1-1-2008

Student -teacher relationships and their effect on student achievement at the secondary level

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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2008

ABSTRACT

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by

Cheryl Dix Modlin

M.A.T., University of South Carolina, 1994
B.S., University of South Carolina, 1992

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education
Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning

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December 2008

ABSTRACT

Previous research has demonstrated that adolescent learning increases with a proactive type of student-teacher relationship. However, due to the lack of common expectations for a positive student-teacher relationship, a disconnection occurs for some students, who then may become disengaged at school and may not reach their full potential academically, socially, or developmentally. This mixed method sequential, exploratory design focused on a Midwestern secondary school of approximately 250 students. The disconnection between students and teachers was addressed by investigating positive student-teacher relationships; student achievement; and the connection between student-teacher relationships and achievement. Qualitative data were collected using focus groups of students and teachers who explored characteristics of positive student-teacher relationships and of student achievement. These data were then analyzed using data reduction that selected, focused, simplified, abstracted, and transformed the data as they appeared in field notes. Quantitative data were then collected using a survey that examined student perceptions of student-teacher relationships and their potential effect on student achievement. Descriptive analysis of survey data revealed themes that were then contrasted against the qualitative data. The overarching theme that emerged from the triangulated data suggested most students perceived that a relationship existed between student achievement and relationships they had with teachers, while most teachers' perceptions were in contrast to the students' perceptions. The research demonstrated that if students and teachers connect in the classroom with a more unified approach to building and sustaining positive student-teacher relationships, a more-prepared individual emerges contributing to the community, the workforce and society at large.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving and supportive husband Brad. Your unbelievable patience, understanding and belief in me as a person, educator, student, wife, stepmother, and now mother make me believe in myself more than I ever knew I could. Thank you for the encouragement, nearly guilt free time away and peace you gave me to finish my schooling. To my stepson Jake, who exhibited patience and hardly complained when I had to study or write. I hope to instill in you a sense of drive, confidence and desire to keep learning. There is nothing you can't do if you put your mind to it; you have many gifts yet to explore. To my son Chase, your debut into the world was classic in timing and manner and clearly indicative of the strength and courage I already know you have. My focus is you now and raising you to be a man of character and a life long learner. To my mother, DiAnn, who always believed I could and should earn my doctorate, here it is. Thanks to my father, Larry, who is a great cheerleader of all that I do. To my sister, Cathy, who models for me what is really important in the journey of life. I love and thank each of you from the bottom of my heart.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I cannot fathom a more committed individual than my advisor and committee chair Dr. Nathan Long. He has demonstrated mentoring and teaching excellence that is unparalleled in my experience. He says, “With choice comes sacrifice” and he is right. I am a better educator, academic, writer and person for knowing and learning from him. My most sincere and humble appreciation for the time, energy, commitment, laughter and compassion it took to get me through. He is extraordinary to me.

To Dr. Howard Carlson who served as my first doctoral instructor and my content specialist on my committee. Thank you for your support, encouragement and expertise.

To my first real teacher of education, Dr. Sarah Jane Byars, who completes this program along side me. What an amazing journey we have traveled from the Alpha of my career to the Omega of yours. Your wisdom and guidance over the years has been abundant and I am eternally grateful for the time and energy you have put into me since the beginning. I am a better person for it, thank you.

To my partner in academics and in friendship, Dr. Nicole Roorda. I thank you for your expertise and camaraderie. There isn’t a finer person to have joined me on this ride.

I would like to thank my colleagues past and present at Heartland AEA 11 in Johnston, Iowa for the guidance, encouragement and brilliance; Dr. Sarah Brown, Steve Fey, Connor Hood, David Johnson, Sheila King, Becca Lindahl, Dr. Andrea Matheson, Dr. Brad Niebling, Dr. Alecia Rahn-Blakesley, Dr. Gary Ratigan,

Sue Schirmer and family, Mary Schmidt, Susan Schrader, Dr. Tom Stinard, Dr. Dave Tilly, Kevin Vidergar, Stephaney Jones-Vo, Judy Walahoski and Tinna Walberg. You are some of the finest educational minds and true friends in the world.

I would like to thank Ms. Nancy Cox whose willingness to support me along this journey with friendship, time, editing and formatting was without limits and completely selfless.

I would like to thank Mr. John Carver, Principal of Badger Creek Secondary School* (pseudonym) for his abundant energy, passion, drive, flexibility and open mindedness. You have been a role model, respected colleague and an incredible support to me in my pursuit of this degree.

I would like to thank the Badger Creek Community School District, Superintendent Greg DeTimmerman, Director of School Improvement Sharon Garvey, Secondary Counselor Rod Beem, Teacher Leader Brent Jorth, and the entire secondary staff and student body. Without your willingness, enthusiasm and honesty I could not have pursued this research in the manner in which it was meant to be pursued.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Why do some students and teachers connect on a personal level and some do not? Does a positive relationship with teachers make a difference for students in the long run? In the past, the student-teacher relationship was one of a hierarchical nature. The teacher was in complete control and students more often than not complied with the directives given. Through evolution of the educational system, research, and societal changes it has become evident that adolescent learning increases with a proactive type of student-teacher relationship. According to Mitra (2003), when students and teachers begin to interact with one another on a personal level and learn together the traditional formality of the environment opens the doors to more productive learning and an appreciation for one another as people. A problem in American high schools specifically is that educators can do a better job of connecting with students on a personal level.

Sergiovanni (2005) suggested that being connected to the school itself and others at the school is a way to feel connected to oneself and know one matters, belongs, and is valued (p. 130). To feel connected to the school is critical for students at any level but during adolescence there are different impacts that come with maturity, development and personal decision making. “In general, students who do not feel an attachment to school personnel tend to have poorer attendance and to drop out more than students who perceive that they are part of a supportive school environment” (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko & Fernandez, 1989, p.118).

While states calculate graduation rates differently approximately 1.2 million students in the United States or 30% of the class of 2006 did not graduate (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2006). The student-teacher relationship is the most critical factor in establishing a learning environment conducive to learning (Pigford, 2001) and this alarming statistic suggests improvement is needed in the area of fostering relationships as a mechanism to prevent students from dropping out. Some students may not reach their full potential academically, socially, or developmentally if they are disengaged at school and unable to relate to the adults in the learning environment. Klem and Connell (2004) stated that "as many as 40-60 percent of all students are chronically disengaged from school" (p. 262).

The premise of teacher ambivalence to students on a personal level can have lasting consequences such as poor attendance, dropping out, or suicide (Clarke, 2003). If students become dispondent academically or personally, tragedies may occur particularly if no one knows the student well enough to see the warning signs. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2004) stated that students can become truant, isolated, or act out in efforts to display desperate behavior for the purpose of seeking help from an adult. Poor academic performance, lack of interest in activities or the use of alcohol or drugs are often signs a student is struggling and in need. When teachers know their students well enough to identify potential problems educators can intervene before more serious issues develop. High school students who feel connected to their teachers, learning, and environment will be more likely to come to school, want to

succeed personally and academically, and have a greater chance of success in life beyond high school (Michigan Department of Education, 2007).

In the last 15 years, many American high schools have made efforts to reduce the anonymity felt by students and increase personalization in their buildings. Since shortly after the Columbine shooting, in 1999, 10% of the 420,000 students attend schools in Chicago which have been created with the sole purpose of making schools smaller, to better connect with students and alleviate anonymity (Klonsky & Klonsky, 1999). Each of these schools has its own curricular focus or theme and the commitment to know each student as an individual. Further evidence is demonstrated by the fact that many high schools currently have advisory programs, smaller learning communities, freshman academies, career academies, or other programming that manipulate a traditional high school schedule so there are greater opportunities for relationship building and enhanced academic support.

The 2003 video, *Through New Eyes*, based on Adlai Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois, illustrates two high schools and the freshman experience in each school. The first school attempts to portray a sterile and unwelcoming environment, perhaps a typical experience for some high school students, the second school has an extremely personalized environment, demonstrating over 23 strategies and techniques implemented school-wide to ensure the success of each student academically and personally. Examples include an adult advisor and adult mentor for each student, a student mentor for groups of students, supported study sessions and learning centers, frequent monitoring of grades and progress in classes, multiple methods of

communication with parents, and a reward system incorporating clear expectations for each student.

Unfortunately, not all schools have the resources, staff, or support to change the schedule or adopt new programs and consequently students may not get the personal attention and support they need to be successful. High schools are sometimes very large, and students can get lost in the shuffle. New high school students are often placed into unfamiliar large buildings, with multiple classes and teachers and very little of the individual support that they may have been used to in middle school. By the time students get to ninth grade, many are so disaffected due to lack of connectivity that the primary tools of standards-based reform, high expectations, and rigorous coursework are not enough to motivate and engage students (Steinberg & Allen, 2002). Conversely, just because a high school is small or in a small community, assumptions might be falsely made that everyone knows everyone, so educators may have a false sense of connectedness to their students. For example, just because a teacher knows a family name in town or taught a sibling of a current student does not necessitate a strong bond to the student currently under the teacher's tutelage.

Another challenge to connecting with students is the amount of time a teacher has with students, which is a critical factor for relationship building and getting to know students. In some high schools, the unfortunate reality is the teachers' unwillingness or lack of desire to get to know their students personally and make the most of the time they have with them. In a study by Spencer and Boone (2006), students reported that some teachers "enjoy embarrassing you and either can't or won't explain things when you

don't understand"(p.244). Often it is perceived that secondary teachers are more concerned with the content they teach, test scores, and the institution and less about the student as a whole person. Van Huizen, Van Oers, and Wubbles (2005) stated teachers must find a place between the corporate aspects of teaching and themselves as people. For teachers finding middle ground between the professional expectations of curriculum and instruction and using their personality as a tool by which to teach can benefit the student.

This study contributed to the body of knowledge needed to address the problem of student-teacher disconnectedness by clearly articulating the definitions and characteristics of positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement from students and teachers. Additionally, this study gathered data about student perceptions of student-teacher relationships and their potential effect on student achievement. Ideally, this research can assist high schools in assessing the current state of student-teacher relationships by providing research to support potential areas of improvement within those schools between students and teachers as well as increasing student achievement.

Problem Statement

Every 3 years in Iowa, a survey is administered to secondary students in the majority of school districts across the state. Since 1999, the survey has been administered to almost all of the 6th-, 8th-, and 11th- grade students. As a result, the Iowa Youth Survey has become a "census" survey that reflects the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of Iowa youth. While the Iowa Youth Survey indicates an improving trend since 1999 in the school staff and student support construct, the schools in the local Area Education

Agency (AEA) boundaries reported in 2005 that only 44.6% of students believed teachers cared about them and that they had someone to turn to with a problem. AEA's are intermediate agencies between the Iowa Department of Education and the local districts and currently in Iowa there are ten AEA's. The state of Iowa trend data on the Iowa Youth Survey is approximately the same as the AEA regional data on the school staff and student support construct (Iowa Department of Education, 2006).

The Iowa Youth Survey findings demonstrate that there seems to be a personal disconnect between high school students and teachers as reported by the students. Without proper research and investigation, this personal disconnect, if allowed to go unchecked, could lead to a decline in student achievement and grades and could potentially lead to an increase in poor attendance and dropout rates (Wehlage et al, 1989). The personal disconnect between students and teachers could be a result of a variety of factors that could ultimately impact student achievement. Some of those factors may include school size, overpopulation and increased class sizes, the evolving role of guidance counselors, and the increased responsibilities of teachers.

If educators and students can clearly define a positive student-teacher relationship and what it means for a student to have success in high school, it will be easier to connect the dots between these two related concepts. Understanding where this personal disconnect comes from seems to necessitate understanding what common expectations teachers and students have regarding their relationship with one another. Investigating common expectations may translate into a first step to fostering successful student-

teacher relationships, but more importantly, it may help shed light on where possible connections and disconnections exist.

According to the University of North Carolina's Counseling Center (2007), "Each person begins a relationship with his or her hopes, expectations, and ideals. Unfortunately, some of these are unrealistic, unfair, and even self-defeating. They may also doom the relationship to be unsatisfying and to eventually fail". Like any type of relationship it takes two entities with common goals and a cooperative approach to make it successful. Fosnot (2005) stated that a relationship based on cooperation is defined as "striving to attain a common goal while coordinating one's own feelings and perspectives with a consciousness of another's feelings and perspectives" (p. 137). The motivation for cooperation is based on trust and mutual affection that has developed between the student and teacher. In a school setting, if there is a lack of common goals, lack of shared experience, or lack of student voice then one could only assume there has been a significant communication breakdown, which could only lead to an unsuccessful relationship. Including students in decision making at school has proven to engage isolated students by providing them with the opportunity to be heard and have ownership in their schools (Johnson, 1991).

Thus far, commonality of expectations for a successful student-teacher relationship does not exist in current literature. The design of this study is exploratory with the hope of developing common expectations and criteria for positive student-teacher relationships to assist in filling the research gap. If both students and teachers were to see a connection between efforts to develop and sustain relationships with one

another and make a commitment to doing their part, then student connectedness could increase and student achievement could follow suit.

Similarly, an alignment of teacher and student values regarding student achievement and what it means to have success in high school could lend itself to a more focused approach for students, teachers, and parents alike. Again, there are gaps in the literature as to a consistent definition or idea of what student achievement actually means. For adults in the educational community, such as teachers and administrators, test scores, number of students proficient, and graduation rate are a few of the measures by which student achievement is defined, per the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB; Public Law 107-120). There appears to be a gap in the research, however, with regard to how *students* define student achievement and success in high school. Some students have defined what success would look like *after* high school rather than during high school. For example, in a study by Masconi and Emmet (2003) a values curriculum was explored. Students shared their perceptions of what they perceived success to be and the traditional Western view of success encompassed material things such as money, job security, high salary, property ownership, and leisure activities (p. 68). While the study's conclusion was that these things did not ultimately lead to satisfaction with one's life, it did give insight into what a population of high school students found to be relevant in terms of success. Thus, the design of this study was exploratory with the hope of developing common expectations and criteria for student achievement to assist in filling the research gap.

There has been a weak connection made between student-teacher relationships and student achievement. With little research on common definitions, expectations or criteria for what encompasses a positive student-teacher relationship between students and teachers further investigation is necessary.

Nature of Study

This study used a mixed method sequential, exploratory design in a Midwestern secondary school of approximately 250 students. Qualitative data collection through teacher and student focus groups provided characteristics and definitions of positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement, respectively. The study followed up with quantitative survey instrumentation, developed by the International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE) and the researcher, regarding students' perceptions of the relationships they have with their teachers and the impact those relationships may have on student achievement. This design was appropriate, as it solidified common definitions during the qualitative phase of the study through focus groups of students and teachers. Once the students and teachers clearly defined positive student-teacher relationships and identified how each group measures student achievement, then the current reality of those relationships, as perceived by the students, was measured using the Student-Teacher Relationship Survey. It is critical for students and teachers to have a common understanding of both the characteristics of positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement so that common goals and expectations can be set for all stakeholders.

During the qualitative phase of the study, student focus groups had a sample size of 14 and teacher focus groups included 19 members of the staff. During the quantitative phase of the study, a current reality of student-teacher relationships using online survey instrumentation was determined using the Student-Teacher Relationship Survey. The survey was administered to a Midwestern secondary school with an enrollment of approximately 250 students in Grades 7-12.

