start of the school year to create a safe environment and establish expectations. By practicing routines and being consistent, teachers are able to manage their classrooms and increase student learning.

Expectation are a classroom management tool teachers use to improve the learning environment. Setting expectations and having a routine to back up the expectations is the way that T1 S2 establishes an orderly classroom, "Any 14-year-old, not just our economically disadvantaged, making sure that they know that the expectations are laid out, and that they are adhered to, and that they have to follow them." Study participant T2 S3 explains that mutual respect helps when setting expectations, "it just goes back to that mutual respect, and that understanding, and developing that environment where kids know their expectations, they know what they can, and can't get away with, and having that line that's drawn." Teacher study participant T3 S3 shares that she is firm but fair in the classroom, "Never letting the expectation down and being consistent. Consistency, no matter what, I'll smile at you all day long, but that

zero belongs to you if you haven't done your job." Teachers T1 S2, T2 S3 and T3 S3 explain that they set expectations to maintain order and give students a safe environment. When the students feel safe they are able to increase effort and achievement.

Students also must feel safe that their basic needs are attended to in order to be able to focus in class. Teacher T2 S1 tries to meet the nurturing need of his students by showing them he cares. He expresses that he has noticed the need for nurturing is increased for economically disadvantaged students. In his opinion, "They appreciate it more because they don't get enough I don't think at home or outside of school." Teacher T2 S2 shares the concern that student basic needs must be met for student to be academically successful. She expresses, "If those needs aren't being met, nothing here is going to matter to them. My personal theme is just to take care of all needs, not just academic, that are within my realm and my professional abilities." Each of the teachers interviewed work to meet as many basic needs in their classroom as they are able to meet so that their students have an environment that encourages learning.

Question 7: Obstacles. Question seven addresses obstacles that are faced in the student–teacher relationship between teachers and economically disadvantaged students. Have you experienced student–teacher related obstacles with economically disadvantaged students? If so, are they the same type of obstacles or different than with students who don't face economic challenges? Obstacles were mentioned four times by two of the teacher study participants. Parents or relationships with a parent were discussed by five of the teacher study participants 12 times. Parent discussion included support, presence, home life and basic needs.

Obstacles with economically disadvantaged students due to the lack of educational and technology resources. The lack of internet access at home may prevent students from the ability to do homework, explains T2 S2, "We have a group of kids who don't have internet access or

there's six of them living in a trailer and they can't all share the same space or they have to wait for their turn and things don't get done. So that's probably the biggest obstacle I've encountered here." Teachers not only face obstacles in their classroom, they are responsible for safety at their duty stations and face obstacles in other areas of the campus. Teacher T2 S3 explains that the relationships she builds with students in her classroom prevents other obstacles by saying:

I think all students are going to have challenges. It's those students that I haven't built

that relationship with, or that I haven't established those ground rules with, and honestly,

as far as it being different between economically disadvantaged, I really wouldn't know,

because I don't know those students, and that, again, that's where I see my struggles, and

my obstacles come in, are with the kids that I haven't had an opportunity to build a

relationship with.

The subtheme for parent appeared in the data for this question. Communication with parent and a partnership between home and school presents an additional obstacle both T1 S1, T1 S3 and T2 S1 claim. Parent involvement is limited and often if parents can be reached they are similarly frustrated at home. Often teachers are unaware of challenges student face outside of the classroom or school. Teacher T3 S2 told a story about a former student who was homeless, sleeping ins his truck and he didn't share that with anyone. For weeks the teachers were frustrated at the student's lack of effort in class. The student lived out of his vehicle for three weeks before it came to the attention of the school. When teachers learned of the student's situation, the coaches allowed him to shower at school and resources were gathered to help the family. Once the student saw that his teachers cared and were willing to help him, he started caring more about school and his effort improved. By meeting the students' basic needs, the teachers witnessed an immediate increase is student effort.

Teachers use the term parent when discussing a support system at home. Several teachers acknowledge that families with economic disadvantages face more challenges than other families. Students may be living in an overcrowded house, single parent home, grandparents may be guardians and students may not feel valued at home. If students do not have an adult that they can rely on at home, trusting adults at school may be a challenge additionally.

Question 8: Strategies. When teachers were asked about specific strategies to overcome obstacles with economically disadvantaged students, the work ethic was addressed. Do you believe that it is important for teachers to use different strategies to overcome obstacles in student effort and achievement for economically disadvantaged students than other students? The subthemes for homework and work appeared most frequently. Homework was mentioned once each by two study participants and work was mentioned four times by two study participants. Teachers discussed the distractions that interfere with students completing and turning in classwork and homework.

Economically disadvantaged students face additional responsibilities outside of school and lack of support in many cases. The discussion of unmet basic needs as an obstacle for economically disadvantaged students was addressed by T1 S3, T2 S2, T2 S3 and T1 S1. They explain that employing strategies in their classrooms to address unmet needs helps bridge gaps for their students. To overcome the obstacle of homework T1 S1 provides additional flexibility for students to demonstrate mastery of objectives by, "If I know that I can't rely on them to do homework and bring it back, then what they do in class every day is what I take the grade on." Teachers are aware that some students do not have easy lives. The teachers interviewed express a desire to show care for these students while helping them make their lives better through

education. Teacher T2 S3 has experienced student hardships including incarcerated parents and expresses a need for giving student more time for work, kind words and extra help learning through one-to-one support. To overcome obstacles in getting students to work, teachers express they become more flexible. T2 S2 explains, "You have to figure out what works best from them and then it's very important to individualize for what's going to work the best for them or what they're going to identify with." Encouraging students to put effort into school work is a challenge for all students explains T1 S3, the classroom environment encourages students to work. She claims, "Most students are going to respond to having that structure within your classroom, holding them accountable, and then building relationships, I think it's (going to be what gets students) work for you." Teachers state the same strategies are used for all students, but economically disadvantaged students sometimes need extra support.

Question 9: Eighth grade math and reading state accountability. Content specific conversations were addressed in question nine. If you have taught economically disadvantaged students, please describe your experience specifically with teaching eighth grade ELA or eighth grade math to those students with the higher standards for state. Because eighth grade ELA and math teachers were the target population, read was mentioned 18 times by two teachers and math was mentioned five times by two teachers. Teaching was another frequently used word, mentioned three times by two study participants. Parent was mentioned two times by two of the teacher study participants. The frequently used words presented subthemes of teaching, parent, read and math. The common theme presented from teachers interviewed focused on learning and student growth in their classrooms. Teachers did not address state assessments or accountability as a focus or concerns even though all teachers interviewed face high stakes state assessment for their students.

Teaching is differentiated to fill gaps for students who are deficient in basic reading and math skills, T2 S1 points out. This idea is supported by T3 S3 when she says, "You do have to change up teaching (to meet student needs). I know you are not capable of getting that, and that's when that one-on-one comes in. Letting them know early on, I'm here for you, what needs to be done, and (where) we go from there." State accountability test are required in both eighth grade ELA and eighth grade math to pass to the next year.

Parents play a significant role in early learning. If early reading and math skills are not introduced to children, T2 S1 explains, "The basic facts tend to be a lot weaker in socio-economic. They're parents aren't teaching them to count when they're two and three." Parents read to their children from a young age to encourage reading skills and prepare students for learning. When students have missed an opportunity for reading at a young age, T2 S3, T2 S1 and T1 S2 explain this impacts them throughout their school career. These teachers express, through no fault of their own economically disadvantaged students do not enjoy reading or struggling with reading on grade level. Educators have an opportunity to inspire and empower students to read through exposing them to reading something of interest and helping them feel successful. Another English teacher, T1 S2, shares an observation that often the first book an economically disadvantage sees is in their kindergarten class. She explains that if students have not had experience and exposure to reading before kindergarten, they are beginning their formal education with deficits. To close some of the deficit gaps teachers use the practice of engaging students in learning to read content they find interesting, inspiring them to read more, empowering them with skills to read and then equipping them with the skills and reading material.

Math teachers share similar concerns to English teachers about deficits in learning due to a lack of early exposure to math concepts. In addition to gaps in reading ability, students struggle in math. Teacher T3 S2 engages students in the curriculum by finding ways to show students how their basic math skills apply and help them in their daily life. When students face challenges that interfere with learning, T3 S2 and T2 S1 explain it is common for students to have some gaps in their basic math knowledge. Teacher study participant T2 S1 explains, "once you raise their level, their confidence goes up, once their confidence goes up then their experience with the math lesson will improve also." Each of these math teachers identify student needs and find creative ways to address basic math skills while continuing with their on-level curriculum.

Question 10: Increase knowledge: Economically disadvantaged needs. Supports for students with economic disadvantages were explored in question ten. In your experience as an eighth grade ELA or math teacher, what opportunities have you had to increase your knowledge in meeting the needs of economically disadvantaged students? This question had sub-questions that addressed support services, professional learning communities (PLC), peer observations, administrators and counselors supports. Student needs were mentioned three times by all eight study participants. Support services were mentioned nine times by seven of the teacher study participants. All eight teachers discussed PLCs with 14 mentions of PLC. Observe was mentioned 16 times by four of the teacher study participants. Training is a subtheme that appeared and was mentioned nine times be three of the study participants. Administrators were discussed by six of the study participants and mentioned seven times. Counselors were mentioned 17 times and discussed by all eight of the teacher study participants. Subthemes for question 10 were need, support service, PLC, observe, training, administrator, and counselor.

Most of the terms were the topic of sub-questions. The terms that were not sub-questions included need and training.

Teachers addressed a variety of student needs when discussing student supports. All eight teachers mentioned needs. School supplies were mentioned by T2 S2, "we did a brand new backpack for all the students who were economically disadvantaged who needed it and we refreshed supplies like we did at the beginning of the year." Two teachers addressed clothing needs. Teacher T2 S3 and T3 S3 addressed clothing needs and added concerns about hygiene. Extra needs for support in academics were mentioned by four teachers. Supports for student success are addressed in planning during the weekly content PLC meetings. Extra supports from the teacher for academic success were discussed by T3 S2, T2 S1, T1 S1 and T1 S2. Solutions to increases academic supports planned in PLC meetings include, a variety of reading material in various forms and levels (magazines, online essays and books), transportation for after school tutoring once a week for economically disadvantaged students and RTI supports with increased communication and discussion of individual student needs. Often, student needs are brought to the attention of counselors and administrators before the teachers are aware of needs. Teachers emphasize the need for communication to teachers about these additional needs as counselors and administrators learn about student concerns.

Support services offered by the district were addressed by seven of the teacher study participants. Teacher T3 S3 expressed that in her classroom she treats all students equally and does not focus specifically on economically disadvantaged students. Support programs including 504, SPED, LPAC and free and reduced lunch were mentioned by T2 S1, T1 S2, and T3 S2 as supports available for qualifying economically disadvantaged students. Material supports such as clothing, supplies and books were mentioned by T2 S2, T1 S3, and T2 S3. They shared that

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the district, campuses and community offer resources to provide for these basic needs through food pantries, clothes closets and free libraries.

Professional Learning Communities or PLCs meet weekly or daily depending on the campus. PLCs in this district are formed of teachers in each content area for planning together at the campus level. All eight teacher study participants state they meet regularly with the PLC for ELA or math at their campus. Data for the department is analyzed in PLC to plan lessons, assessments, special population needs and individual student needs. Each of the teacher study participants expressed that their PLC is a support for all students, including students with economic disadvantages.

A support several teachers indicated that helps with classroom management and teacher practices to improve learning is observations. Teacher T2 S3 describes an opportunity for teachers to empathize with students through observation and experience where the teacher shadows a student's schedule and is treated as a student for the day. This opportunity allows teachers to see how teachers interact with students over the course of a school day for more in depth observation of what practices work and do not work well for students. Teacher T2 S1 says, "Peer observation of other teachers teaching socio-economic disadvantaged helps me plan better lesson plans and strategies also." Another teacher, T1 S1, discussed a program her campus had that she found helpful. Peer observations are helpful for the teacher observing a classroom, but one campus allows teachers to request feedback when teachers observe their classroom, explains T2 S3, "We also have the observe me, #ObserveMe, where a teacher can come in, and observe a lesson, and then scan the QR code, and go back, and give you feedback on what they saw, things that they liked, things they thought maybe you could do different." The four teachers

that shared experiences with observations expressed that it is a valuable tool for improving teaching and learning for all students.

Many opportunities for professional development were also mentioned as support tools. Teacher T2 S1 explained that every year there are opportunities for working on strategies to help low performing or economically disadvantaged students learn. Ruby Payne's practices for economically disadvantaged students was referenced as an excellent tool she has studied by T2 S3. Teacher T3 S2 shared a story about a training for English Language Learners that helped her with engagement of economically disadvantaged students:

> We got to sit down and make raps and songs that correlated to curriculum and core subject. One that we wrote was for an English teacher and it was, "Write, write baby" that kind of correlated to the "Ice, Ice Baby" song. And then, we did a math one, "all about the base, about the base, surface area. All about the base, about the base, shape volume" we incorporated the formulas into the song but it all went along with the beat to the songs because for the English language learners, it's easier for them to learn just English words, communicating with one another, versus learning academic words.

Each of these three teachers expressed the value of additional training and professional development in preparing teachers to work with economically disadvantaged students.

Campus administration was a valuable support referenced by six of the eight study participants. Teacher study participant T2 S3 said, "Our administrators are very hands on. I mean, they provide lots of staff development opportunities. Just this week, our principal sent out four links, four articles for differentiation among economically disadvantaged students. So, they're constantly giving you opportunities to get better." Teachers T3 S3 and T1 S2 express the value of administrators communicating with them about students and sharing background

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information when appropriate. Teacher T1 S1 and T2 S1 address the support administrators offer by going over student data with teachers to help them identify needs for economically disadvantaged students. Additionally, T1 S3 shares it helps students in her classroom when administrators meet with students to check on them and build a relationship with economically disadvantaged students.