The study contributed to the body of knowledge needed to address this problem by answering three questions. First, how do students and teachers define a positive student-teacher relationship? Next, how do students and teachers define student achievement? Lastly, what level of connection, if any, exists between positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement?

In order to answer Questions 1 and 2, the researcher collected qualitative data about student and teacher characteristics and definitions of positive student-teacher relationships and of student achievement followed by a survey examining student perceptions about how positive student-teacher relationships affect student achievement. In addressing Question 3, the measurement tool was a quantitative survey designed by the ICLE and the researcher. The researcher collected both qualitative and quantitative data and determined to reject the null hypothesis, which states there is no connection between student-teacher relationships and student achievement. After a complete review of the data, the study identifies possible ways to enhance student-teacher relationships for increased success in high school. A more detailed discussion of the methodology will be addressed in chapter 3.

Purpose

The researcher used a mixed method sequential, exploratory design to initiate a study of high school students' and teachers' definition of positive student-teacher relationships and the definition of student achievement. This process created a more universal definition for both terms. From those definitions a student survey was conducted to determine if a relationship exists between student and teacher determined definitions of positive student-teacher relationships and academic achievement.

Practitioners can consider the implications of this study in the following ways. First, high school faculty and staff could examine and analyze their student perception data in a structured way and set goals and create an action plan for continuous improvement in relationship building. Secondly, findings from this study can assist other high schools in examining their current practices around personalization and a student focused system on their quest for increased student achievement. Thirdly, practitioners could consider implementing different programming approaches to improve personalization at their high school and measure change in student perceptions over time.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The theory of school membership (Wehlage, et al.1989) described the four components of school membership: (a) attachment–personal investment in meeting the expectations of others, caring what others think, and positive reciprocal teacher and student relations; (b) commitment–complying with a school's rules and demands; (c) involvement–active participation in school activities and tasks; (d) belief–valuing and trusting the institution. When considering the four components of school membership at a

high school there is a critical role adults play in the school environment. When adults demonstrate their personal and professional commitment by supporting students academically and personally, students are more willing to participate in the learning environment and exceed school expectations. This reciprocal relationship fosters successful and rewarding experiences for the student and the adult (Wehlage et al.,p. 114).

To fully understand Wehlage et al.'s (1989) theory of school membership one must examine each of the four elements more closely. According to Hirschi's (1969) definition, *social bonding* describes a social-psychological state or outcome in which a student exhibits the four elements of attachment, commitment, and involvment, and belief in the norms, activities, and people of an institution. The first element*, attachment* refers to when individuals have a personal stake in meeting the expectations of others and rising to those expectations because, they genuinely care what other people think of them and their behavior. The idea of attachment is one that is reciprocal. If an individual does not care what others think then it is easy for him or her to begin to feel isolated and eventually disconnected to the instituion (Whelege). In a high school setting it is common for students who do not have previously established relationships or other connections to become defensive and hostile and portray an "I don't care" attitude when, in fact, they do care but are struggling to make the initial connections with others, a situation that manifests into this defense mechanism.

Secondly*, commitment* as described by Wehlage et al. (1989) is "expressed through conformity to school rules and demands because continued participation now and

in the future provides rewards" (p. 115). The logical progression of events such as the sequence of classes or enduring certain inflexible policies and procedures to reach an end goal are ways to characterize the idea of commitment. Most students will tolerate the practical approach to graduation; however, some students who are less goal oriented or do not readily see what the next step after high school is may be less likely to endure unattractive instituional practices in order to graduate.

Next, the element of *involvement* according to Wehlage et al. (1989) is the participation in activities which are school related. The more time spent on cocurricular activities the less likely some students will be drawn to outside activities that may lead to inappropriate or illegal activities that are competing for the students' time. A challenge for some schools is the range of offerings of cocurricular activities. If the options are limited then a student may be less interested, and conversely, if there is a myriad of activities a student would be more likely to find something of interest or a passion to persue.

The last element of social bonding is *belief* (Whelage et al., 1989) that underlies the essence of social bonding. This is the notion that the student believes that the school will lead him or her to achieve a goal that will lead to a better life or a payoff in the end. If there is no belief in the institution's purpose for the individual then the concept of social bonding fails. If the student believes that schooling is a means to an end, it is more likely that the student will be connected to others and ultimately graduate.

The four elements of social bonding–attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief in the norms, activities, and people of an institution–are the foundation and theory

by which high schools can base their approach to increasing positive student-teacher relationships and developing a more personalized learning environment for each student.

While this theory is soundly based, the researcher investigated the perspectives of one Iowa high school in relationship to this theory. The purpose of the exploratory design is to determine the potential gap in the students' and teachers' perspectives of what constitutes a positive student-teacher relationship and by what criteria, student achievement is measured. The possibility exists that students and teachers may have different thoughts and ideas on these two critical topics, thus an exploration is necessary. Once commonalities or gaps are clarified the researcher will be able to draw possible conclusions as to the connection between positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement.

Additional components which could apply to a positive student-teacher relationship are reciprocal honesty and trust, respectful and supportive interactions between students and teachers, and a sense of humor on both sides of the equation (Mitra, 2003; Spencer & Boon, 2006). Teachers also must recognize the need to set personal and professional boundaries for themselves and understand their role as mentor and supporter, as well as being the facilitator of learning for each student. There is a failure of educators to create a "clear and enforceable code of conduct for teachers" (Barrett, Headley, Stovall & White, 2006, p.422) which is suprising given the national attention to recent cases of misconduct, particularly involving criminal relationships with students. This type of relationship is clearly a conflict of interest for the practioner as well as a boundary violation that puts the student at risk for emotional or physical harm (p. 424).

Recognizing compromising situations and using common sense usually prevails when teachers find themselves in gray situations according to Davidson (2006).

The researcher's hypothesis and null hypothesis are as follows:

Ho1: There is no significant connection between the relationships a high school student has with teachers and student achievement.

Ha1: There is a significant connection between the relationships a high school student has with teachers and student achievement.

When students and teachers have well developed relationships around mutual respect, belonging, and a desire for what is best for one other, the students will be more engaged in their learning and their future.

For this study a mixed method approach was conducted and the study gave priority to the qualitative phase. Focus groups of teachers and students defined and articulated characteristics of both positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement. Gaining a clear and concise definition of positive student-teacher realtionships from the vantage point of both the student and the teacher may help bridge the gap in developing and sustaining those relationships in the future, which, according to Whelege et al. (1989), is the first and most pivotal component of school membership.

The quantitative phase encompasses a student perception survey that was administered to determine if in fact students believe a connection exists between positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement. The findings from the quantitative phase assesses the school's current reality of student-teacher relationships from the student's perspective. By analyzing the school's current student perceptions, insight was

gleaned into areas of strength and suggestions for improvement to begin enhancing the components of school membership. From the newly developed common definitions of positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement measures.

a clear set of common goals could be identified for the future of the schools efforts to personalize the learning environment and increase student achievement. The definitions coupled with the findings from the student perception survey give clear targets for improvement as well as points of data to measure progress over time.

Operational Definitions

For this study the following operational definitions were used.

Building leadership team: each K-12 building in Iowa is required by state statute to have a team of teachers and administrator(s) who meet regularly to process professional development needs, student data, climate and culture, and other building level issues.

Heartland Area Education Agency 11: is an accredited intermediate regional service provider between the Iowa Department of Education and local school districts in central Iowa. Heartland AEA serves 65 districts and is the largest of 10 AEAs in the state.

Personalization: as defined by Clarke (2003), is,

> A learning process in which schools help students assess their own talents and aspirations, plan a pathway toward their own purpose, work cooperatively with others on challenging tasks, maintain a record of their explorations, and demonstrate their learning against clear standards in a wide variety of media, all with the close support of adult mentors and guides. (p. 15)

Postsecondary readiness: implies the skills and competencies needed for the next phase of a student's journey beyond high school (e.g., 2 or 4 year college, technical school, workforce, military, homemaker/parent).

Programming approaches used to personalize a high school: could include, but are not limited to the following: advisory programs, smaller learning communities, career guidance, mentoring programming, personalized learning plans, adult advocates, differentiated instruction, and student representation on decision-making groups.

Student engagement: is defined by Skinner and Belmont (1993) as the situation that occurs when children show sustained behavioral involvement in learning activities accompanied by a positive emotional tone. They select tasks at the border of their competencies, initiate action when given the opportunity, and exert intense effort and concentration in the implementation of learning tasks; they show generally positive emotions during ongoing action including enthusiasm, optimism, curiosity, and interest.

A student-focused school: as defined by the Iowa Department of Education (2006), promotes and sustains a culture that values the diversity of students and their educational experiences. It creates a system of beliefs, policies, and structures that supports the development of relationships to advance learning.

Theory of school membership: is described by Wehlage et al. (1989) as describes the four components of school membership: (a) attachment–personal investment in meeting the expectations of others, caring what others think, and positive reciprocal teacher and student relations; (b) commitment–complying with a school's rules and

demands; (c) involvement–active participation in school activities and tasks; (d) belief–valuing and trusting the institution.

Assumptions

The core assumptions made by the researcher are as follows: (a) The participants, both teachers and students, were willing participants; (b) The role of the researcher as a professional learning and leadership consultant for Heartland AEA 11 will not inhibit either the student or teacher participants during the focus groups, the survey administration, or the single case study; (c) The participants provided honest data and were candid during focus group sessions.

Limitations

Limitations of the study could be threats to quality as the researcher currently serves the district as a professional learning and leadership consultant with Heartland AEA 11 and began working with the high school's Building Leadership Team (BLT) during the 2007-2008 school year. The researcher is a third-party consultant who provides support to the district as requested. The work is concentrated in the areas of structured school improvement, instructional design, and the implementation of advisory programming. The researcher and the high school's BLT, including administrators, have had opportunities to dialogue, coach, interact, plan, implement, and evaluate collaboratively. Though the relationship with the school had been strictly with the adults in the building, depending on how the researcher communicates the ideas about the study and the final data findings, an unintentional bias could be perceived on behalf of the teachers. The researcher made every effort towards objectivity when collecting and

analyzing data. Data collection occurred during the last weeks of May 2008, thus perceptions of some students and teachers may be reflective of the culmination of the academic school year.

The Student-Teacher Relationship Survey is a hybrid survey using questions from the Learning Relationship survey developed by the ICLE, modified with permission by using the researcher's original questions. The survey uses a Likert scale and the preferred response is a high number on the Likert scale; this could be perceived as "a correct answer" thus leading the student to think consistently in a more positive direction, which could potentially cloud a true response. All students have multiple teachers and as they reflected on the survey question their opinions might be biased due to one experience with one teacher that could have caused them to respond with bias towards all teachers.

The researcher collected data online during a typical week in May 2008 through English classes. The mobile computer lab or Computer on Wheels (COW) rotated amongst the English teachers so that each student completed the survey during their English class. The English teacher monitored the students in the English classes for appropriate student behavior and independent responses to the survey, rather than collaborative responses.

Scope and Delimitations

The study is delimited to approximately 23 staff members and 250 students in a suburban Midwest high school spanning Grades 7-12. The sample does represent similar high schools of its size within central Iowa and can be generalized, in this respect, to similar areas within the state. The staff members were chosen based on their employment

in the selected secondary school during the 2007-2008 school year. There was a sampling of approximately 14 students who participated in two focus groups. Students were selected randomly from the student information systems enrollment, with the exception of seniors who were unavailable to participate. Each of the 23 staff members was invited to participate in one of the two focus groups. Nineteen staff were available and consented to participate and 88% of the student population took the survey.

Significance of the Study

The critical nature of positive student-teacher relationships can no longer be secondary to curriculum, instruction, or assessment when looking at the key components of student learning. Literature supports the concept that positive student-teacher relationships are the cornerstone of student engagement. Blum (2005) contended that in the era of high stakes testing and accountability, school connectedness could be perceived as a soft approach to school improvement; however, connectedness has a significant effect on student achievement for which schools are held accountable. For students to stay in school, attend school on a regular basis, and have successful experiences while they are there, it is incumbent on the teacher to make overt efforts with each student to enhance the personal connection with the ultimate goal of increasing student achievement.

Practitioners can consider the implications of this study in the following ways. First, high school faculty and staff could examine and analyze their student perception data in a structured way and set goals and create an action plan for continuous improvement in relationship building. Secondly, findings from this study can assist high

schools in examining their current practices around personalization and a student focused system in their quest for increased student achievement. Thirdly, practitioners could consider implementing vehicles to improve personalization at their high school and measure change in student perceptions over time.

The potential benefits to this study would be that a group of high school educators can clearly articulate their own definitions of what a positive student-teacher relationship consists of and determine the current state of student-teacher relationships in their building. Subsequently, they can also determine ways to improve the connection they have with their students toward the intermediate goal of increased student achievement.

Social Change

For students to be considered postsecondary ready, they must first be postsecondary. The goal is having more students stay in school, complete rigorous coursework and graduate. This way they have a greater chance of reaping the benefits of social and emotional growth so they are ready to take on the next phase of their lives.

> Change is not required because the educational system has failed. It needs changing because it is still based on a century-old model that did not emphasize a rigorous and relevant curriculum for all students, but rather one that selected and sorted them. The world today requires a different core of knowledge that all students need for success. The push of global competition, elimination of unskilled jobs, advancements in technology, and the demand for maintaining a middle class has led the public, media, and government to push for higher standards for all students. (Daggett, 2005)

A high school diploma is merely the minimum one must attain. Whether a student chooses a 2 or 4 year college, a technical training program, the military, the workforce, or another option there are skills and competencies that must be attained to maintain a middle-class lifestyle and be a competent, caring and contributing member of society.

The point of a high-quality high school education is to educate the whole person and to help students to think critically, have compassion for others, and get ready to contribute to and be part of a community. "The reality of helping students realize the need for further education or training is part of the high school's curricular responsibility, with the goal of becoming independent and self-sufficient *within* the community at large" (B. Lindahl, personal communication, October 15, 2007). For students to be prepared for this phase of life they must first master critical thinking, communication, and problem solving, which are typically the essential learnings of American K-12 curricula. Students eventually must be able to sustain a living wage and be able to support themselves independently. To that end, K-12 educators must make every possible effort to connect with students and their learning to enhance their success in school so the teachers are better able to produce a highly qualified workforce and more importantly a society of young people who are capable of continuing the cycle of growth and change, which truly is the ultimate goal.

This study discusses in depth the barriers to and benefits of positive student-teacher relationships at the secondary level. In addition, ways to determine student achievement are explored. The methodology by which this study was conducted will be examined, followed by an analysis of the data, and a summary of the findings discovered and conclusions drawn by the researcher.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature review will discuss some of the factors in American high schools that have had a significant impact on student-teacher relationships, followed by a discussion of how current literature indicates that teachers and students define positive student-teacher relationships. Next, the perceptions of student achievement held by stakeholders in education will be examined. Finally, a discussion of the potential connection of student-teacher relationships to student achievement will be explored. The organization of the literature review will correspond directly with the three research questions the researcher attempts to answer in this study. They are as follows:

1. How do students and teachers define a positive student-teacher relationship?

2. How do students and teachers define student achievement?

3. What level of connection exists, if any, between positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement?

The strategies used by the researcher to review the literature include researching peer reviewed scholarly journals; educational psychology primary sources; educational sociology primary sources; curriculum, instruction, and assessment resources; and educational and research instructional texts. All of these were in either electronic format or hard copy. Focused searches for articles published in journals in the fields of education and psychology specific to student-teacher relationships were explored. Citations from individual studies, dissertations, and theses were also examined.