Teacher study participants used similar statements to describe counselor supports and administrator supports. "I would say counselors help in the same way administrators help, especially when they're struggling with stuff that they can't seem to shake off when they come in. Letting them know they have somebody to talk to" states T1 S3. This idea was supported by all of the study participants. Another area of support all study participants linked to counselors is the connection between home and school. Teachers reported the counselor being the resource that bridged the gap between home and school when teachers were unable to get in contact with parents. This school district does not employee specific at risk counselors, but T1 S3 shared the value of this role at a previous school where the at risk counselor helped meet basic needs and added emotional support by providing items for hygiene, clothing and school supplies. She explained that students felt safe and free of judgement because of the confidentiality and trust built with the at risk counselor. Teachers all said they contacted the counselor at their campus to support the additional basic student needs of economically disadvantaged students.

Additions and recommendations. During the pilot study the suggestion was made to ask teacher study participants if they have anything to add or recommend for economically disadvantaged students. The subtheme that emerged in this section was the word know. Seven of the teacher study participants used the word know 41 times in this section.

Teachers expressed the importance of making sure communication about available resources and supports reaches economically disadvantaged students. Teacher T2 S2 explained, "I feel like communication needs to be out there a little bit more and 90% of communication in middle school goes out via email. But for our students who don't have internet access, they miss a lot of that." Finding better avenues of communication through post mail, sending information home with students and parent groups are ways to improve support through knowledge for economically disadvantaged students.

All teachers interviewed emphasized that as teachers it is important that communication reaches all teachers about supports for economically disadvantaged students. Teachers stated that often they learned about resources because they sought out additional support or found out about supports too late to share with students. Several teachers, T1 S1, T2 S3, and T3 S3 mentioned they would benefit from additional training to know about resources. There was a general consensus that additional campus and district Response To Intervention would be very helpful for economically disadvantaged students. RTI was mentioned by T2 S2, T1 S2, T2 S3, and T3 S3. Teachers interviewed also pointed out that as the teacher they took the responsibility of making sure students' needs are met in their classrooms. Teacher T2 S3 said:

> Making sure your students know what you expect of them, building that mutual respect, taking the time to get to know your students, and just being there for them, and not prejudging, letting go of anything you may have heard from the student previously for previous years, giving kids a fresh start, and just letting them know you believe in them, and that they're more than just a kid sitting in a desk in your classroom.

Teachers emphasized knowing students' needs through building relationships and knowing about available resources really aide in supporting students with economic disadvantages.

Chapter 4 Summary

Chapter 4 utilizes social constructivism to present the perspectives of eighth grade ELA and math teachers on the connection between student–teacher relationships and student effort in students who are economically disadvantaged. The objective of Chapter 4 was to provide a summary of the data collected through artifacts and interviews in an accurate and dependable manner. Interpretive phenomenological analysis was utilized for the research design. Artifacts representing positive student–teacher relationships were presented by study participants and one-to-one interviews were used for data collection. The data collected was intended to answer the research question regarding how do teachers perceive the impact of student–teacher relationships on student effort of economically disadvantaged students. The significance of the student–teacher relationship and importance of this relationship with economically disadvantaged students was be explored. Furthermore, the way teachers defined relationships and advocacy in education and how this relates specifically to students who are economically disadvantaged was be addressed. The research also examined how teachers advocate for students to overcome obstacles they encounter that impact self-efficacy, relationships, and student effort with economically disadvantaged students and how teaching strategies can be used to overcome these obstacles. Finally, the research addressed how teacher practice and advocacy improve connections in student–teacher relationships, student effort, success and self-efficacy with students who are economically disadvantaged.

The groundwork for the presentation and evaluation of the results that appear in Chapter 5 were established in Chapter 4. The perspectives and narratives of teacher study participants guided the identification of connections between this research and what it might contribute to the field of educational research. Patterns and themes identified in this collection of interviews lead

to the results that will be presented in the following chapter. In Chapter 5, results will be

examined and interpreted, a discussion of the relationship between the literature and the results

will be presented, study limitations and implications of the results will be explored, and

recommendations for further research on student–teacher relationships and effort of

economically disadvantaged students will be provided.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

The passion of public educators serves students and drives practices and policies in education. Educators serve students, teachers, and administrators, providing opportunities to observe and work with individuals to build and restore relationships. The goal of this research was to represent a portrait of the impact from student–teacher relationships through mutual emotional connectedness on economically disadvantaged student effort, as demonstrated through eighth grade English Language Arts and eighth grade math teacher perspectives in one Texas public school district. Themes and patterns were identified in teacher perception of practice and advocacy that improve connections in student–teacher relationships, demonstrate through teachers' lived experiences that teacher practices and advocacy impact student effort and academic achievement and contribute to educational research by empowering teachers with examples of how educators make a greater positive impact on their students through relationships. This chapter provides a summary of the study results, a discussion of the results, and an exploration of the results in relation to the literature. Limitations of the study are examined, followed by the implications of the results for practice, policy, and theory. Finally, recommendations for future research and the conclusion closes the chapter.

Summary of the Results

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to (a) identify themes and patterns in teacher perception of practice and advocacy that improve connections in student–teacher relationships, (b) demonstrate through teachers' lived experiences that teacher practices and advocacy impact student effort and academic achievement, and (c) contribute to educational research by empowering teachers with examples of how educators make a greater positive impact on their students through relationships. Interview protocol was applied to answer the

guiding question in this research study: How do teachers perceive the impact of student–teacher relationships on student effort of economically disadvantaged students? The significance of student–teacher relationships and importance of this relationship with economically disadvantaged students was investigated. Teachers' lived experiences of relationships and advocacy in education and how this related specifically to effort of economically disadvantaged students was explored. The research examined how teachers advocate for students to overcome obstacles they encounter that impact self-efficacy, relationships, and student effort with economically disadvantaged students and how teaching strategies and practices are used to overcome obstacles.

Teacher perceptions of relationships in public education were examined through one-to-one teacher interviews in this phenomenological study. Teachers were asked to bring an artifact to the interview that was a personal representation of positive student–teacher relationships in education. During the interviews, teachers were asked about student–teacher relationships, economically disadvantaged student effort, obstacles, supports and their beliefs about best practices in public education. Evidence through data supports the assumption that student–teacher relationships contribute to student effort and achievement; furthermore, data supports that academic achievement is a powerful and positive indicator of student success (Funches, 2017; Maurizi et al., 2013). Educational relationships and effort were studied and themes in teacher practices and advocacy that effect student effort positively were examined with the goal to offer the educational community insight into teacher mindsets and practices that produce positive student effort. Four themes emerged, relationships, supports, teacher practices and basic student needs.

Finally, the research addressed how teacher practice and advocacy improve connections in student–teacher relationships, student effort, success and self-efficacy with students who are economically disadvantaged. Interviews revealed that most of the study participants witnessed a decrease in connection and student efforts when the students were dealing with a traumatic event at home; for example, absent parents, domestic violence or lack of food. Teacher study participants identified a connection between building positive relationships through meeting students' basic needs, using caring, empathy and high expectations, utilizing district and campus supports of counseling and community resources and using teacher practices, that are sensitive to children who have experienced trauma, in their classrooms with increased student effort of economically disadvantaged students.