Review of Related Research and Literature

There is a personal disconnect between high school students and teachers in the United States as a result of many factors that ultimately impact student achievement. Some of those factors include, but are not limited to, school size, overpopulation and increased class sizes, the evolving role of guidance counselors, and the increased responsibilities of teachers. This disconnect between students and teachers could lead to a decline in student achievement and/or grade point averages and could potentially lead to an increase in office referrals, poor attendance, and dropout rates. The literature review examines the existing literature in the areas of student-teacher relationships and the potential effect they may have on student achievement.

Factors in Public Education That Have an Impact on Student-Teacher Relationships

> Our schools are not failing--they are obsolete. They foster anonymity and stifle learning by systematically inhibiting those things that are most important: powerful sustained relationships; students' ability to address complex problems individually and as members of a team and to communicate in various ways; and the ability of teachers and administrators to take on increasing responsibility. (Vander Ark, 2002, p. 55)

When considering factors that have potential to affect the student-teacher relationship, school size is at the forefront. In the 1900s there were approximately 160,000 school districts in the United States; today there are approximately 14,500 (Public Purpose, 2007). The decrease in the number of districts is largely for economical reasons designed to reduce the burden on taxpayers, but saving taxpayer money has its own costs for students. Most high school students today are educated in larger school systems and larger high schools. Some reformers would contend that larger high schools offer more and different course selections, opportunities for more and different

cocurricular activities, and potentially better facilities. Patterson (2003) contended that larger schools have increased the number of cocurricular activities that has raised the level of competition in athletics and created a menu of cocurricular options, although it has done little else for students, particularly in the academic arena. There is currently an increasing effort, however, to shrink larger high schools into smaller ones for varied learning opportunities that will result in increased student achievement. While the cost to rebuild physical plants is prohibitive, there are strategies and structures currently in play that can decrease the perceived size of a high school, for example career academies and smaller learning communities. Career academies and smaller learning communities group larger numbers of students into smaller groups by theme, interest, or grade level and ensure students are connected to an adult advocate who is responsible for the support and progress of students in their charge.

According to Johnson (2002), teachers and parents say they believe the smaller school atmosphere generally offers a stronger sense of belonging and more personalized instruction and attention from teachers. Students seem to "flourish both intellectually and personally in a smaller school environment" (Johnson, 2002, p. 354). Similarly, students from a large high school in a study on school size reported 5 years after graduation that they "hated the anonymity of the large schools and that it felt dehumanizing" (Bracey, 1998, p. 406). Additionally, and perhaps at the root of the issue, Noguera (2002) stated that in his study of high school size and the benefits of smaller school approaches, what is most evident is that the students report that they like school, enjoy being there, and feel comfortable confiding in the adults in the learning environment. While some high schools

have found ways to increase the personalization of the learning environment and decrease anonymity of students, many have not.

Currently in Iowa there are 365 public school districts and 357 high schools. Of these high schools, 13 have a student population of 1,600 or more, 53 have a student population between 600 and 1,600 and 291 have a student population of 600 or less (Iowa Department of Education, 2007). Many of the larger high schools and some of the smaller ones in Iowa are implementing programs and structures to decrease student anonymity and isolation. Some of these approaches include smaller learning communities, advisory programs, career academies, freshmen houses, and interdisciplinary teams with the intent to create a more personalized learning environment. Deliberate instructional design tailored for specific students' needs, interest, and ability level is one approach to learning that is embraced by teachers in hopes that the attendance rate will continue to rise, the dropout rate will decrease, student-teacher relationships will be fostered, and overall student achievement will increase. The right mindset must be in place to achieve such lofty goals. As stated in Patterson (2003), meeting student needs rather than trying to control students must be a primary focus for trust to develop between students and teachers. This concept could often be prohibitive in a large school setting because control of students may be the overarching concern.

Another factor that can affect the student-teacher relationship is the evolving role of the guidance counselor. When classroom teachers can assume some of the responsibilities of the guidance counselor and have different topics to discuss with

students other than the content area in which they were trained, relationships between students and teachers begin to form at a different level.

These responsibilities, now being absorbed by teachers in some high schools, reflect a growing issue occurring in the guidance community. Secondary school guidance counselors are overloaded and many have unrealistic caseloads. The American School Counseling Association recommends 100 students per counselor and 300 students as a maximum caseload (Sanoff, 1999). A survey released in 1998 by the National Association for College Admission Counseling found that on average 330 students were assigned to one secondary guidance counselor. Most counselors were trained to counsel students one-on-one or in a group setting on particular issues that adolescents may face during the course of high school. These issues may include body image, alcohol or drug use, family dynamics, bullying, and getting along with peers. Tasks such as standardized test coordination, career counseling, college application processes, course scheduling and registration, family services, specialized assistance to homeless and at-risk students, special education support, and more have placed counselors in an impossible situation to do it all and do it all well.

One area in which many secondary counselors appear to fall short is career counseling. According to the High School Guidance Counseling Report (2004), most high schools offer career tests, vocational presentations, internships, job shadowing experiences, and jobsite visits, an alarmingly low number of students take advantage of these opportunities, however. Perhaps with a focus on career counseling and priority given to this within a curriculum, more students would take advantage of the existing

opportunities. While hiring more guidance counselors or extending a counselor's contract length (Sanoff, 1999) to help alleviate and redistribute responsibility could help, it is cost prohibitive in most schools. Many high schools are looking to the teaching staff to absorb much of this overload. Through advisory programming and smaller learning communities in particular, the classroom teacher can absorb some of the overload from guidance counselors.

While many teachers do a great job of connecting with students on a personal level, many others do not. When teachers "treat students as valuable resources rather than as immature people-with-deficits it can reduce feelings of alienation and prevent dropping out of school" (Smith, Day, Gonzales, & Bell, as cited in Colvin, 2004, p.45). Teachers have the ability and access to make significant differences in the lives of their students particularly with an approach called "distributed counseling" (Gewertz, 2007, p.24). With the right support, professional development, and intent, positive connections between students and teachers can be made that will support students with academics and personal issues. According to Cohen (as cited in Sergiovanni, 2005), teachers should be treated as carefully and celebrated as much as other stakeholder groups, and their sensibilities accommodated and professional needs attended to (p. 112). This includes increased support, resources, and professional development on relationship building with students if needed. Gewertz contended that the relationships with students through distributed counseling cannot just be "soft and fuzzy enhancements of school life, but genuine bonds that enable students to perform at the top of their game" (p. 23). The Chief Executive Officer of the Bronx Lab School in New York, a school known for its

successful advisory programming, said, “If you have trusting relationships, you can demand more of students academically because they know that in addition to the demands we are making, there is the support” (as cited in Gewertz, p. 25).

Empowering teachers to foster relationships and take on additional responsibilities, however, is not without its challenges. Most high school teachers were trained as content experts and not guidance counselors. The idea of building relationships with students must be overt and with an abundance of training and support for teachers. The reality suggests that some guidance counseling duties, such as course selection, registration for classes, career assistance, and personal support are becoming an increasing component of the teacher’s palette of job duties. That is not to say teachers are or should act as counselors or advise students in a manner they are not comfortable with or are unqualified to do. As such, a significant factor that must not be overlooked or underestimated when thinking about implementation of an advisory program or smaller learning community effort is the support that faculty will need in the form of professional development as argued by Galassi, Gulledge, and Cox (1998). Lessons that can help students and teachers connect on a more personal level, like topics such as violence prevention, team building, service learning, sexuality, and career planning, will likely be new to some teachers, and they will need the support of their colleagues and the administration to assist them with new learning. High school teachers who are asked to address topics out of their typical realm of expertise may become resistant, frustrated, and overwhelmed if they are not supported, and this could have negative effects on the

program or sabotage implementation altogether. Thus, attempts to build relationships with students may suffer.

Similar to the increasing demands on secondary counselors are the multitude of expectations for teachers that continue to increase each year. For high school teachers there is a bevy of responsibilities such as teaching multiple sections of multiple courses, staying current with best practice of instruction in each content area, serving on building and district level committees, analyzing formative and summative classroom and building- wide data to make instructional decisions, planning and delivering or engaging in professional development, and participating in professional learning communities, to name a few. This is, of course, above and beyond the regular expectations of lesson and unit planning, instructional delivery, assessment preparation and grading, attendance, parent contacts, conferences, special education support, teacher evaluation processes, and perhaps cocurricular activities for many. The Iowa Teaching Standards require all Iowa teachers to show proficiency in each of the eight standards and 42 criteria to maintain licensure according to the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners (2004). The Iowa Teaching Standards are as follows:

1. Demonstrates ability to enhance academic performance and support for implementation of the school district's student achievement goals.

2. Demonstrates competence in content knowledge appropriate to the teaching position.

3. Demonstrates competence in planning and preparing for instruction.

4. Uses strategies to deliver instruction that meets the multiple learning needs of

students.

5. Uses a variety of methods to monitor student learning.

6. Demonstrates competence in classroom management.

7. Engages in professional growth.

8. Fulfills professional responsibilities established by the school district.

Teachers are overloaded with many responsibilities and relationship building may seem less than a priority to some.

Defining Student-Teacher Relationships

Much of the literature around the definition of student-teacher relationships and the quality of those relationships is in the context of preschool and elementary school. The student-teacher relationship is often viewed as an extension of the child-parent relationship (Davis, 2003); one must recognize the similarity in the characteristics and components that make up the relationship for younger students as virtually the same for older students. Pianta, as cited in Davis (1999), stated that the student-teacher relationship becomes more critical as the child gets older. The teacher's ability to "help children accurately label, manage, and express emotions, experienced in the classroom is significant for the child's socialization and development at any age" (p. 214). Davis (2003) stated that students coming from middle school to high school are often told in middle school how difficult high school will be and how students will be treated less personally than in middle school thus inviting the immediate disconnect between students and teachers as well as the learning environment. As students make the transition from middle school to high school the changes in structure, instruction, and differences in

philosophy students endure highlight the potential systemic issues within a district. Is the traditional high school system set up to encourage or discourage relationships with students? Increases in class size, burgeoning demands on teachers' time, and higher stakes for learning are just a few institutional barriers that can affect student-teacher relationships. Some high school teachers (Oldfather & Thomas as cited in Davis, 1998) feel that being authentic and real with students puts them at a disadvantage with students, and they may have to give up some level of control if the students get to know them as people. This concept speaks to the culture and climate of a high school, which will be explored briefly but is not the focus of this discussion.

When examining student-teacher relationships, the broader concept of relationships within a high school culture must be considered. In a high school many types of relationships exist. One critical relationship is the adult-to-adult relationship, and within that context, some examples could be teacher to teacher, administrator to teacher, administrator to administrator, support staff to certified staff, parent to teacher, and the reciprocal of each. Student behavior is reflective of the modeling observed in the adults around them, thus the adult relationships are paramount to a high school's climate and culture. Collegiality and professionalism are behavioral norms that systems have in place amongst staff. These norms set the tone of the classroom, building, and district and directly affect student achievement (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, pp.88-89). The climate and culture will in turn have a direct effect on the student-teacher connectivity and ultimately to student success. When students see adults treating each other with dignity, respect, collegiality, and humor (Spencer & Boon, 2006), it can be contagious.

School leaders can control the culture and climate of a system just as a teacher can a classroom. As stated by McBrien and Brandt, (1997),

> Some schools are said to have a nurturing environment that recognizes children and treats them as individuals; others may have the feel of authoritarian structures where rules are strictly enforced and hierarchical control is strong. Teaching practices, diversity, and the relationships among administrators, teachers, parents, and students contribute to school climate. (p.89)

The culture and climate of a system, building, or classroom boils down to relationships and how people within the system treat each other. While policies and procedures may be in place systemically, it is the personal interactions that create relationships within the school. It is then incumbent upon school leaders within the high schools to model and demonstrate consistently positive and professional relationships that can and will be fostered by implementing and sustaining professional learning communities of practice. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) described a community of practice as groups of individuals who share a concern, interest, or passion and interact on a regular basis for the purpose of deepening their thinking and problem solving. Professional relationships can grow significantly and informal bonds form when high school personnel are given the opportunity to work together around a common issue relating to their students. When the common thread revolves around students and their success, great gains can result (Du Four, 2004).

The aforementioned speaks directly about the adults in the building and their interactions with each other. While adult interactions are critical, consideration needs to be given to the students and their opportunities to have ownership of decisions made within the school. When considering the climate and culture of an organization, leaders

need to ensure that each stakeholder has a voice and multiple methods for that voice to be heard. In a high school it is paramount to include the voice of those most affected by decisions, the students.

An avenue to help foster positive student-teacher relationships by incorporating student participation in needs assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation of school improvement efforts has proven to enhance those efforts, improve climate and culture, and solidify student-teacher relationships. Cushman espoused that when adults show they believe teenagers' interests matter, they reap a payoff in terms of higher student attendance and achievement (2006). In a study by Mitra (2003) student voice was heard loud and clear. This study incorporated students from beginning to end when students and teachers worked together to form partnerships to explore curriculum and instruction and improve the culture and climate at a struggling high school. Whitman High School was awarded a grant to launch a 3 year reform effort to improve graduation rate and teacher abandonment. By incorporating students in examining the problems and seeking solutions the staff and students at Whitman High School began to see each other differently and break down existing barriers through focus groups and community conversations and a deeper understanding of each other was gleaned on the part of students and teachers. Four themes were identified as areas to improve through the needs assessment as part of the reform efforts: (a) improving the school's reputation, (b) increasing counseling and information resources for incoming ninth-graders, (c) improving communication between students and teachers, (d) raising the quality of teaching. After the students presented the improvement areas to the whole faculty, they

formed a student group to help address these issues and called it Student Forum (Mitra, p.300). With the purpose of improving student teacher communication, relationships, and understanding of each other's perspectives, the students developed two types of activities to help lessen the gap between students and teachers. Students joined the activities that teachers were conducting to address reform, for example, curricular meetings and professional development. This allowed students to gain a better understanding of the inner workings of the school and the teachers' perspectives. Similarly, teachers participated in student lead reform activities like tours of the neighborhoods and community forums to learn from the student and better understand the students' perspectives.

Through this two-pronged approach at Whitman High School, and after many hours of conversation and a significant amount of time invested, the teachers and students began to see each other differently and on a more informal and personal level. Because of the time and commitment of both the teachers and the students, an entirely new appreciation for each other evolved. Mitra (2003) contended having financial and emotional support for adults and students throughout these processes was critical to the reform effort's success, and change does not occur in a vacuum.

This study is critical when examining student-teacher relationships in that it demonstrates one school's approach to knock down the walls between students and teachers because it became apparent that students were not learning and teachers were leaving in droves. Students and teachers both reported that there was usually a communication gap between the students and teachers, a lack of understanding of the

other person's perspective or background, and general misunderstanding on a personal level between students and teachers.

Mitra (2003), Oldfather, and Thomas (1998) disagreed that when students and teachers get to know one another on a personal level that barriers are removed, positive relationships are formed, and critical learning can finally take place. There is limited information gathered on the perspective of Oldfather and Thomas that discusses how teachers feel being authentic and real with students puts them at a disadvantage with students, and they may have to give up some level of control if the students get to know them as people (Oldfather & Thomas as cited in Davis, 1998).

In 1997-1998 a qualitative study was conducted that explored the relationships between at-risk high school youth and their mentors in an urban area of Los Angeles. The mentoring program, Project RESCUE (Reaching Each Student's Capacity Utilizing Education), connected at-risk youth with local firefighters. The at-risk youth were from an area of high crime and violence and of varying cultures and socioeconomic strata. Open- ended questions were asked of the student mentees at the beginning of the program and after a year in the program. Two of the adult mentors were also interviewed, both at the start of the program and again after a year in the program. At the beginning of the program the youth were asked, "What kind of relationship would you like to have with your mentor?" Some responses from the youth included: "Not so tight," "Full of trust, I can trust him; he can trust me. Reliable", and "Fun, close confidential person to talk to." When asked to "describe the perfect mentor," the participants shared the following, "The same personality", "Responsible but still can have fun", "Not boring-not wild, but fun

adventurous", "Very outgoing", "Honest", "Always going to be there when you need them", "Can talk with them on my own level", and one youth participant said,

> A perfect mentor would be someone you could always talk to; someone you could ask them for advice, and they would always give you the best advice. And in the future when you're grown up, you could look back and say 'they really helped me; they've really been there and a great role model.' (pp.292-293)

Though this study is not in a school setting, it identifies what one group of teenagers believe are the characteristics and qualities they want and need in a positive relationship with an adult. If one could make the parallel to a school setting to realize that teachers are mentors and role models, then these same characteristics would apply to an educational staff at a high school.

The mentors in this study were of different cultures, and though new to being a formal mentor, both had mentored many youth in their adult lives both in a professional and personal setting. Both wanted to give back to the community and make a difference in the lives of youth. They identified goals they wanted to accomplish with each young person, and they ranged from getting in shape physically, mentally, and emotionally to giving the opportunity to grow and become a more productive citizen and a more productive student to developing confidence and assertive behavior through modeling and seeing how professionals behave in public (de Anda, 2001). They identified what they wanted to accomplish with their mentee but did not specify how they envisioned the mentor-mentee relationship to be. The study was followed up with four case examples from the RESCUE program that highlight the benefits and prosocial outcomes and developmental growth that occurred for each of the four youth described.

One of the powerful aspects of this study is that it demonstrates, as does the Mitra study, that it often takes two entities, the students and the teachers, to be willing to come to the table to foster the relationships. It takes work, time, and two sides of the equation with a common goal to make it happen. In most high schools are there two interested parties? Does one party have a professional obligation to reach out and try?

A quantitative study by researchers Katherine and Robert Niebuhr in 1998 identified student-teacher relationships as the relationship with the most significance of the five types that were explored in the study. The five types can be described as teacher-student relationships, administrative relationships, guidance relationships, racial relationships, and student-peer relationships. The reliability measurement was .84 for the student-teacher relationship instrument and suggests a connection between student-teacher relationships and academic success as measured by grade point average. This study was conducted in a small town in the southeastern part of the United States that had a bimodal socioeconomic population. A survey instrument developed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals called the Comprehensive Assessment of School Climate (CASE) was administered to 241 ninth-graders. A positive correlation between student-peer relationships and academic success as measured by grade point average was also found.

This study uses an instrument that has been in existence for over 25 years. It asks freshmen about their relationships with their teachers and other students. If one were to assume that this school was a traditional high school, it begs the following questions: At what point in the school year was this survey administered? Is it realistic to think that as a

newcomer to the building the students' relationships are well established with the teaching staff? Perhaps this particular high school made overt efforts with the freshmen to ensure connectivity and personalization right from the start of the students' high school experience. If so, then the positive correlation to academic achievement as measured by grade point average would be more likely. As it stands, the correlation seems potentially weak.

A similar study was conducted by Spencer and Boon (2006) that examined characteristics of effective learning experiences as perceived by students. Students believed the reigning characteristic of effective learning experiences was developing the student-teacher relationship (p. 245). When a teacher and student "respect each other for real" then students will try harder even in a course subject they may not like, particularly if the instruction is relevant and enjoyable. "If they teach me something that doesn't apply to my life, then I won't try. I really don't care" (p. 246). Students reported if the teacher makes it fun and authentic then the student will be more likely to get a better grade.

Literature reflects that high school students want and need a connection to adults in their lives. For many high school students the connections they make to the adults at school may be the only positive ones in their lives. Teachers may often feel out of touch with teenagers and not feel they are qualified or it is their place to get involved in the lives of their students. It is often difficult for adults to understand teenagers since the surface behavior is not always what is reflective of the underlying issues or true feelings. What is displayed is likely a defense mechanism that will need to be examined more

deeply. This takes time and effort on the part of the caring adults in the student's life. Teachers and students will both need to make efforts to know and understand the other in order for positive relationships to be developed and sustained.

Defining Student Achievement

Literature on the definition of student achievement as defined by students and teachers is limited. If one asked a group of high school teachers what student achievement means and one asked a group of high school students what student achievement means many different answers would likely arise, and some would probably overlap. A prediction might be that teachers would perceive grades, standardized test scores, involvement in activities, and class rank as items that could encompass student achievement for high school students. From the students' perspective, whether or not they graduate on time or at all and grade point average would likely be indicators of student achievement. When research studies and stakeholders in education attempt to measure student achievement, commonly attendance rate, grade point average, discipline referrals, dropout rate, cocurricular participation, standardized test scores by subgroup and by subject, or other measures defined by No Child Left Behind of 2001 (Public Law 107-120) are used as indicators of success or progress.

While most of these factors are concrete pieces of data that public high schools collect and report to the public, they do not actually tell what a student knows and is able to do. Grades, in the United States overall, are not always a true reflection of academic ability and often are inflated or reflective of very little of what the student has mastered.

Wormeli (2008) suggested that mastery could be defined as

> Students have mastered content when they demonstrate a thorough understanding as evidenced by doing something substantive with the content beyond merely echoing it. Anyone can repeat information; it's the masterful student who can break content into its component pieces, explain it and alternative perspectives regarding it cogently to others, and use it purposefully in new situations.

The traditional way of grading in the United States is usually based at least to some degree on teacher pleasing behaviors such as timeliness, format, and following directions rather than on demonstration of mastery of a particular standard. Many high school teachers typically grade on an antiquated system that is not reflective of student learning and often create more barriers for motivation than anything else (Guskey, 1994). On a high school student panel about grading in Littleton, Colorado, students reported that grades were a "game they played for grades-a game that best treats learning as incidental, and at worst distracts students from making meaning" (Winger, 2005, p. 64). One student referred to the grading game as ""academic bulimia"" where students stuffed themselves for the test and then regurgitated the knowledge and facts for the assessment with no thought to the bigger picture of learning.

One area of student achievement that is danced around but not universally quantified is the idea of becoming a competent, caring, contributing member of society. In some school systems this aspect of a student's life is not a focal point or considered an essential learning. In other systems it is the intent of the educational system as a whole; for example, it is stated in the mission of the district that high school students must demonstrate competencies by acts of citizenship or community service as a graduation

requirement. Clearly there is a need for more research on the perceptions of students and teachers on what student achievement means to them.

Is There a Connection Between Positive Student-Teacher Relationships and Student Achievement?

At the heart of school culture lie the relationships within a school building. To improve the culture of a school the staff must foster relationships between both the adults in the building and between the students and adults. Relationships between and amongst the teachers in a school building are clearly important to school culture (Murphy, 2005, p.132).

This concept is articulated differently in each piece of research but is a constant theme throughout. True high school redesign efforts cannot simply be structural changes to bell schedules and start times. High schools can dance around the edges of redesign by modifying their structure and programming, but until climate and culture shifts, true change will not occur (DuFour, 2003). The pervasive belief must be that each child can be successful, and the educators in a high school have the responsibility to teach the whole child, not just the content.

When considering efforts around high school redesign currently underway in the United States, several models are endorsed or supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The Gates Foundation recognized a need to examine the current high school structure; curriculum; instructional delivery; assessment mechanisms; climate and culture; and leadership practices in order to produce a different work force than what is currently being produced or has been produced in the past. Breaking Ranks II, The International Center for Leadership in Education, High Schools that Work, and The High

School Alliance, which will be discussed in this chapter, all have ties to the Gates Foundation. As educators continue to work on redesigning and improving high schools across the country, there are many experts who have determined what components high schools must focus their time, attention, and resources on for the purpose of creating competent, caring, productive citizens who can maintain a middle-class lifestyle in the global economy.

In an era of standards based education, high stakes testing, and immense pressure for accountability, personalization of the school environment and relationship building is often lost. The executive director of the Gates Foundation, Tom Vander Ark, argued, "If we replace anonymity with community, sorting with support, and bureaucracy with autonomy, we can create systems of schools that truly help all students achieve" (Vander Ark, 2002, p. 4). As a means of addressing the need for school redesign and thus potentially improving the culture and climate, several options, including programs or frameworks, have been put forward.

In each of these established programs and frameworks the idea of relationships, mentoring, climate, and culture of a high school, as well as a sense of community, are represented as critical elements for student success. An overview follows of each the programming frameworks (a) Iowa's Framework for High School Redesign, (b) High Schools That Work, (c) National High School Alliance's core principles, (d) International Center for Leadership in Education's nine characteristics of high performance in high schools. Each discusses the components of school improvement and high school redesign. There is repetition and overlap within the current frameworks to include the

need for positive student-teacher relationships and emphasize the importance of alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Aligning the enacted curriculum and assessing what has been taught in a way that truly measures what educators want students to know and be able to do are paramount for student success. If teachers increase the level of intellectual rigor and relevance to curriculum, instruction, and assessments on a daily basis, student achievement can increase. When teachers can ensure that instruction is differentiated in order to meet each student's needs, the learning will be far more personal (Wormeli, 2008).

Iowa's Framework for High School Redesign

Former Governor Tom Vilsack (2006) of Iowa has stated,

> The case for change in America's high schools is well documented: the graduation rate is too low, too many students are struggling learners, and much of the curriculum needs to be revamped to better prepare our youth not just to become employed, but also to be informed, compassionate, and productive citizens.

In January 2005, Iowa's high school redesign committee that was composed of membership from the Iowa Department of Education, Area Education Agencies, local high schools, higher learning institutions, School Administrators of Iowa, Iowa Association of School Boards, and Iowa Workforce Development, synthesized several reports, studies, and existing programs currently in place in Iowa high schools. Some of the works examined included Breaking Ranks II (National Association of Secondary School Principals), High Schools That Work (Southern Regional Education Board), Iowa Learns Council, Foundation for Change: Focusing on Iowa High Schools, and the Urban Education Network report, Redefinition of High School: A Vision for Iowa. Several

common themes were found in the research that was synthesized. After much dialogue and input among a variety of stakeholder groups, six common elements were distilled from the existing information and programming. The six elements are what Iowa espouses to local districts and communities when they begin their redesign process (Iowa Department of Education, 2005). These elements include the following:

1. High Expectations.
2. Student Focused System (Personalization).
3. Curriculum Rigor and Relevance.
4. Collaborative Leadership.
5. Professional Development.
6. Student Assessment Systems.

High Schools That Work: Ten key practices for increasing student achievement

*S*outhern governors and legislatures established the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) in 1948. Today, SREB works collaboratively with policy makers and local districts to improve education and to improve the region's social and economic life. Though SREB originated in only one part of the United States, many states work with SREB and the High Schools That Work (HSTW) model. The HSTW model was established in 1986, and there are currently 1,200 HSTW sites in 32 states. The HSTW model identifies 10 key practices for increasing student achievement (Southern Regional Education Board, 2005):

1. High expectations.
2. Program of study.

3. Academic studies.

4. Career and technical studies.

5. Work based learning.

6. Teachers working together.

7. Students actively engaged.

8. Guidance.

9. Extra help.

10. Culture of continuous improvement

National High School Alliance: Core principles

The National High School Alliance (NHSA) was established in October 2002 with funding and support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The mission of the NHSA is to work collectively in shaping policy, practice, and research by mobilizing the resources, knowledge, and capacity of individuals and organizations and by promoting public engagement that fosters high academic achievement, closes the achievement gap, and promotes civic and personal growth (National High School Alliance, 2005). The NHSA has identified six core principles for high school redesign. These core principles include the following:

1. Personalized learning environments.

2. Academic engagement of all students.

3. Empowered educators.

4. Accountable leaders.

5. Engaged community and youth.

6. Integrated system of high standards, curriculum, instruction, assessments, and supports.

NHSA believes to create deep and lasting change all six core principles must be addressed, and the principles are interdependent and must function as a part of a comprehensive plan focused on ensuring that all students are ready for college, careers, and active civic participation (National High School Alliance, 2005).

International Center for Leadership in Education: Nine central characteristics of high performance in high schools

In 1991, the International Center for Leadership in Education was created with the sole intent of assisting schools to move all students toward a more rigorous and relevant education (Daggett, 2005). After working with several high schools, facilitators identified and established the most urgent needs for schools to begin working toward solutions in the short term. The characteristics identified are as follows:

1. Focus instruction around students' interests, learning styles, and aptitudes through a variety of small learning community approaches-most commonly academics.

2. Administrators and teachers share an unrelenting commitment to excellence for all students, especially in the area of literacy.

3. An extraordinary commitment of resources and attention to 9th-grade students.

4. A rigorous and relevant 12th-grade year.

5. A laser-like focus on data at the classroom level to make daily instructional decisions for individual students.

6. High-quality curriculum and instruction that focuses on rigor and relevance.

7. Provide students with adults with whom they can develop personal relationships and be allowed the opportunity to use reflective thought.

8. Focus and maintain professional development around a limited number of high-impact initiatives.

9. Solid and dedicated leadership.

In this brief overview of existing redesign models the themes are similar and the goals of each program advocate for increased student achievement and creating a competent workforce for the 21st century. There is repetition and overlap in each program discussed and student-teacher connectedness is in each model. The programs also stress the importance of quality instructional leadership and high expectations for everyone who is impacted by the high school. High expectations are not just for students and their academic work; one should consider the implications of high expectations for teachers, administrators, parents, and communities at-large. Increasing expectations for the level of professionalism of the faculty and staff will ultimately benefit students. During the spring of 1992, the Center for Effective Schools (CES) at the University of Washington surveyed 87 elementary and secondary schools in four urban districts in the Midwest. The survey was designed to assess staff perceptions of their school on nine variables: (a) instructional leadership of the principal, (b) staff dedication, (c) high expectations for student achievement, (d) frequent monitoring of student progress, (e) early identification of students with special needs, (f) positive learning climate, (g) multicultural education, and sex equity. Survey data indicated that a large percentage of the 2,387 teachers who responded did not have high expectations for the academic achievement of students in

their schools (Bamberg in Iowa Department of Education, 2006). Some students also perceived a lack of expectations from their teachers. The 2005 High School Survey of Student Engagement, which surveyed over 80,000 students in 19 states, reported that 62% of students did not feel their teachers encouraged them to learn more, and 80% of students spent less than 3 hours a week outside class doing schoolwork; thus, a lack of academic rigor is perceived.