Discussion of the Results

Teachers spend more time with students than any other employee in the educational field. Relationships between students and teachers are some of the most meaningful and significant relationships in education. Teachers are charged with the responsibility of student learning and achievement. Student must be engaged in learning and putting in effort to be successful and demonstrate academic achievement. A form of qualitative methodology was utilized for this study by collecting phenomenological data through teacher interviews and artifacts. Meaning of the participants' lived experiences regarding student–teacher relationships and economically disadvantaged student effort in their classrooms developed through this phenomenological approach by examining what they experienced and how they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). Participants each individually with the researcher discussed an artifact that represents the phenomenon to them and completed a one-to-one interview answering questions directly related

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to their experience with the phenomenon in question. The results of this study were provided by descriptions of study participants' lived experiences with the phenomenon.

Themes of relationships, support, teacher practices and basic student needs emerged from the data. Ultimately all teachers interviewed were passionate about student learning. Everything in each of their classrooms centered around the goal of student achievement because of the shared belief that through education, students are prepared to be productive citizens as adults. Teachers interviewed were all passionate about not only student success in their classroom, but continued success in the futures of each of their students. Contributing to a productive future for students was the drive of the teachers in this study to focus on increasing student engagement and effort. Throughout the interviews, the teachers all made connections between their relationships with students, first making sure students' basic needs were met, practices in their classrooms and supports for them and their students.

Relationships. Examples of the connection between effort and relationships were presented by all study participants. T1 S1 and T1 S3 both explain that they are able to increase student effort because they have worked to develop relationships with students in which the students know the teacher cares and the students feel safe in the classroom. Teacher study participant T1 S3 expresses a connection between student effort and relationships by stating, "the more that you build that relationship, I feel like the more that they will work for you." Teachers interviewed express that students need to know teachers care to build positive relationships and then the students will work to impress the teachers.

Support. Teachers explain that support for teachers and students alike are an important part of increasing student effort. For economically disadvantaged students, T1 S2 discusses a lack of support, "I'll say many of our kiddos who are economically disadvantaged, unfortunately,

they also fall into that category of not having the proper support at home." T2 S2 claims economically disadvantaged students need additional support they might not get somewhere else. Teacher study participant T1 S3 states, "they need support, they need you to care, they need to know that you respect them, and then they will tend to reciprocate that respect." Teachers interviewed express the additional need for external supports, such as administrator and counselor support, meeting student's basic needs and additional academic tutoring, to encourage effort in economically disadvantaged students. Supports for students serve the purpose of remove distractions and worries from students to allow for focusing on academics rather than worrying about hunger, shelter, feeling cared for and safe.

Teacher practices. Teacher expectations set the tone for their practices. Student effort was identified by teachers as a necessity for academic achievement. Both teachers at School 1 addressed the significance of student effort. One teacher was very specific about her role as a professional. T1 S1 explained the importance of an expectation for student effort by stating, "it's all about your effort in my class and you wanting to get smarter, that I appreciate." T1 S2 outlined her role as:

> I'm here for a purpose. I will listen. I will engage. I will take care of you. I will keep you safe. But I will not be your friend, and my expectations are that you come into my room, you sit down, you work, you give me the very best effort you can.

Teachers from each of the three schools in the district addressed the importance of maintaining authority in the student–teacher relationships rather than being friends with students as an important factor in keeping high expectations and encouraging increased effort. Significance was placed on creating a safe environment in which students feel comfortable working with the

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teacher, know the teacher expects engagement and learning, know the classroom procedures and believe the teacher cares about them.

Basic student needs. Students with economic disadvantages need to feel safe and have food, shelter, clothing and hygiene needs met to be able to focus on learning. All teachers interviewed referenced free and reduced lunch and the need for students to be fed at school in order for them to be able to focus on learning (National School Lunch Program, 2019). Teachers provide examples of meeting basic needs through both supports and teacher practices to build on the positive student–teacher relationship. Teacher study participant T2 S2 explains, "I feel like building those relationships, especially with our economically disadvantaged, whose parents might be working multiple jobs, might not be home very often, they need that." Each of the eight teachers in this study provide examples of seeing improved student efforts by first meeting these basic student needs.

Meaning of results. Data collected in this research indicates that building positive student–teacher relationships using positive teacher practices and student supports increases economically disadvantaged student effort. Supports from the district, campus administrators and counselors and the community help to meet the basic student need of belonging. A "strength-based, resilience-focused approach is rooted in the universal principal that, to be emotionally healthy, all youth need a sense of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity" (Starr Commonwealth, 2019). Using trauma-informed and resilience-focused teacher practices many of students basic needs could be met in the classroom while building positive student–teacher relationships. Teacher study participants each referenced using teacher practices that build positive relationships and student efficacy to increase economically disadvantaged student effort.

Eighth grade math and English teachers were chosen for the study population because in Texas, although eighth grade students take state accountability exams in all four core subjects, student must pass the state accountably exams in Reading and math to be promoted to the ninth grade. I expected the teachers to discuss added pressure of accountability in the interviews and it surprised me that this was not addressed more in the interviews. Questions 9 and 10 focused on eighth grade math and English specifically to explore teacher experience with this content and additional needed supports. When answering these questions, teachers did not place significance on State Testing or the requirement for students to pass the eighth grade Reading and math STAAR to be eligible for promotion to ninth grade. Teachers interviewed focused more on the additional supports needed for economically disadvantaged students because of unmet basic needs. The supports teachers discussed needing most were related to food, safety and emotional nurturing. Classroom practices teachers described as being most successful to increase student achievement were practices that also fostered student–teacher relationships through providing a safe and structured environment that increased student effort through encouragement.

Unique teacher perspectives were explored through interview and artifacts in the phenomenological study. Each participant described individual perspectives of student–teacher relationships in their classroom and the impact these relationships had on student effort. Similarities in the unique responses revealed that their experiences with the phenomenon were comparable. The teacher participants described their lived experiences in the classroom and how their relationships increased student effort. Through teacher study participants' reflection and responses, the results of this study answered the research questions that guided this study. The following section examines the way the results of this study relate to the previous literature presented.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

It is well established that relationships in education play a significant role in success. Student engagement is higher when a positive proactive student–teacher relationship is in place (Colditz & Wallace, 2013; Lauderdale, 2011; Maurizi, Grogan-Kaylor, & Delva, 2013; McHugh, Horner, Sointu, Savolainen, Lappalainen, & Lambert, 2017; Van Praag, Stevens, & Van Houtte, 2017; Zee & Bree, 2017). Positive relationships in all levels of education contribute to the overall culture, behavior and academic achievement in schools. Administrators are focusing on leadership styles that promote transformational and servant leadership in an effort to increase positive relationships in education (Deaner, 1994; Greenleaf, n.d.; Hallowell, 2011; Mezirow, 1991; Nass & Yen, 2012). As the accountability for student effort is placed more on the teacher than the student, it is necessary to determine factors the teacher can control that influence student effort.

This phenomenological study sought to contribute to the literature in this area of education by exploring teacher perceptions of how the student–teacher relationship effects student effort in economically disadvantaged students, a population of students that often demonstrates low student effort. Previous research focusing on student effort has been limited. Relationships in education, student behavior, play and laughter in the classroom, and leadership styles have been explored extensively (Deaner, 1994; Greenleaf, n.d.; Hallowell, 2011; Mezirow, 1991; Nass & Yen, 2012). The gap that appeared in the literature review was the teacher perspective of how their relationships with students impacts student effort.