The previously presented research indicates a clear need to redefine U.S. high schools and for administrators and teachers to think creatively about multiple opportunities for students to engage in their learning. The examined models clearly stated leadership is the foundation for school change. The cornerstone for change is the relationship piece which is so often overlooked in this era of accountability and high stakes testing. There are multiple ways to enhance relationships and make learning more personal and relevant to students. Students who are more connected to the adults in the building, peers, and the curriculum are more likely to come to school, graduate, and be motivated and have the confidence to reach their potential.

Additionally, teachers must have the mindset that their role is not just academic, but believe they have a moral obligation to accept personal accountability for student success. *Personal accountability* is defined by Larson (1983) as

> Having to do with one's exercising his own will in making decisions and following a course of conduct. It implies self-initiative and a measure of self-reliance. But it requires more than the ability to act for oneself. It must be guided by knowledge of true principles.

Teachers who accept personal accountability as part of their way of life professionally understand that they support students not because the district expects them to but because

it is the right thing to do. They do it because they want to and it is selfless, not because they have to. These teachers believe inherently in what they do as educational leaders and why their work is important to student success. When teachers gain an authentic open-mindedness and comfort in themselves and their teaching and begin to see their role less as a provider of institutional instruction but as "unique facilitators of personal development", (Novak and Fischer, 1998, p.483) the relationships with students are elevated and student achievement will ensue.

Current research regarding the *personalization* of high schools is vast and varied. Personalization is defined by Clarke (2003) as

> A learning process in which schools help students assess their own talents and aspirations, plan a pathway toward their own purpose, work cooperatively with others on challenging tasks, maintain a record of their explorations, and demonstrate their learning against clear standards in a wide variety of media, all with the close support of adult mentors and guides. (p. 15)

This concept is described differently in each piece of research, but is a constant throughout. The vehicles used to personalize a high school could include, but are not limited to advisory programs, smaller learning communities, career guidance, mentoring programming, personalized learning plans, adult advocates, differentiated instruction, special attention to ninth graders, service learning, and community relations activities with students.

No one would argue that these different types of learning experiences benefit students academically, socially, and developmentally, if implemented appropriately. Often for students it is the nontraditional activities that are the biggest draw to them, and high schools can capitalize on their learning experiences by providing these types of

quality activities, programs, or initiatives. The question then remains, how does personalization benefit student achievement? The student may have a better attitude coming to school or be excited to participate in something out of the norm.

While personalization may affect students' attitudes, does it in any form increase student engagement, and in turn, increase student achievement? According to Cotton (2001), if teachers are able to follow students for several years, then a more intimate connection is possible and teachers know students well enough to provide necessary interventions when students run into trouble academically or personally and help students reach their potential. This process could happen through a consistent advisory program, smaller learning communities, or instructional looping. Cotton also suggested that smaller schools or smaller learning communities are valuable because everyone knows everyone else, and students are less likely to fall through the cracks. Similarly, Strike (2004) stated that "small schools are better schools because they are more intimate and nurturing, when students are known to and cared for by adults, they are more willing to take seriously the education adults wish to provide" (p. 215). While there is merit to Strike's idea of students being known and cared for by adults, one might question the idea that students are more willing to take seriously the education adults wish to provide. Though the adult is the delivery vehicle of content and learning experiences, should not the environment be such that students are excited to learn and want to increase their capacity as a learner on their own? Are most instructional strategies and student assessments tailored to meet the needs of individual students and to entice the learner and pique his or her curiosity? If not, then why? The learner should be able to recognize the value of a particular

assignment because it is a real-life situation that he or she may gain personal benefit from by solving. Strike's statement suggests that the adult is the one in control of the learning and not the student. When students take ownership of their own learning, then a shift of focus and attitude should make a significant difference in that student's success.

High school students hold a wealth of information that is often not tapped. In a High School Survey of Student Engagement (2005), researchers at Indiana University reported less than half of the students agreed they would select the same high school again if given the opportunity. In the same study, about two-thirds of the respondents said that students at their school generally accept them for who they are. This data speaks to the connectedness of students to their schools and to the sense of belonging high school students feel while in high school. This study is evidence that many American high schools are not reaching each child to realize individual potential and a concerted effort to build relationships is necessary.

In a study of 39 Florida high schools, Sparger's (2005) task was to determine if there was a relationship between the implementation of smaller learning communities (SLCs) within a high school and selected school performance data. Sparger's study examined the level of implementation of SLCs as defined by Cotton's (2001) five elements: (a) accountability, (b) autonomy, (c) identity, (d) instructional focus, and (e) personalization. The selected school performance data was absentee rate above 21 days; percentages of dropouts and graduates; total incidents of crime and violence; percent of students assigned both in school and out of school suspensions; and average ACT, SAT and FCAT scores. The study was thorough and its purpose clear, but

questions were left for the reader. Sparger indicated the critical nature of a supportive administration to the implementation of SLCs. Is the program set up for sustainability if the administrator changes or when the funding stream stops? The assumption continues to be made that a smaller high school (500 students or less) is always going to be more personalized. While fewer students, potentially smaller class sizes, and increased student involvement in activities would likely be evident in a smaller high school, one could challenge that thinking. Because a school's population is smaller, are the adults more caring? Is there a more rigorous and relevant curriculum being taught? Because a teacher knows a student's name or family, does not always mean the teacher knows what skills and aspirations a teenager might have, or what supports that student might need to succeed. Putting structures such as SLCs or advisories in place to foster this kind of environment will assist teachers in engaging students in a different way, both instructionally and personally. Each of the schools in Sparger's study implemented SLCs in their own way. Which model was most successful and could that be replicated in other schools? Sparger's work indicates varying levels of implementation of SLCs in 20 of the 39 studied schools who actually participated in the study. Changes in administration and faculty proved to be a challenge and greatly affected the level of commitment that a high school had to its SLCs. It was also determined that the amount of time a high school had been working on SLCs did not influence the level of implementation. Another finding to be noted is that of the five components of SLCs, personalization and autonomy were the two that were vital to the success of the SLCs.

Newman (1989) suggested embedded social supports in a classroom or school that honors the differences in students and creates a sense of ownership are "both likely to enhance students interests in and valuing of, what is studied" (p.35). Learning involves risk taking, and unless students trust their teachers and peers to offer support, the learning process may be too punishing for some students. The social support is needed for students to feel a sense of belonging and a true part of the school community which students are "entitled to the care and respect of staff and peers" (p. 215). Newman also stated that the care must not be contingent on academic achievement alone. Although academics are important, there is more to life than academic achievement. When a teacher makes efforts within instruction to make learning meaningful and relevant, coupled with a supportive structured environment, then students have a stake in their own learning which leads to improved learning (Blum, 2005).

In contrast Sedlack, Wheeler, Pullin, and Cusick (1986) contended that some teachers who may be weak in content knowledge or are personally insecure often value the relationship with the student and a smooth class period over learning and thus get taken advantage of in the classroom. It is argued that when teachers defer to disruptive or ambivalent students to solve the issue, then knowledge acquisition suffers. Over time far less is learned in order to keep the peace in the learning environment and for the teacher to be liked. When this occurs, it is each student in the classroom's learning experience who suffers.

Conclusion

Students can benefit when teachers extend their responsibilities to do what ever it takes and are persistent with students who do not respond initially to first or second attempts of support. When teachers express a sense of optimism to each student and when each student is challenged appropriately and the focus is on strengths rather than on weaknesses, the student can and will thrive.

When a high school makes it a priority to create a more student focused system and wishes to enhance the relationships between students and teachers, it takes a bold step to increase student achievement. Each school would need to commit time up front to study the research, dialogue with all stakeholders, create an action plan, develop a communication plan, and then diligently proceed with the work. Unless that work is completed, high schools will continue to slowly lumber forward.

It was the researcher's hope that by inviting students and teachers to define positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement through focus groups that a clear definition would emerge for both terms. From that, a look into the perceptions of one student population at a Midwestern secondary school would then give the researcher an idea of the current reality of student-teacher relationships. Finally, examining the perceptual data and student achievement data would give the researcher evidence for the hypothesis that there is a connection between student-teacher relationships and student achievement.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

Introduction

Through evolution of the educational system, research, and societal changes, it has become evident that adolescent learning increases with a proactive type of student-teacher relationship. There is a need for adults in a high school to make it a priority to foster positive relationships with high school students. Educators in American high schools can do a better job of connecting with students than is the current reality. This is a problem and because of this disconnect between students and teachers some students may not reach their full potential academically, socially, or developmentally if they are disengaged at school. Sergiovanni (2005) suggested that being connected to the school itself and others at the school is a way to feel connected to oneself and know one matters, belongs, and is valued.

Every three years in Iowa, a survey is administered to secondary students in the majority of school districts across the state. Since 1999, the survey has been administered to almost all of the 6th, 8th, and 11th-grade students. As a result, the Iowa Youth Survey has become a census survey that reflects the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of Iowa youth. While the Iowa Youth Survey indicates an improving trend since 1999 in the school staff and student support construct, the schools in the local AEA boundaries reported in 2005 that only 44.6% of students felt like teachers cared about them and that they had someone to turn to with a problem. The state of Iowa trend data on the Iowa Youth Survey is approximately the same as the AEA regional data on the school staff and student support construct (Iowa Department of Education, 2006). The Iowa Youth Survey

findings demonstrate that there seems to be a personal disconnect between high school students and teachers as reported by the students. Without proper research and investigation, this personal disconnect if allowed to go unchecked could lead to a decline in student achievement and grades and could potentially lead to an increase in poor attendance and drop out rates (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko & Fernandez, 1989).

Upon IRB approval (05-12-2008-0328871 see Appendix A) this study engaged a mixed method sequential, exploratory design in a Midwestern secondary school of approximately 250 students. The study investigated the perceptions of students and teachers regarding characteristics of the student-teacher relationship, their definition of student achievement, and through survey responses, how student-teacher relationships may affect student achievement. The survey data illustrates the current reality of student-teacher relationships within the high school as perceived by the students and their potential effect on student achievement.

Research Design and Approach

This study was a mixed method sequential, exploratory design in a Midwestern secondary school of approximately 250 students. The study was conducted in two phases with priority given to the qualitative phase. Qualitative data collection through teacher and student focus groups provided definitions of positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement, respectively. Next, the study followed up with quantitative survey instrumentation developed by the International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE) and the researcher regarding students' perceptions of the relationships they had with their teachers and the impact those relationships may have had on student

achievement. The findings of these two phases were then integrated during the interpretation phase (Tashakkori, 2002). This research design was intended to first solidify common definitions during the qualitative phase of the study through focus groups of students and teachers that had shared common experiences (Hatch, 2002). Once the definitions of positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement were articulated through the focus groups then commonalities between student and teacher perceptions could be further examined. During the quantitative phase of the study a current reality of student-teacher relationships using online survey instrumentation was determined. The survey was administered to a Midwestern secondary school population whose enrollment is approximately 250 students. The connection between the definitions of student-teacher relationships and student achievement and the survey was determined using outcome variables that emerge from qualitative focus groups. The qualitative data from the focus groups and the quantitative data from the survey were collected during May 2008 prior to the end of the academic school year.

This design was appropriate because one of the theories on evaluation techniques described as the "value of the types of data" invites the idea that more than one type of data has value depending on the situation and context of the study (National Science Foundation, 1997, p.43). A mixed method approach not only explores depth in the qualitative phase but also breadth in the quantitative phase. As described by Tashakkori (2002) "the purpose of this design is to use quantitative data and results to assist in the interpretation of qualitative findings" (p. 18). The students and teachers articulated their perceptions of the characteristics of a positive student-teacher relationship and how

student achievement is defined in addition to students taking a survey on the current reality of the student-teacher relationships at the high school and their potential effect on student achievement. The researcher used a focus group approach because the teachers and students were set individuals who have shared experiences and because the discussion provided a different type of information than would individual interviews (Hatch, 2002). Once the definitions of positive student-teacher relationship and student achievement were developed the researcher had a clearer understanding of the measures used in the study to determine a potential connection between positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement. As the topic of study revolved around relationships, the idea that they could be measured with only a quantitative approach would be short sighted, as the deeper humanistic element was clearly at the center of this research. The idea of merely collecting survey data on student-teacher relationships without also examining personal perceptions could lead to unclear or false information. When investigating human behavior and beliefs, it is "most fruitful to use a variety of data collection methods" according to Patton as cited in National Science Foundation, 1997, (p.43).

The qualitative data solidified and explored the common definitions of positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement initially. The focus groups provided a deeper understanding of the social context of students and teachers. The purpose of using focus groups is to glean the perspective of those in the situation being researched (Patton, 1990). The quantitative data reflected the current reality of student-teacher relationships and their perceived effect of student achievement using the survey

instrumentation. The student population in Grades 7– 11 took the survey and the sample size for the quantitative portion of the study was 88% of the secondary students. The quantitative data collected using the Student-Teacher Relationships Survey could potentially be generalized to a school with similar demographics and population as the research school, though it is recognized that external validity may be severely limited.

Setting and Sample

All teachers and students at this Midwestern suburban secondary school were eligible and invited to participate simply by being a member of the staff or student body. There were 23 teachers and 19 chose to participate. The student population of the high school is approximately 250 students, made up of 52% (or 143) male students, and 48% (or 132) female students. The graduation rate was 100% and the attendance rate was 96.4% for the 2006-2007 school year. Graduation rate in Iowa is calculated by "dividing the number of high school regular diploma recipients in a given year by the estimated number of 9th-graders four years previous" (Iowa Department of Education, 2007).

Qualitative Phase: Participants

During the qualitative phase of the study, four separate focus groups were conducted. Each focus group represented either students or teachers. There were two teacher focus groups and two student focus groups.

Focus Group 1

The first focus group was randomly selected high school students Grades 7-11. Systematic random sampling was used in conjunction with the schools student

information system. Every 26th student on the school's roster was selected to participate. There were 7 students in the focus group.

Focus Group 2

The second focus group was comprised of 7 teachers, representing different content areas. The teaching staff was invited to join one of two focus groups, whichever was most convenient for them.

Focus Group 3

The third focus group consisted of randomly selected students Grades 7-11. Systematic random sampling was used in conjunction with the school's student information system. Every 25th student on the school's roster was selected to participate. There were 7 students in the focus group.

Focus Group 4

The fourth and final focus group was made up of 12 staff members who did not participate in the second focus group. This group consisted of a cross section of teachers in different content areas. The teaching staff was invited to sign up for one of two focus groups, whichever was most convenient for them to attend.

There was a total of four focus groups, two composed of teachers and two composed of students. Nineteen of the 23 faculty in the building participated in either the first teacher focus group (Group 2) or the second teacher focus group (Group 4); thus, 83% of staff member's perceptions were incorporated.

The second set of student and teacher focus groups (Groups 3 and 4) confirmed the definitions created by the first set of student and teacher focus groups (Groups 1 and 2). A standard open-ended interview approach was used with a set of predetermined questions to assist in controlling the flexibility (Patton, 1990) and ensuring the data were systematic. The focus group type of interview is preferred in this study rather than the indepth interview for the following reasons: Sensitivity of subject matter is not such that participants' responses will be inhibited, the volume of the subject matter is manageable, the number of participants can be managed within a group, and depth of individual responses is such that participants can appropriately answer in a limited amount of time (Patton).

To ensure validity of the data collected during the qualitative phase, the researcher used a peer debriefer who took public notes at each of the four focus groups as the researcher facilitated the conversations with the students and teachers. The peer debreifer reviewed and processed with the researcher the data collected so that the account would resonate with people other than the researcher (Creswell, 2003).

Quantitative Phase Participants

For the quantitative phase of the study a survey developed by the researcher was administered to all students in Grades 7-11 using an online survey program, Test Pilot. A pilot survey was administered prior to this data collection.

The Role of the Researcher

The researcher is employed by an intermediate agency between local school districts in central Iowa and the Iowa Department of Education. The vision and mission of the organization is as follows:

> We are dedicated to enriching people's lives. We are partners for learning who provide cutting-edge services for children and youth, families, schools and communities. We are a proactive and caring organization fueled by a passion for excellence in all we do. We are committed, every day, to helping people grow, develop and learn. (Heartland AEA, 2006)

The intermediate agency employs approximately 700 full-time staff and serves 65 school districts and is the largest of 10 intermediate agencies in Iowa. Some of the areas in which this agency serves schools include, but are not limited to, professional development, structured school improvement, curriculum, instruction and assessment, special education, evaluation, media and technology, leadership development, and accreditation.

The researcher is a professional learning and leadership consultant with an intermediate agency and began working with the high school BLT during the 2007-2008 school year in the areas of structured school improvement, instructional design, and the implementation of advisory programming. The researcher and the high school's BLT, including administrators, have had opportunities to dialogue, coach, interact, plan, implement, and evaluate collaboratively.

The researcher collaborated with the building principal and BLT to determine focus group dates and times that were least disruptive to instruction and most convenient for participants of the focus groups. The researcher moderated each of the four focus

groups and collected qualitiative data personally, using public notes recorded by a peer debriefer as well as the researcher taking copious personal notes. During the focus groups the purpose and goal of the study was reiterated, opportunity for questions or clarification was offered, and treats were served. After the introduction the researcher confirmed willingess to participate and secured consent of adult participants. Parental consent for students participating in the focus groups was obtained prior to the focus group session. Next, the researcher explained the format of the time spent in the focus group and began with the first question using a round robin approach to be sure each participant's thoughts were heard.

The Student-Teacher Relationship Survey was placed online and a URL and a password was made available to the students. Students took the survey during their English classes. The students had taken this survey in the fall, and have taken other surveys online in the recent past; thus, the procedures were familiar to them. The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete and was factored into the differentiated instructional approach embraced at this secondary school. The loss of instructional time was minimal. After the surveys were administered, a frequency count by item and percentages by item for the 25 Likert scale questions were calculated. The researcher used frequency counts in conjunction with percentages rather than averages to investigate any patterns of bimodal distribution that could require further investigation.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered during this study.

1. How do students and teachers define a positive student-teacher relationship?

2. How do students and teachers define student achievement?

3. What level of connection exists, if any, between positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement?

Data were collected sequentially and priority was given to qualitative data collection followed by quantitative data collection, thus a sequential, exploratory design. Qualitatively, there were two phases of focus groups. During the first phase of focus groups, Research Questions 1 and 2 were answered and clarified during the focus group sessions, first with one group of students and next with one group of teachers. During the second phase of focus groups, the same questions were asked with a second group of students and a second group of teachers who were interviewed separately. Solidifying the students' and the teachers' perceptions of characteristics that make up a positive student-teacher relationship took place. Next, the collective definition of student achievement evolved within the focus group discussions. Question 3 was addressed during the qualitative and quantitative phases of the study using survey administration.

Context and Strategies

The district superintendent and high school principal granted the researcher permission and access to the teachers and students in the district, see Appendix B. The researcher works as a third party provider of services and as a partner in the school improvement process. The researcher explained the purposes and goals of the study to teachers and students in written and oral formats and provided opportunities for the teachers and students at the high school to ask questions and seek clarification regarding the study.

Qualitative Phase

Phase 1: Student interviews

The students who were selected for the first round of focus groups were randomly selected using the student information system. Every 26th student was selected to participate in the first focus group. These selected students were interviewed in the media center at the end of the school day.

Phase 2: Teacher interviews

For the first round of focus groups approximately half of the high school's teaching staff of 23 were invited to participate in a focus group after school. The teachers invited for the first focus group were a cross section of high school teachers, and they were asked questions regarding what the critical elements were to cultivate and maintain a positive student-teacher relationship and questions regarding their perceptions of what student achievement means to them.

Phase 3: Student interviews

The students selected for the second round of focus groups were randomly selected using the student information system. Every 25th student was selected to particpate in the second round of focus groups. These selected students were interviewed in the media center at the end of the school day.

Phase 4: Teacher interviews

During the second round of teacher focus groups representatives of cross content areas of the high school staff were invited to participate in focus groups after school.

The same set of questions were asked of the second set of students and teachers as were asked to the first set of students and teachers. There was a second list of characteristics describing a positive student-teacher relationship from this focus group and a second definition formulated for student achievement.

During the qualitiative phase of data collection, beginning with the first focus group of students, the researcher gained the student perspective of the characteristics they believed helped to foster, cultivate, and maintain a positive relationship with their teachers. Secondly, the researcher was interested in knowing what the student perspective was regarding student achievement or student success in high school. In general, did students have similar ideas on this issue?

During the second focus group comprised of teachers the researcher was interested in the teacher perspective of the characteristics they believed helped to foster, cultivate, and maintain a positive relationship with their students. Secondly, the researcher was interested in knowing what the teacher perspective was regarding student achievement or student success in high school. In general, did teachers have similar ideas on this issue?

The third focus group comprised of students looked similar to the first focus group of students. Once the perspectives were gleaned from students on their ideas about positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement the data from the first focus group of students were shared. A brief conversation about the similarities and differences took place and a common set of descriptors was crafted.

The fourth and final focus group that was comprised of teachers flowed similarly to the previous teacher focus group. Once the perspectives were gleaned from this set of teachers on their ideas about positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement, the data from the first focus group of teachers were shared. A brief conversation about the similarities and differences took place and a common set of descriptors was crafted.

During the quantitative phase of the study, the survey data confirmed the ideas that students had regarding the possible connection between positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement. Based on what the students and teachers believed student achievement was measured by determined if the data demonstrated a connection between positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement.

Quantitative Phase

The quantitative component is the second component of this study. The Student-Teacher Relationship Survey was intended to measure perceptual results from students regarding student-teacher relationships and how they may affect student achievement. This instrument is a combination of the ICLE's Learning Relationship Survey and the questions developed by the researcher. The researcher chose questions that depicted the students' perceptions of the relationships they had with their teachers and a potential connection to student achievement. The questions were based on scholarly literature and professional experience of the researcher. All changes and modifications to the survey were done with permission from the original author, the ICLE. The researcher removed the response of neutral and undecided on the Likert scale from the original surveys. A

neutral response gives participants an opportunity not to commit to a viewpoint (Fink, 2006). The researcher also altered wording such that a student with multiple teachers, as most high schools students have, would be able to respond with confidence, changing "my teacher" to "most teachers."

The results from this survey were used to guide discussions regarding the topics that are of the greatest need according to the survey data. Participation in this survey was voluntary and anonymous. Students were given directions by their teacher and asked to submit responses electronically during survey administration. The survey instrument was administered to high school students in Grades 7-11. The survey consisted of 27 items; 25 were selected response items and two were descriptive items. Ordinal data were used for the 25 items on the survey using a Likert scale from 1-4. One represented *strongly disagree,* 2 represented *disagree,* 3 represented *agree,* and 4 represented *strongly agree* with each item posed. Frequency counts and percentages were collected from the survey for each of the 25 questions. The researcher used frequency counts in conjunction with percentages rather than averages to investigate any patterns of bimodal distribution that could require further investigation. For the first of two descriptive items nominal data were used. The number 1 was assigned to the male response and a 0 for the female response while grade level numeric data matched that of the grade level of the student. For example a seven represented seventh grade and a 10 represented tenth grade and so forth. The survey can be found in Appendix C. Descriptive statistics as described by Gravetter and Wallnau (2005) were used to summarize, organize, and simplify the data. There was a frequency count for each survey response item as well as a percentage of

respondents answering for each option (p. 5). All survey questions aligned with research Question 3, which asked, "What level of connection exists, if any, between student-teacher relationships and student achievement?" Some survey questions could also support research Questions 1 and 2 in addition to Question 3. For example Questions 1, 6 and 13 supported research Question 1 which asked, "How do students and teachers define student-teacher relationships?" and Questions 2 and 10 supported research Question 2 that asked, "How do students and teachers define student achievement?"

The study used internal consistency reliability to ensure that all items reasonably measured student perceptions of student-teacher relationships. Specifically, average inter-item correlation was used to test the construct for each of the summarized items against the others on the survey (Trochim, 2002). This estimate was selected because test-retest was not feasible in terms of access to a random sample and the researcher did not intend to use parallel forms of the survey for the study. Thus, to enhance reliability and validity of the survey instrument, a pilot test of the survey was conducted prior to the administration of the survey at the research site and a reliability estimate was calculated. According to Salvia and Ysseldyke (2007), a .6 estimate is the appropriate minimum for making group decisions or administrative decisions that are relatively low in consequence. A .8 or higher is best for making individual student decisions that are more high stakes such as placing students in special classes or staffing them into special education. The researcher determined the reliability estimate of the Student-Teacher Relationship Survey was .915 using a pilot group during October 2007. A Chronbach Alpha test was calculated to possibly establish the need to adjust survey administration

protocol if necessary or adjust items to improve the reliability estimate, neither of which was necessary as the estimate demonstrated high reliability. Students at the research site were required to complete this survey in the fall and for district purposes to measure growth prior to implementation of an advisory program implemented during the 2007-2008 school year. The researcher had secured permission from the IRB to use spring survey data for this study see Appendix D.

The study used conclusion validity as an estimate because the issues of student achievement (as defined by students and teachers during the qualitative phase of the study) had a positive connection to the relationships that students had with their teachers as measured by the Student-Teacher Relationship Survey. Conclusion validity was the appropriate type of validity because this study was attempting to establish a relationship between two variables. Validity types build on one another and conclusion validity is the foundation of other types of validity (Trochin, 2002). Thus, other types of validity would not be appropriate such as internal validity because the researcher was not trying to prove a causal relationship. Construct validity assumes there is a causal relationship before examining the nature of generalizing the construct so this type would not be appropriate. Lastly, external validity explores the possibility of generalizing the findings to other situations and assumes a causal relationship between the constructs (Trochin, 2002), thus inappropriate as well. This study could serve as a framework for future study or replication at other high schools.

The researcher administered the survey online using Test Pilot, a Web-based software program that each school has free access to within the boundaries of the

intermediate agency. Administration of the online survey instrument took place during the students' English classes. Each English class rotated the COW so all high school students had access to the mobile lab of laptops to take the 27-item survey according to the predetermined rotational schedule. The COW had 15 accessible computers that were turned on prior to the start of class each day with the login prompt on the screen. The universal password was shared with students and posted for them to use when logging into the survey.

Triangulation

As Mills (2003) stated, "Researchers should not rely on any single source of data, interview, observation or instrument" (p.52). As described previously, focus group data for this study were collected from students and teachers, and a survey instrument was administered to students in Grades 7-11. The researcher used a peer debriefer to assist in publicly recording statements from the focus groups in addition to the researcher who facilitated the conversations. The peer debriefer processed the data collected and asked questions of the researcher after each focus group so that the account resonated with people other than the researcher (Creswell, 2003). During each of the four focus groups, the debriefer recorded participant responses publicly using chart paper. The researcher facilitated each focus group and verbally interacted with the student and teacher participants. The peer debriefer did not have responsibilities beyond recording data during the focus groups. At the conclusion of each focus group the peer debriefer reviewed the recordings with the researcher for clarity.

Survey data collection took place the week of May 12-16, 2008, during the students' English classes. All students were enrolled in an English class so each student in Grades 7-11 had the opportunity to take the survey. The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete; thus, each teacher had all of his or her English students complete the survey during one class period that week. The high school staff had advance notice of the survey administration and planned instruction accordingly on those days. The professional development focus was the Rigor and Relevance Framework (Daggett, 2003) that employs a differentiated approach to instruction; consequently the survey administration was a minimal loss of instructional time.

The data were collected using survey software called Test Pilot, which is available to the district at no cost from their AEA. The surveys were loaded and accessible for students prior to test administration. The researcher ensured the operational success of the survey by piloting it prior to actual administration. English teachers read a set of prescribed instructions to the students about the survey and allowed them to complete the survey independently. When all students were finished, they logged off and left the computer on for the next group. The English teacher was present and available to assist with any issues or concerns.

The researcher collaborated with a variety of stakeholders to collect the data. The building principal and the district superintendent signed off on all data collection procedures and schedule modifications for students and all communications to faculty and staff. The researcher communicated with staff members so they were aware of who, what, when, where, and how the data were being collected and its possible future uses.

English teachers communicated the rationale of the data collection to the students in their classes during May 2008 which left opportunity for English teachers or students to ask questions should they have had any prior to survey administration. The researcher was available for the communication between the three English teachers and the students and available for questions and support. The IRB waived parental consent for students taking the survey, as it is a district expectation, see Appendix E. Once the online surveys were administered the guidance counselor worked with the Test Pilot programmers at the intermediate agency to retrieve the data. The guidance counselor then forwarded the data to the researcher for analysis. Raw data is available upon request.

The data that comprises the independent variable of the study, which was student-teacher relationships in high school, were assessed first by the definitions and descriptors of positive student-teacher relationships, which were created during the qualitative phases of the study. Two groups of students and two groups of teachers were interviewed and asked to brainstorm characteristics of positive student-teacher relationships. Common definitions and descriptors were crafted by the focus groups to determine the perceptions of students and teachers and what they believed to be the critical elements of the student-teacher relationship. The Student-Teacher Relationship Survey measured student perceptions of the current state of student-teacher relationships and their potential effect on student achievement, which represented the dependent variable.

The dependent variable was first assessed by the definition and descriptors created during the qualitative phase of the study. Two groups of students and two groups of teachers were interviewed and asked to brainstorm what the term student achievement

meant and how they perceived it to be measured. The survey provided data of student perceptions regarding student-teacher relationships and their potential effect on student achievement.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Phase

During the qualitative phase of the study, focus groups were conducted with students and teachers. The researcher asked questions regarding the participants' perspectives on what they deemed to be characteristics of a positive student-teacher relationship and what they considered the definition of student achievement to be. Focus group questions for teachers were as follows, see Appendix F:

1. What characteristics make up a positive relationship with a student, on your part and on the part of the student?

2. What characteristics make up a negative relationship with a student, on your part and on the part of the student?

3. How do you define student achievement?

4. Describe what it means to have student achievement or student success in high school?

Focus group questions for students were:

1. What characteristics make up a positive relationship with a teacher, on your part and on the part of the teacher?

2. What characteristics make up a negative relationship with a teacher, on your part and on the part of the teacher?

3. How do you define student achievement?

4. Describe what it means to have student achievement or student success in high school?

The researcher served as the moderator and the peer debriefer served as a public scribe for each focus group to assist the researcher. Through public brainstorming notes and copious personal notes, the researcher and the peer debriefer were able to capture the dialogue within the focus groups. The data were compiled from each of the four focus groups and grouped by student responses separate from teacher responses. Next, the data were categorized by similar themes and then frequency of each theme was noted as the definition and descriptors emerged. The researcher used what is described as data reduction. Data reduction is a process "selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data as they appear in field notes" (Miles and Huberman, as cited in National Science Foundation, 1997, p. 43). The idea was to reduce the notes compiled from the focus groups so that only the information that answered the questions asked by the researcher were being considered for the final analysis.