Student behavior directly influences academic performance. When students are focused, engagement increases both effort and success. In return, lack of engagement and off task behavior limit academic success. A study conducted by Cadima, Doumen, Verschueren, and

Buyse (2015) examined student behavior engagement improvements through the use of PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports). The goal of PBIS is increasing behavior through positive encouragement and rewards for good behavior. This social constructivist study observed the implementation of PBIS using teacher interviews and classroom observations. The findings of Cadima et al.'s study indicated managing student behaviors may increase overall academic success and reduce disruptive behaviors.

In the current study teacher perspectives indicate that positive student–teacher relationship's impact student effort in addition to behavioral engagement. Additionally, teacher study participants identified increased completion of assignments when students believe the teacher cared and they wanted to please the teacher. By addressing the social emotional needs of students, and fulfilling student basic needs, the higher levels of learning are more attainable. The positive student–teacher relationship provided a protective support for students to desire higher academic achievement through effort in school work.

Previous research explored the perspectives of students in relation to student–teacher relationships. McHugh, Horner, Colditz, & Wallace (2013) conducted a study that explored student perspectives of student success in relation to student–teacher relationships. Themes in student interviews were identified that support the concept of positive student–teacher relationships positively impact student success. Students perceptions of their relationships with teachers and the impact on their success indicated students believe positive student–teacher relationships lead to student success. In the current study, the inverse was examined through teacher perspectives of the significance positive student–teacher relationships play in student effort and success. Comparing student perceptions to teacher perceptions, the common perception valuing positive student–teacher relationships can be concluded. Teacher study

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participants discussed the increase in effort they observe after earning student respect, developing trust and establishing high expectations. When positive student–teacher relationships are in place, teachers' express students want to meet the high expectations of the teacher because they trust they are able to meet those expectations if the teacher believes they are capable.

One key support found after completing the interviews for this study was by Starr Commonwealth. Starr Commonwealth (2019) explains the teacher and student supports offered by the organization, "providing services to traumatized children and their families, Starr is driven to provide professionals the training and resources needed to help children, families, and communities thrive" (Our Approach section, para. 3). Trauma-informed and resilience-focused practices taught by Starr Commonwealth are a resource this study indicates could be effective in working with economically disadvantaged students to increase effort through building positive relationships in education. The data found from Starr Commonwealth led to four more books addressing trauma, poverty and social emotional learning needs; two books by Ruby K. Payne, Ph.D., *Emotional Poverty in All Demographics* (2018) and *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (2019), a book by Bruce D. Perry, MD, Ph.D. and Maia Szalavitz, *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog* (2017) and Jim Fay and Foster Cline's book *The Pearls of Love and Logic for Parents and Teachers* (2000).

Empathy holds a significant influence on building positive relationships and allowing for critical thinking to occur. Educators increase learning when students are able to use higher levels of thinking in any given content area. Both Payne (2019) and Perry (2017) explain the significance of the fight or flight response and the impact fear has on slowing the thinking and learning process. They explain that the amygdala blocks thought from traveling to the frontal cortex of the brain when fear initiates the fight or flight response in individuals. Critical thinking

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occurs in the frontal cortex of the brain and is able to work best when stress and fear are not present. Fay and Foster Cline (2000) explain that because fear prevents learning and critical thinking in the frontal cortex of the brain, discipline must be done with empathy rather than anger, as anger stimulates fear. By applying love or empathy and encouraging students to use logic by giving two appropriate choices, Fay and Cline (2000) explain that students learn to use critical thinking and become responsible for the consequences of their choices both positive and negative. When students identify their responsibility in consequences they are empowered in both learning and behavior. Teacher study participants provided examples of communication with economically disadvantaged students that reduced fear and stress and allowed for increased effort and achievement.

The fight or flight response tends to be more sensitive in people that have experienced trauma. Payne (2019) and Perry (2017) explain that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) increase learning and behavioral problems. They provide a 10 question quiz with yes or no answers to determine how many adverse childhood experiences a child has experienced. "ACE score of 0: only 3% had learning or behavioral problems. ACE score of 4 or higher: 51% had learning or behavioral problems" (Payne, 2019, p. 132). The teacher study participants' perceptions of negative experiences outside of school impacting student effort in economically disadvantaged students further supports this data. Perry (2017) offers a solution for helping heal trauma and adverse childhood experiences through "resilience-related factors, such as connection to family, community, and culture" (p. 281). Teachers have an opportunity to build resilience in students through teaching self-regulation rather than using punitive discipline and by building positive and caring student–teacher relationships with students who have experienced trauma. Starr Commonwealth (2019) uses the Circle of Courage model to address the needs of belonging,

mastery, generosity and independence and the role they play in trauma-informed and resilience-focused practices. This need for belonging and community are also attended to in the works of Ruby Payne and Dr. Perry. Economically disadvantaged students are more likely to experience trauma or adverse childhood experiences because violence and crime are more prevalently in communities of poverty. "Reducing economic inequality and helping victims of domestic violence and child abuse are critical if we want to cut violence and crime" (Perry, 2017, p. 270). Positive relationships in education have the power to heal and protect children of trauma.

Educators have the unique opportunity to provide resilience-focused protective factors for all students through the public education system. Another study examined the impact administrators play though campus leadership styles. Helmer (2013) surveyed and interviewed teachers to determine the impact of leadership style on teachers' perception of school culture and student achievement. The results of Helmer's research indicate that leadership relationships in education impact student achievement. The current study explored the impact of classroom culture and leadership style on student effort. Teachers' in this study explained that using play and laughter in their classrooms increased student engagement, effort and improved their student–teacher relationships. Strategies teachers used in the classroom were designed to create a safe and caring environment and build positive relationships. This study found that teachers have a similar influence on the culture and effort in their classrooms that administrators have on the campus. Through modeling and engaging in connections for relational capacity the culture is influenced. This influence in education provides an opportunity for healing the ACEs and trauma economically disadvantaged students have experienced through building relational capacity. The following section addresses the limitations of the current research study, with the intent of strengthening future studies replicating the interview protocol from this study.

Limitations

The researcher must be flexible and allow the study to evolve as the data drives the research in qualitative research. The most significant limitations associated with this study is the researcher as the primary instrument of research. Possible areas of error in phenomenological research include, research bias and the researcher themselves as the data collection tool, ethical issues, and the nature of qualitative research. My individual bias had the potential to influence the data collection process because I used interviews with all teacher study participants for my primary data collection tool. The goal of phenomenological design is to reveal perceptions and lived experiences of study participants (Creswell, 2007). I was aware of the possibility of research bias and administered the interview protocol without deviation in each interview to prevent compromising the data with my personal views.

A second limitation specific to this study was related to the small sample size. One school district was used to conduct research for this study. The study was further narrowed to eighth grade ELA and math teachers at the three middle schools in the district. Therefore, the study population was limited to 24 teachers, making it difficult to transfer the results from this study to larger populations.