Validation Procedure

To ensure validity of the data collected during the qualitative phase the researcher used a peer debriefer who took public notes during the focus groups and reviewed the data so that the account resonated with people other than the researcher (Creswell, 2003). An external auditor was used to review the entire project.

Quantitative Phase

A mixed-methods approach was used in this study to further increase the depth of understanding of the phenomena of student-teacher relationships by administering the Student-Teacher Relationship Survey, the quantitative data, as follow up to the focus group conversations, the qualitative data. The survey data analysis consisted of frequency counts and percentages that were analyzed for each of the 25 Likert scale questions on the survey. Each survey question compared frequency counts and percentages to determine if there was bi-modal distribution and further analysis needed. Next, survey results were examined for patterns, relationships and trends. Each survey question aligned to research Question 3 and most questions also aligned with research Question 1 or 2.

To better understand the qualitative focus group data, the study used the Student-Teacher Relationship Survey as additional perceptual data to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena of student-teacher relationships. The survey was administered to the secondary school's student population Grades 7-11, thus giving a clear picture of what student-teacher relationships looked like within this school, according to students.

The Student-Teacher Relationship Survey was a hybrid survey using adapted questions from the Learning Relationship Survey developed by the ICLE and the researcher's original questions. To ensure the validity of the qualitative findings, the researcher used a Likert scale and the preferred response was a high number on the Likert scale; this could be perceived as a correct answer thus leading the student to think more positively and could potentially cloud a true response. Also, students had multiple

teachers, and when they reflected on the survey question, their opinions might have been biased due to one experience with a teacher that could have caused them to respond with bias. The researcher had modified many items to read *most* teachers rather than *all* teachers. The researcher collected data during a typical school day using the mobile computer lab. English teachers monitored students during the survey to ensure appropriate behavior and to verify independent responses.

Participants' Rights

An informed consent form was developed for all participants to sign prior to engaging in research, acknowledging that they were aware of the purpose and the processes of the research and that they were participating voluntarily and had the right to withdraw at any time. The purpose of the study was articulated in writing and verbally to all participants, and they were given opportunities to ask questions and obtain a copy of the summary results if they were interested. Students participating in the electronic survey instrument were guaranteed anonymity and privacy. Names and identification numbers were removed during the data analysis process. The researcher owns the data and it is available upon request.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

As stated in chapter 1, this study contributed to the body of knowledge needed to address the problem of student-teacher disconnectedness by articulating the definitions and characteristics of positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement from students and teachers at one Midwestern secondary school. Additionally, this study gathered data about student perceptions of student-teacher relationships and their potential effect on student achievement at the secondary level. Chapter 4 provides a detailed discussion around each of three research questions. First, how do students and teachers define a positive student-teacher relationship? Next, how do students and teachers define student achievement? Lastly, what level of connection, if any, exists between positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement? The researcher used a mixed method, sequential exploratory design and the first two research questions represented findings from the qualitative portion of the study while the third research question was represented in both the qualitative findings and the quantitative findings respectively.

Background Demographics

Demographics of the student population in the Midwestern secondary school encompassed the following; the race and ethnicity make up was 97% White (or 242 students) and 3% non White (or 8 students).The Grades 7-12 special eduation population was comprised of 11% (or 28 students) while students of low socioeconomic status made up approximately 10% of the student population (or 25 students). Students who qualified

for free and reduced lunch did not always apply for financial assistance particularly at the secondary level; therefore, the low SES percentage was an approximation only, due to self-reporting.

The demographics of the teaching staff included 23 teachers, 13 male and 10 female, 22 White and one non White. Twelve had been teaching more than 10 years and 11 had been teaching less than 10 years. Five had a master's degree or higher and 18 had bachelor's degrees. The principal was a White male with a master's degree and over 28 years of experience.

Data Collection

Qualitative data collection through teacher and student focus groups provided definitions and characteristics of positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement. Four focus groups took place between May 22-May 29, 2008. Two focus groups of 7 students each representing Grades 7-11 met on May 22, 2008. Two focus groups of teachers, one group with 7 teachers and one with 12 teachers representing multiple content areas met on May 27 and May 29, 2008. All focus groups were held in the media center of the secondary building. Each focus group began with a review of the study, its purposes, a chance for questions and clarifications, and an opportunity to withdraw. Questions were asked in a round robin format, and in each focus group, the dialogue evolved into a conversation and discussion amongst participants. A peer debriefer was used as a scribe to record data publicly on chart paper during each focus group. The researcher facilitated each group and interacted directly with the participants.

Quantitative data collection took place during the last two weeks in May 2008. The purpose of the survey was to gather student perceptual data regarding the relationships they had with their teachers and how those relationships might be connected to student achievement. Online survey administration was conducted through each student's English class. Two hundred-twenty students participated in the 27 questions survey entitled Student-Teacher Relationships.

Phase 1: Qualitative Data Collection Focus Group Interviews

Research Question 1:How Do Students and Teachers Define a Positive Student-Teacher Relationship?

Student Perceptions

When students were asked what the characteristics of a positive student-teacher relationship encompassed, they were asked in two parts. First, they were asked what they brought to the relationship to help make it positive. Secondly, the students were asked to describe what the teachers brought to the relationship that helped the relationship become a positive one. Several students agreed that "when we participate in class and when kids are communicative and open minded" it helped the rapport between the teacher and student. Students admitted that while difficult at times "listening to the advice teachers give you and being respectful of them and what they know" could be helpful in the long run in not only sustaining the relationship with the teacher but in life in general. Every student in the focus groups agreed "having fun in the classroom" was a key element to learning and they also identified it as a component that they felt assisted in making a positive relationship with teachers.

The second part of the question revolved around what characteristics demonstrated by the teachers students believed helped to foster and maintain a positive relationship. Many students agreed "when a teacher is reliable and caring," it was easier to connect and students were less defensive. One student shared, "A teacher's attitude makes all of the difference to me, if they are positive then I tend to be more positive." Another student reported, "If a teacher is respectful, nice, and understanding it makes me more relaxed about learning, and I am not afraid to make mistakes."

Students were also asked in two parts what the characteristics of a negative student-teacher relationship encompassed. First, they were asked what they brought to the relationship that contributed to the negativity of the relationship. Secondly, the students were asked what teachers did that contributed to the relationship becoming a negative one. Students were eager to share that when they behaved in a manner that was "lazy, disrespectful, or held a grudge" then the relationship with the teacher often became sour. Students appeared aware of their adolescent behavior and could easily recognize when it may have been inappropriate. Students believed that behaviors such as punctuality, turning work in on time, and completing work made a difference in how the teachers viewed them as people. They felt that a student's work ethic played a role in how they were treated by teachers.

When considering what teachers brought to the relationship that could cause ill will, students identified that when teachers were "cocky and arrogant, mean, short-tempered or didn't care then it made me not want to work as hard for that teacher".

Students also noted that if they were bored in class or the teacher "picked obvious favorites" then it was a turn off for the subject matter being taught and the teacher.

Teacher Perceptions

Teachers were asked what characteristics of a positive student-teacher relationship encompassed in two parts. First, they were asked what they as teachers brought to the relationship to help make it positive. Secondly, the teachers were asked what the students did that helped the relationship become a positive one. Some examples of teacher behavioral characteristics that they believed helped to foster and maintain a positive relationship were, "When we find common interests and made connections to activities and the real world for kids" it helped immensely in forming positive relationships and in the learning. "Getting to know kids and finding out about them made the relationship a growth experience for everyone," reported one teacher who also noted that doing this took time and effort on the part of the teacher. All teachers agreed that positive reinforcement such as compliments and public recognition were key ingredients to a positive student-teacher relationship. Having a sense of humor was also noted as a powerful tool when working with teenagers.

Some examples of student behavioral characteristics that teachers believed helped to foster and maintain a positive relationship were, "When kids were hard working, respectful and asked questions". Teachers shared that when students approached them outside of the classroom at an event or in the community that it meant that students were comfortable with them as a person and it was helpful in building rapport.

Teachers were also asked what the characteristics of a negative student-teacher relationship encompassed in two parts. First, they were asked what they as teachers brought to the relationship that could contribute to the negativity of the relationship. Secondly, the teachers were asked what the students did that might have contributed to the relationship becoming a negative one. A few teachers stated that sometimes when teachers are defensive or if the personalities of the teacher and student did not mesh then there could be tension. Two teachers also recounted if they reprimanded in public or useed sarcasm that some students were often defensive and the teachers recognized those behaviors as ones that could damage a relationship. Many teachers did not have contributing remarks to this question. It appeared that this self-reflective question was difficult to answer for some teachers.

Teachers identified that when students had a sense of entitlement or behaved in an arrogant way such behaviors could deter from a positive relationship. When students were "mouthy and disrespectful it was hard to remain positive towards that student," stated one teacher. One teacher described a behavior that she found particularly disconcerting. The teacher shared when students "butted in and tried to run the show, when they didn't even know the situation, it was really annoying." Another teacher spoke about the longevity in which relationships occur since this school is a Grades 7-12 building. "Proximity breeds contempt" was the phrase that one teacher used when sharing that having a student multiple times over multiple years could negatively affect the relationship between the teacher and the student. In contrast, another teacher reflected that the longer a teacher knew a student, the stronger and deeper the bond. Some teachers

agreed that some students did not want a positive relationship with their teacher and so neither the teacher nor the student puts in much effort to build one.

Emerging Themes

A theme that emerged from the data was that both students and teachers noted characteristics such as respect, having a positive attitude, being a caring individual, and kindness ranked amongst the top as reciprocal necessities for each party. Both groups also stated that disrespect, rudeness, and lack of work ethic on the part of teachers and/or students were detractors from developing a positive relationship. It appeared that in most cases both students and teachers wanted and needed the relationships they had with each other to be positive and healthy so as to ensure student learning and to maintain a generally positive day-to-day existence for everyone involved.

A second theme supported by the focus group data was that students and teachers both discussed the concept of day-to-day interactions and holding a grudge. Therefore, forgiveness and moving on past a bad day or unfortunate encounter was something both parties had to deal with on an ongoing basis. Given the social complexities and day-to-day realities, it also became apparent through the data that a delicate balance and continuous work were required on everyone's part to maintain a positive relationship between a student and a teacher.

Research Question 2: How Do Students and Teachers Define Student Achievement?

Student Perceptions

Students were asked how they defined student achievement and what it meant to have a successful high school experience. The answers from students were varied. The

most common responses defining student achievement included the following attributes: trying one's best, having fun, and knowing and feeling confident in their next steps upon graduation from high school. Several students agreed that giving school your best effort mattered more than any grade one could attain. "If you did your best and tried your hardest, that is all anyone can ask of you," stated one student. Other students commented on the enjoyment aspect of the high school experience and the importance it held for them. Students discussed the teen years as being some of the best in life and making memories with friends. "If I can graduate with little or no regrets personally and can say I had a good time, that is what matters to me." One student shared that if upon graduation he "felt prepared for the next level and had reached his academic goals" he would be successful. Some students reported ACT scores, GPA, and earning a diploma as measures of success. Two students noted athletic scholarships and a winning season in sports as a successful high school experience. Other students reflected on the more affective areas of feeling good about themselves, having no regrets, staying drug free, maintaining friendships, and social status as measures of success.

Teacher Perceptions

Teachers were asked how they defined student achievement and what it meant for students to have had a successful high school experience. Responses for teachers were also varied. The most common response was if students had met the standards in their classes. A few teachers felt attendance was a measure of success in high school. Two teachers specifically stated that grades were in fact not a measure of success but rather indicators as to whether students were ready for the real world and demonstrated a desire

and confidence in their own learning capabilities. Many teachers felt that it was difficult to quantify student achievement and addressed student success with a more affective approach. One teacher stated, “The single greatest thing we can do is praise kids and make them confident in their abilities.” Teachers shared that a successful experience in high school could encompass the development of an interest outside of school or could happen when students made use of the opportunities available to them by getting involved. Other teachers leaned toward the affective domain with responses like, “Students treating each other well, students demonstrating social skills, liking themselves and if they had developed into a mature person by the time they graduated, their experience could be considered a success.”

Emerging Themes

A significant theme that emerged from the focus group data was by and large most teachers and students shared measures of student achievement and student success that were softer or less quantifiable than what was required for state mandates or the federal requirements of NCLB. Maturation, getting along with peers, putting forth effort, feeling prepared for the next level, and socialization were some of the measures noted by both students and teachers.

A minority of students reported quantifiable measures of student achievement rather than measures that aligned with the mission and purpose of the secondary school, which will be discussed in chapter 5. Those measures included ACT scores, GPA, and earning a diploma, though teachers did not mention these as measures of student achievement.

Though most teachers and students did not acknowledge many of the quantifiable measures of student success that existed at their secondary school such as grade point average, standardized test scores, or graduation rate, the school's statistics did necessitate recognition as they were measures by which other stakeholders determine the success of educational institutions and some of these measures are exceptional. The average composite ACT score for the class of 2008 at this Midwestern secondary school was 23. The average GPA of a high school student in Grades 9-12 was a 2.859. This school had a 100% graduation rate and had maintained that rate for over 10 years. Graduation rate in Iowa is calculated by "dividing the number of high school regular diploma recipients in a given year by the estimated number of 9th-graders four years previous" (Iowa Department of Education, 2007). Additionally, 70% of the students in Grades 9-12 completed the district required and ACT recommended core courses of 4 years of English, 3 years of math, 3 years of science, and 3 years of social studies. Finally, 90% of students (or 225 students) participated in some type of cocurricular activity sponsored by the school. While quantifiable measures existed it did not appear that they were the definition of student achievement that most students and teachers embraced as success at the high school level.

Research Question 3: What Level of Connection, If Any, Exists Between Positive Student-Teacher Relationships and Student Achievement?

Student Perceptions

Students were asked if they put forth more effort and performed better academically in classes where they had a positive relationship with the teacher. Thirteen out of fourteen students agreed that they performed better academically when the rapport

with the teacher was solid. Students felt if they knew the teacher and what that teacher expected they tried harder. “You can relate to them and know what they want from you,” one student shared. For some students the effort came because the student cared what the teacher thought of them and their abilities. “You know them (the teacher) and respect them and what they think about you,” reflected one student about his teachers. Other students shared that they felt like they could do better in school if the teacher thought they were capable because of the confidence the teacher had expressed to the students. One student shared, “I stay focused and I am not scared to mess up because I know that the teacher believes in me.” Similarly, another student commented, “You can do better if the teacher thinks you can.” Several students agreed that there was more motivation and confidence on the part of the student if the relationship with the teacher was an encouraging and supportive one. “If I can get along with the teacher, then to me what they say or what they teach isn’t stupid.” One student had an opposing view from the rest, and he shared that his motivation came from the content of a class. If the content would be valuable to him later in life, there was motivation for him to learn and do well. He suggested that the relationship with the teacher was irrelevant to his academic success or failure.