An additional limitation of this study was my role as an employee in this school district. My current position working in the school district and 13 years of building relationships in the district was known to all study participants due to the relatively small size of the school district. As a result of my current knowledge of campuses and administrators in the district, my current position may have impacted responses from study participants. This bias was addressed by agreeing to confidentiality of all study participants. Teachers might have provided more detailed description of their lived experiences with students and colleagues in the interviews because they

trusted me to keep the information confidential and knew I was familiar with the campus environments, demographics and staff in the district. In addition, my employment in the district and role of student advocacy could possibly have discouraged teachers from discussing more negative aspects of their experiences with students and staff even though I stressed that confidentiality would be preserved throughout the interview process.

Self-reported data was the main data collection tool of this phenomenological study utilizing interviews with teacher study participants. Then nature of phenomenological research through interview in a possible limitation. As in any qualitative study, the data collection process being subjective, I had to assume that the teachers involved in this study provided accurate depictions of their lived experiences with the phenomenon being studied. The results of the study trusted teacher study participants did not hold back information, provide false information or inaccurate descriptions in the interviews.

Utilizing a larger study population across a region rather than just one school district could possibly strengthen this study for future replication. While researcher's bias for this study was removed through trust and a confidentiality agreement, the study would be further strengthened by applying the research to a population with no prior relationships to the researcher. Creswell (2013) explains that no phenomenological study is free of interference, but discussion of ways to strengthen a study to be replicated is important. Modifying this study in these ways could reduce the potential for preexisting relationships between participants and the researcher and improve transferability to larger populations. Implications of the results of the current study for teacher practices in building relationships and relational capacity in education, policy on standardized testing, and working with economically disadvantaged students will be presented in the next section.

Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

Relationships have a demonstrated impact on student effort and achievement. Building positive relationships in education has the potential to improve learning, effort, and achievement. Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies (PBIS) and Restorative Practices are both emerging practices in education that build relational capacity and increase student effort. These practices are both examples of social learning through Vigotsky's (1978) social development theory. With PBIS, students learn to associate extrinsic and intrinsic rewards through positive interventions and peer observations. In Restorative Practices, students learn through interactions with stakeholders in education to be responsible for the way their actions and behaviors affect others. Utilizing social emotional developmental learning practices campus and district wide, builds relationships in education that act as psychological protective factors (Starr Commonwealth, 2019). Teacher study participants in this study, demonstrated that they all value building relationship in education as a tool to address students' basic needs to create an emotionally safe environment for increased learning.

Standardized testing is currently a hot topic for the state of Texas Legislators. Lobbyists are encouraging the Texas Education Agency to remove Student Success Initiative (SSI) for fifth and eighth grade students. The population chosen for this study was based on eighth grade SSI. Students in Texas public schools are required to pass the eighth grade reading and math standardized tests to be eligible for promotion to ninth grade. The district used for this study only has summer school resources and funding for eighth grade students to attend summer school for SSI purposes. Meaning that students that do not pass their classes, but pass the standardized tests are promoted to ninth grade without summer intervention, essentially decreasing the rigor for students to only require minimum standards. This research provides evidence that teachers

are not focusing on standardized test achievement, rather their focus is on student learning, rigor and increasing academic opportunities for students at all levels of learning through classroom differentiation. Teacher T3 S3 states, "I don't pay attention to that (State Accountability Tests). The only time I really pay attention to data, is when I'm in a meeting. I look at what I need to teach them." Ensuring that students learn the material and objectives for eighth grade is the focus of teachers interviewed. Teachers need to have the autonomy in their classrooms to focus on individual student needs and pace of curriculum to improve relationships in education that will then increase effort and student achievement. Evidence that changes in state policy and theory surrounding standardized testing needs to be evaluated is indicated through this research that indicates students are more successful academically when they have opportunities for social emotional learning.

Economically disadvantaged students face challenges other students may not encounter as a result of poverty, preventing families from meeting basic needs of food, shelter and parental supervision. According to Starr Commonwealth (2019) trauma-informed school are resilience-focused; "Starr's strength-based, resilience-focused approach is rooted in the universal principal that, to be emotionally healthy, all youth need a sense of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity." The stories teachers shared through interviews in this study indicated trauma in children and a need for building relationships, utilizing support for teachers and students, meeting basic needs, and teacher practices that reach these goals. Implementing social emotional learning (SEL) in all classes will build relationships in the classroom. Evidence in this study indicates that student effort and success will increase when positive relationships in the classroom are present. SEL in all classrooms is a tenant of trauma-informed and resilience-focused practices. Equipping schools, administrators and teachers with trauma-informed

practices is one way to address these SEL needs through Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory. Teacher study participants all provided evidence through both interviews and artifacts that implementing practices for social emotional learning and shifting the mindset in education to address the whole child emotionally, physically, behaviorally and academically is more effective than addressing academics alone.

Recommendations for Further Research

This phenomenological study indicated that most teacher perceptions are the connection between student–teacher relationships and student effort is significant. According to the interviews, all study participants consider the teacher responsible for fostering positive relationships with students. Study participants provided evidence that positive student–teacher relationships increase student effort while negative student–teacher relationships decrease student effort. Data produced through teacher interviews demonstrates student effort is increased when there is a positive student–teacher relationship, students' basic needs are met, teachers use caring practices and utilize supports from the school district and community to meet students' physical and emotional needs and improve teacher practices.

Further study is needed to examine the impact relationships in education and application of encouraging and promoting positive and proactive educational relationships. Future studies may build on this research by expanding research to encompass improvement in these relationships with the addition of trauma informed practices, the impact of relationships between adults in education, social emotional learning (SEL), relationships in higher education and the connection between positive student–teacher relationships in K–12, and enrollment/attrition of economically disadvantaged students in higher education. Continued contributions to the body of educational research involving proactive and positive relationships in education, practices and

advocacy in education, and strategies for developing positive relationships in education that lead to increased efficacy, effort and achievement are likely to benefit teacher practices, student efficacy and achievement.

This study can provide a guide for future research in determining the effectiveness of implementing trauma-informed and resilience-focused teacher practices to build positive student–teacher relationships and improve economically disadvantaged student effort. Schools need to support teachers and students by providing professional development opportunities for working with economically disadvantaged students and family and community partnerships. Teachers need to be provided with examples and ideas for application of skills learned through professional development. Teachers should be given the autonomy to determine which teacher practices work best in their classrooms for building relationships and increasing student effort. Schools need a check and balance system to create accountability for increasing student effort. Finally, campuses need more faculty discussion to increase teacher awareness and knowledge of available supports and collaborate about teacher practices that build student–teacher relationships and increase student effort.

Conclusion

Relationships in education have been identified as a significant factor across the field of education. This phenomenological study sought to explore the experiences of teachers, specifically with the effort of economically disadvantaged students in relation to positive student–teacher relationships. Following the review of previous literature, it became evident that a gap exists in this area of education because student effort of economically disadvantaged students related to positive relationships in education has not been thoroughly examined. The literature has established that relationships play a significant role in success and student

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engagement is higher when a positive proactive student–teacher relationship is in place (Maurizi, Grogan-Kaylor, & Delva, 2013; Lauderdale, 2011; McHugh, Horner, Colditz & Wallace, 2013; Sointu, Savolainen, Lappalainen, & Lambert, 2017; Van Praag, Stevens, & Van Houtte, 2017; Zee & Bree, 2017). The higher drop-out rate for economically disadvantaged students and low achievement indicated a need for further research in this specific population.

Common experiences in working with economically disadvantaged students and student–teacher relationships impact on effort for eighth grade ELA and math teachers were the focus of this study, with the goal of developing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. In this study, the researcher examined factors influencing student effort, which included: positive student–teacher relationships, professional relationships in education, classroom management practices, humor, play and laughter in the classroom, obstacles related to students with economical disadvantages and supports in the classroom. The teachers interviewed provided positive and negative aspects of their classroom experiences related to the phenomenon. Through these rich and detailed depictions, four central themes were identified and related subthemes emerged from first and second cycle coding. The related themes were relationships, support, teacher practices and basic student needs. Through "trauma-informed" and "resilience-focused" interventions, children are encouraged to feel safe in an environment of acceptance and understanding (Starr Commonwealth, 2019). All teacher study participants described building relationships and increasing student effort by using practices in their classrooms that nurture the child's basic needs and focus on building resilience through encouragement in a safe and accepting environment. The findings of this phenomenological study were then used to make recommendations for future research in education.

Chapter 5 concluded this phenomenological study and provided a summary of the previous research on the topic and Chapter 4. This study explored the lived experiences of eighth grade ELA and math teachers in the impact of student–teacher relationship with economically disadvantaged students and the impact these relationships have on student effort in their classrooms. There remains a need for continued study related to effort of economically disadvantaged students. Low achievement of economically disadvantaged students continues in spite of financial support and assistance from federally funded programs (Hall, 2014). The significance of improving effort for students with economical disadvantages merits further investigations of this topic to determine how teachers can build positive student–teacher relationships that increase student effort, engagement and achievement.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Time of interview:

Date of interview:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

Ethnicity of Interviewee:

Gender of Interviewee:

Years' experience teaching eighth ELA of Interviewee:

Years' experience teaching eighth math of Interviewee:

Total years' experience teaching of Interviewee:

Brief description of the study: This research study is examining connectedness in student–teacher relationships: the practices and advocacy patterns of teachers with positive student–teacher relationships, how the teacher self identifies as a student advocate, and the impact this connection has on student effort and achievement specifically with students who are economically disadvantaged.

Questions:

Please tell me about the artifact that you brought with you and how that represents connections in educations to you.

1. Do you believe that student–teacher relationships impact student effort of economically disadvantaged students? Please explain.

2. How does the relationship between teacher leadership (classroom management) styles and student effort impact economically disadvantaged students? Please explain.

3. Are student–teacher relationships different (than with other students) for economically disadvantaged students to create the best environment for increased effort?

4. How do you define professional student–teacher relationships and connection in education?

5. Do you integrate humor, play and laughter into the classroom? If so, please provide your reasons for doing so and examples.

6. Can you identify themes in teacher practice and advocacy that improve student effort for economically disadvantaged students? If so, please explain.

7. Have you experienced student–teacher related obstacles with economically disadvantaged students? If so, are they the same type of obstacles or different than with students who don't face economic challenges?

8. Do you believe that it is important for teachers to use different strategies to overcome obstacles in student effort and achievement for economically disadvantaged students? Please explain.

9. If you have taught economically disadvantaged students, please describe your experience teaching eighth grade ELA or math to those students.

10. In your experience as an eighth grade ELA or math teacher, what opportunities have you had to increase your knowledge in meeting the needs of economically disadvantaged students?

    What support services are available to help with economically disadvantaged students?

    How does your PLC contribute to proficiency with economically disadvantaged students?

Have you had opportunities for peer observation? If so, explain how this applies

to working with economically disadvantaged students.

How do administrators help teachers?

How do counselors help teachers?

Prompts and Probes used to encourage in depth exploration of lived experiences:

Prompt – Can you tell me a bit more about that?

Probe – What do you mean by '_____'?

Is there anything you would like to add?

Do you have any recommendation for your campus or the school district to improve effort for

students who face socioeconomic challenges?

Audra Funk

Dear :

I am writing you because I am conducting interviews as part of my Ed.D. dissertation research study to increase our understanding of how relationships in education are perceived and experienced by those in the field who produce high student effort and success. As a teacher with demonstrated success in to eighth grade English Language Arts or math, you are in an ideal position to give valuable first-hand information from your own perspective. The interview will take around 45 minutes and is very informal. Your responses to the questions were kept confidential. Each interview was assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers were not revealed during the analysis and write up of findings.

Purpose. The purpose of this study is to (a) identify themes and patterns in teacher perception of practice and advocacy that improve connections in student–teacher relationships, (b) demonstrate through teachers' lived experiences that teacher practices and advocacy impact student effort and academic achievement, and (c) contribute to educational research by empowering teachers with examples of how educators make a greater positive impact on their students through relationships. This is accomplished through asking teachers to reflect and share their perspectives of relationships in public education. Teachers are asked about student–teacher relationships, student effort and their beliefs about best practices in public education.

Study Participants. In an effort to offer the educational community insight into teacher perceptions of practices and mindsets that produce positive student effort and achievement, research was conducted with eighth grade English Language Arts or math teachers in one school district.

Research Method. Interviews (one time, approximately 45 minutes to an hour) were used to evaluate themes in teacher perceptions of practices and advocacy that effect economically disadvantaged student effort and achievement positively.
If you are willing to participate please reply with a day and time that suits you and I'll do my best to be available. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to e-mail me at [redacted].

Sincerely,
Audra Funk
Concordia University–Portland
Graduate Candidate

<div style="text-align: center;">**Appendix C: Consent Form**</div>

Research Study Title: Proactive and Purposeful Educational Connections: Portraits of Teacher Perceptions on the Impact of Professional Student–teacher Relationships on student effort for Economically Disadvantaged Students.
Principal Investigator: Audra Funk
Research Institution: Concordia University–Portland
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Bill Boozang

Purpose and what you will be doing:
The purpose of this survey is to (a) identify themes and patterns in teacher perception of practice and advocacy that improve connections in student–teacher relationships, (b) demonstrate through teachers' lived experiences that teacher practices and advocacy impact student effort and academic achievement, and (c) contribute to educational research by empowering teachers with examples of how educators make a greater positive impact on their students through relationships. We expect approximately 6–9 volunteers. No one will be paid to be in the study. We will begin enrollment on January 14th, 2019 and end enrollment on February 14th, 2019. To be in the study, you will participate in an interview that will take approximately 45 minutes.

1. One-to-one, in person, interviews were conducted with study participant, teachers.
2. Interviews will be conducted in the study participants' classrooms to create an environment that is comfortable and conducive to reflection about their teaching experiences.
3. An interview protocol will guide the research-related interview questions.
4. Note taking will be used as a secondary form of documentation to capture the researchers' impression of body language and social cues during the interviews.
5. The primary method of documentation will use Microsoft Word functions to record, transcribe and code attributes of the phenomenon in the interview sessions.
6. The recordings will then be converted to text and the participant-specific transcriptions will be sent to study participants to be reviewed for accuracy prior to use in this study.

Doing these things should take less than an hour of your time.

Risks:
There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption. When we or any of our investigators look at the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. We will refer to your data with a code that only the principal investigator, Audra Funk, knows links to you. This way, your identifiable information will not be stored with the data. We will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times and then all study documents were destroyed 3 years after we conclude this study.

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Benefits:
Information you provide will help the educational community by bringing awareness to best practices for connections and relationships between teaches and students to increase student effort and success. You could benefit by increasing advocacy and awareness of the important role teachers play in connecting with students for increased student success.

Confidentiality:
This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw:
Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

Contact Information:
You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Audra Funk, at email [redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. Ora Lee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Your Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

_____   _____
Participant Name   Date

_____   _____
Participant Signature   Date

Audra Funk _____   _____
Investigator Name   Date

_____   _____
Investigator Signature   Date

Investigator: Audra Funk; email: [redacted]
c/o: Professor Dr. Bill Boozang;
Concordia University–Portland
2811 NE Holman Street
Portland, Oregon 97221

Appendix D: Table 1

Table 1

Study Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Ethnicity African Amer.(AA); Caucasian (C); Hispanic (H); Other (O)	Gender Male (M) Female (F)	Eighth ELA Years' Experience	Eighth Math Years' Experience	Total Years Teaching Experience
Teacher 1 School 1	H	F	9	0	19
Teacher 2 School 1	H	M	0	8	22
Teacher 1 School 2	C	F	2	0	8
Teacher 2 School 2	C	F	0	2	13
Teacher 3 School 2	H	F	0	5	5
Teacher 1 School 3	C	F	0	3	4
Teacher 2 School 3	C	F	5	0	16
Teacher 3 School 3	AA	F	4	0	8

Table 2

Artifacts

Study Participant	Artifact
Teacher 1 School 1	Tree stump: multi-genre project about a novel
Teacher 2 School 1	2 student presentations of most inspirational person to the student.
Teacher 1 School 2	Multiple letters from former students.
Teacher 2 School 2	2 student presentations of most inspirational person to the student.
Teacher 3 School 2	Student drawing of the word love.
Teacher 1 School 3	Multiple messages from former students.
Teacher 2 School 3	Picture of a former student.
Teacher 3 School 3	Book: Promises and Prayer for Dedicated Teachers.

Table 3

Themes

Themes	Subthemes	Number of mentions	Number of study participants
Relationships	Relationship, Connect, Relationships	24	8
Support	Home, Administration, Counselors, Resources	36	8
Teacher Practices	Expectations, Routine	15	8
Basic Student Needs	Need, Eat, Parent	64	8

Note: Themes are represented in the first column. Subthemes grouped to form the theme are in the second column. The number of times the theme was mentioned is represented in the third column. The number of study participants who mentioned the theme are in the fourth column.

Table 4

Artifacts Subthemes

Subthemes	Number of mentions	Number of study participants
Connect	3	2
Relationship	4	3

Note: Subthemes involving artifacts are represented in the first column. The number of times the subtheme was mentioned is represented in the second column. The number of study participants who mentioned the subtheme are in the third column.

Table 5

Question 1: Relationships Impact Effort

Subthemes	Number of mentions	Number of study participants
Relationship	9	6
Behavior	2	2
Support	3	3

Note: Subthemes involving question #1 are represented in the first column. The number of times the subtheme was mentioned is represented in the second column. The number of study participants who mentioned the subtheme are in the third column.

Table 6

Question 2: Teacher Leadership

Subthemes	Number of mentions	Number of study participants
Relationship	4	2
Classroom Management	7	3
Expectation	3	3
Routine	2	2

Note: Subthemes involving question #2 are represented in the first column. The number of times the subtheme was mentioned is represented in the second column. The number of study participants who mentioned the subtheme are in the third column.

Table 7

Question 3: Relationships Differences

Subthemes	Number of mentions	Number of study participants
Different	7	7
Yes	8	8
Eat	7	2

Note: Subthemes involving question #3 are represented in the first column. The number of times the subtheme was mentioned is represented in the second column. The number of study participants who mentioned the subtheme are in the third column.

Table 8

Question 4: Professional Relationships

Subthemes	Number of mentions	Number of study participants
Like	15	2
Respect	7	2
Relationship	4	3
Effort	2	2

Note: Subthemes involving question #4 are represented in the first column. The number of times the subtheme was mentioned is represented in the second column. The number of study participants who mentioned the subtheme are in the third column.

Table 9

Question 5: Humor, Play, and Laughter

Subthemes	Number of mentions	Number of study participants
Humor	3	3
Laugh	20	6

Note: Subthemes involving question #5 are represented in the first column. The number of times the subtheme was mentioned is represented in the second column. The number of study participants who mentioned the subtheme are in the third column.

Table 10

Question 6: Teacher Practice and Advocacy

Subthemes	Number of mentions	Number of study participants
Eat	2	2
Structure	3	2
Routine	6	3
Need	9	2
Expectation	4	3

Note: Subthemes involving question #6 are represented in the first column. The number of times the subtheme was mentioned is represented in the second column. The number of study participants who mentioned the subtheme are in the third column.

Table 11

Question 7: Obstacles

Subthemes	Number of mentions	Number of study participants
Obstacle	4	2
Parent	12	5

Note: Subthemes involving question #7 are represented in the first column. The number of times the subtheme was mentioned is represented in the second column. The number of study participants who mentioned the subtheme are in the third column.

Table 12

Question 8: Strategies

Subthemes	Number of mentions	Number of study participants
Homework	2	2
Work	4	2

Note: Subthemes involving question #8 are represented in the first column. The number of times the subtheme was mentioned is represented in the second column. The number of study participants who mentioned the subtheme are in the third column.

Table 13

Question 9: Eighth Grade Math and Reading State Accountability

Subthemes	Number of mentions	Number of study participants
Teaching	3	2
Parent	2	2
Read	18	2
math	5	2

Note: Subthemes involving question #9 are represented in the first column. The number of times the subtheme was mentioned is represented in the second column. The number of study participants who mentioned the subtheme are in the third column.

Table 14

Question 10: Increase Knowledge: Economically Disadvantaged Needs

Subthemes	Number of mentions	Number of study participants
Need	32	8
Support Service	9	7
PLC	14	8
Observe	16	4
Training	9	3
Administrator	7	6
Counselor	17	8

Note: Subthemes involving question #10 are represented in the first column. The number of times the subtheme was mentioned is represented in the second column. The number of study participants who mentioned the subtheme are in the third column.

Table 15

Additions and Recommendations

Subthemes	Number of mentions	Number of study participants
Know	41	7

Note: Subthemes involving additions and recommendations are represented in the first column. The number of times the subtheme was mentioned is represented in the second column. The number of study participants who mentioned the subtheme are in the third column.

Appendix F: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

> As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does "fraudulent" mean?

"Fraudulent" work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one's own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate's final work without full and complete documentation.

What is "unauthorized" assistance?

"Unauthorized assistance" refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

• Use of unauthorized notes or another's work during an online test
• Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
• Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
• Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.

2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.

Audra J. Funk
Digital Signature

Audra J. Funk
Name (Typed)

October 9, 2019
Date