Teacher Perceptions

Teachers were asked if they believed students put forth more effort and performed better academically in classes where they had a positive relationship with the teacher. The overwhelming majority of teachers believed that the rapport they had with their students had little to no effect on the students’ academic performance. Some teachers suggested

that students were intrinsically motivated to do well academically. “Kids excel because they want to, not because of a relationship they have with me,” stated one teacher. Several teachers believed that students were motivated by grades and credits to graduate. One teacher shared, “Kids don’t want to disappoint, so if the tone is set, they respect the expectations and the environment, not necessarily me.” Most teachers also agreed that a positive rapport between students and teachers would not harm or detract from academic success the way a negative relationship might, but on the whole they felt as though a positive relationship did not enhance academic performance. It was one teacher’s perception that individual relationships with adults were not personalized for students. “Kids have a relationship with the whole school, not individual to individual, they see us all the same.” Finally, one teacher shared that the strongest relationships he had with his students was “equal to the strongest effort proportionally” in his content area, not necessarily strongest academic performance.

Emerging Themes

On the whole the focus group data suggested that students strongly believed that a positive relationship with their teachers helped to motivate them, engage them in instruction and perform better academically overall. Almost every student shared how he or she put forth more effort, spent more time on assignments, and generally seemed to care more about the classes that had a teacher they connected with positively. However, teachers on the whole, did not believe that a positive relationship with students had much of an effect on student achievement. While most teachers agreed a positive relationship did not hurt student achievement, they also believed it was not a significant element

necessary for increased student achievement. The general perception of most teachers was students were motivated by factors such as earning a credit or grade rather than the relationship that could exist between a teacher and students. Several teachers suggested that there was intrinsic motivation that could be factored into how well a student performed. The data from students would suggest the opposite; that the teacher does have a significant influence on the student-teacher relationship, thus, a potential connection to student achievement. Herein lies the disconnection discussed in chapter 1 and at the beginning of this chapter. If students believed there was a connection between student-teacher relationships and student achievement and teachers believed there was not a connection between student-teacher relationships and student achievement, this would likely affect how much effort or emphasis teachers may or may not put into the relationships they had with their students.

Phase 2: Quantitative Data Collection Student-Teacher Relationship Survey

The quantitative survey data were the second component of this study. Survey data were collected during May 2008. The Student-Teacher Relationship Survey was intended to measure perceptual results from students regarding student-teacher relationship and how they might affect student achievement. This instrument was a combination of the ICLE's Learning Relationship Survey and questions developed by the researcher. The researcher chose questions that depicted the students' perceptions of the relationships they have with their teachers and a potential connection to student achievement, thus helping to answer research Question 3. The questions were based on scholarly literature and professional experience of the researcher. All changes and

modifications of the original survey were implemented with permission, from the original author, the ICLE, see Appendix G.

Student participation in this survey was voluntary and anonymous. Students were given directions by their teacher and asked to submit responses electronically during survey administration. The survey instrument was administered to secondary students in Grades 7-11 and 220 students responded. The survey consisted of 27 items; 25 were selected response items and two were descriptive items. Ordinal data were used for the 25 items on the survey using a Likert scale from 1-4. One represented *strongly disagree*, two represented *disagree*, three represented *agree*, and four represented *strongly agree* with each item posed. Frequency counts and percentages were collected from the survey for each of the 25 questions. The researcher used frequency counts in conjunction with percentages rather than averages to investigate any patterns of bimodal distribution that could have required further investigation. For the first of two descriptive items, the number 1 was assigned to the male response and a zero for the female response while grade level numeric data matched that of the grade level of the student. For example a 7 represented 7^{th} grade and a 10 represented 10^{th} grade and so forth. Each question on the survey was discussed in terms of frequency count and percentage as well as the possible connection between student-teacher relationship and student achievement.

To better analyze school wide data the researcher used a dichotomous scale by combining the two positive survey responses, *strongly agree* and *agre*e together. Similarly, combining the two negative responses, *strongly disagree* and *disagree* together

gave a sense of the big picture for the overall perceptions of the student population and allowed for systemic analysis. (see Table 1)

Table 1

Student-Teacher Relationship Survey Data–Spring 2008

Question	Survey responses 1 or 2	Survey responses 3 or 4
1. Most of my teachers know my name.	1%	99%
2. My teachers take an interest in my future goals and education plans.	20%	80%
3. I have opportunities to ask my teachers questions about what we are learning in class.	8%	92%
4. I talk with teachers in settings outside of class.	43%	57%
5. There are teachers I could ask to write me a recommendation for a job, college or an award.	16%	84%
6. Most of my teachers are willing to help me with a personal problem.	28%	72%
7. My teachers trust me.	13%	87%
8. My teachers pay attention to all students, not just the top students.	28%	72%
9. My teachers keep their promises.	36%	64%
10. My teachers help me catch up if I am behind.	25%	75%
11. I feel supported by my teachers.	23%	77%
12. The support I get from my teachers encourages me to learn more.	34%	66%
13. My teachers make me feel special and unique.	49%	51%
14. I feel my school has a welcoming environment.	27%	73%
15. Most students respect teachers.	45%	55%
16. I enjoy being at school most of the time.	27%	73%
17. Students have input in decisions made at my school.	33%	67%
18. I feel accepted by my teachers for who I am.	18%	82%

19. I have a teacher who I can look up to as a person who sets a good example for me.	20%	80%
20. Most teachers recognize students for being friendly and setting a good example for others.	27%	73%
21. I feel my teachers care about me as an individual. Most teachers make school fun and an exciting place to learn.	34%	66%
22. My teachers usually think the best of me and expect me to be successful.	16%	84%
23. My teachers notice and comment upon my return if I am absent from school.	29%	71%
24. Most teachers respect students at my school.	20%	80%
25. Most of my teachers seem to have fun at school.	32%	68%

Note: Survey response 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree.

Research Question 3: What Level of Connection, If Any, Exists Between Student-Teacher Relationships and Student Achievement?

Emerging Themes

Overall, the survey data illustrated the majority of students felt positively about the school environment as a whole and the relationships they had with their teachers. Ninety-nine percent of students expressed their belief that teachers knew their name and 82% of students felt accepted by their teachers. In addition to these are strengths in the climate and culture evident at their school; 87% of students shared they felt their teachers trusted them.

Fifty-seven percent of students said they talked with teachers in settings outside of class and 80% of students felt they had a role model that set a good example for them which indicated continuing and evolving relationships for students.

The student perceptual data also indicated that 27% of students felt their school did not have a welcoming environment; additionally, 29% of students reported that their teachers did not notice or comment when they were absent from school. Thirty-three percent of students reported feeling that they had little student voice in decisions made at the school. This likely affected the feelings of respect and trust with their teachers, which had perhaps led to 28% of students feeling unable to confide in a teacher or seek support for a personal issue or 16% feeling unable to have support for a recommendation for college, a job, or an award.

Triangulation

Overall, the survey data illustrated the majority of students felt positive about the school environment as a whole and the relationships they had with their teachers. High percentages indicated minimal anonymity of students and multiple opportunities for students to interact with teachers for follow up questions. This perception was confirmed during the focus group conversations with students as they shared attributes of relationships they had with their teachers. “Most of my teachers are really nice and caring,” stated one student. “I can talk to some of them about personal stuff and school stuff, which is cool,” shared another. It appeared that 99% of students felt each teacher knew who they were, and 92% had learning opportunities to seek clarification of curriculum and instruction. Additionally, 87% of students felt their teachers trusted

them, and 82% of students felt accepted by their teachers. Students considered these qualities to be strengths that were in place at their school.

Increased communication between students and teachers to ensure students were welcomed into the school environment, made to feel supported as well as missed when they are absent, could be beneficial for some students to begin to feel valued. In survey items 14 and 23, at least 27% of students for each item perceived the environment to be unwelcoming and stated teachers did not notice or comment if a student had been absent. Focus group data from students suggested that some teachers appeared at times not to care, were not helpful, or had a negative attitude. One student stated, "Teachers need to be strict but not a pushover, it helps when they stay calm and don't freak out over little stuff and they help us without giving the answer." Another student remarked, "When teachers pick favorites it is so obvious. Sometimes they pick the athletes and sometimes they pick the brains, but everyone knows it and hates it. It feels like you have to fit into a category to matter." If students perceived teachers to have student favorites and 28% of students indicated that most teachers paid attention to primarily the top students, the focus group data and the survey data would suggest alignment in this area. Additionally, 33% of students reported feeling that they had little student voice in decisions made at the school, which was in alignment with the focus group data from students, that suggested some students' negative feelings about the school environment. One student shared, "We have an SLT (student leadership team) but I don't know how to get on it or what they do exactly."

The focus group data suggested a disconnection between teacher and student perceptions that student-teacher relationships had an effect on student achievement. When interviewed students felt almost unanimously that there was a positive connection between their academic success and the relationships they had with their teachers, though the teachers on the whole disagreed. Most teachers did not believe that positive relationships between students and teachers hurt student achievement, but they did not feel students performed better due to the relationship they had with a given teacher. Survey data on item 12 suggested that 66% of students believed relationships were elemental to student achievement, which was a lesser percentage than what students in the focus group suggested with their responses, though it is a significant percentage of students.

Data from the teacher focus groups suggested that high expectations from teachers yielded high results from students and survey item 22 concurred that 84% of students felt their teachers thought the best of them and expected them to be successful. Two teachers agreed, “Kids don’t want to disappoint you so they respect the expectations and often rise to the occasion.”

Student perceptual responses for item 2 on the survey which reads, “My teachers take an interest in my future goals and education plans” indicated 80% of students perceived that teachers took an interest in the future goals and educational plans of their students. This was in alignment with both what the teachers and students suggested in their focus group responses regarding the importance of preparedness for the future and it being a key component of success in high school. “If I learn skills for later, get my

diploma, and know where I am headed next, I'll feel good about myself," shared one student. Teachers also remarked, "If they (students) are ready for the real world and are thinkers and not just doers they will have succeeded in high school."

This research was completed in a relatively small school and a disconnection still occured between students and teachers in their relationships. The definitions and ideas about student-teacher relationships were different between students and teachers. It may be inferred that there was not a shared goal or purpose for their relationships, thus a breakdown for some. When students believed their academic success was impacted by positive relationships with their teachers and teachers believed that the relationships they had with students did not impact student achievement, the foundation of the relationship may be fractured which could make it difficult to develop and sustain over time.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The impetus for this study was the increasing disconnection between secondary students and their teachers at the secondary level, resulting in some students not reaching their full potential academically, socially, or developmentally due to disengagement in the school environment.

The purpose of this mixed method, sequential, exploratory design was to initiate a study of high school students' and teachers' definitions of positive student-teacher relationships and their definition of student achievement. This process attempted to create a more universal definition for both terms in one school setting. From those definitions a student survey was conducted to determine, from the perspective of the students, to what extent, if any, a relationship existed between student and teacher determined definitions of positive student-teacher relationships and academic achievement. The goals of the study were threefold and revolved around three research questions. First, how do teachers and students define positive student-teacher relationships? Secondly, how do teachers and students defined student achievement or success at the secondary level? Lastly, what level of connection, if any, exists between positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement? The rationale for this approach was to determine if students' and teachers' definitions of positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement were similar in nature and to probe more deeply into the relationship between student-teacher relationships and student achievement.

Data collection was conducted during May 2008. Qualitative data were collected through teacher and student focus groups, which provided definitions and characteristics of positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement. The focus groups took place between May 22-May 29, 2008. Two focus groups of 7 students each representing Grades 7-11 met on May 22, 2008. Two focus groups of teachers, one group with 7 teachers met on May 27, 2008, and one with 12 teachers representing multiple content areas met on May 29, 2008. Quantitative online survey data were also collected during May 2008, and the participants were 220 secondary students in Grades 7-11. The Student-Teacher Relationship Survey was intended to measure perceptions from students regarding student-teacher relationships and how they may or may not effect student achievement.

The qualitative data were analyzed using data reduction of focus group responses and a topological analysis was conducted to identify emerging themes. The focus group responses were specifically tied to reseach Questions 1, 2, and 3 while the quantitative survey data aligned specifically with research Question 3. Triangulation was then used to strengthen the alignment between focus group data and survey data.

Summary of Results

After a thorough examination of the data, each of the three research questions can be answered and a rationale can be provided for the disconnect that existed between some students and teachers at this Midwestern secondary school. This section will be divided by research question.

Question 1: How Do Teachers and Students Define Positive Student-Teacher Relationships?

According to University of North Carolina's Counseling Center (2007), in all types of relationships, whether a friend, a spouse or partner, or a coworker, there is a basic universal foundation with reciprocal characteristics that must be in play for the relationship to be a successful and productive one. The two parties need to have a shared goal or purpose and behave in such a way that a positive relationship can exist in order to be healthy and satisfying.

The results of the study showed that students and teachers were in agreement and shared common characteristics of a positive student-teacher relationship. Both students and teachers noted characteristics such as respect, having a positive attitude, being a caring individual, and showing kindness rank amongst the top as reciprocal necessities for each party. Similarly, Good and Brophy (1995) have identified "consideration, buoyancy and patience" (p.306) as general characteristics of an effective student-teacher relationship, which are in alignment with students and teachers perspectives at this Midwestern secondary school. Both students and teachers also stated that disrespect, rudeness, and lack of work ethic on the part of students and teachers detracted from developing a positive relationship. Like any type of relationship, it takes two entities with common goals and a cooperative approach to make it successful. Fosnot (2005) stated that a relationship based on cooperation is defined as "striving to attain a common goal while coordinating one's own feelings and perspectives with a consciousness of another's feelings and perspectives" (p.137). The motivation for cooperation is based on trust and mutual affection that has developed between the student and teacher. If students and

teachers share the goal of engaging in positive relationships and cooperating with one another for the purpose of increasing student achievement the impact on student achievement may be significant. That is not to say increased student achievement is the sole purpose for a positive student-teacher relationship, but it is a primary benefit.

In order to achieve in any arena, one needs goals and means to measure those goals. Traditionally, in a secondary school setting some educators may not have overtly articulated a student's academic or personal goals with them. Thus, students may not have had the opportunity to contribute their own ideas and thoughts into goal setting for them-selves; it may have been done for them or to them instead. If there is a lack of student voice or common goals between students and teachers, then one could assume there could be a communication break down, which may lend itself to unsuccessful relationships between some students and teachers.

Students and teachers both discussed the concept of day-to-day interactions that may be negative from time to time, and either the student or the teacher or both may hold a grudge. Teachers have a responsibility to maintain appropriate professional composure and behave appropriately when interactions with students become challenging for them. Marzano (2007) suggested that for teachers "emotional objectivity" (p. 151) is a critical component of classroom management, instruction, and interactions with students. Emotional objectivity is described as "keeping an emotional distance from the ups and downs of the classroom and not taking students outbursts or disobedience personally." Therefore, forgiveness and moving on past a bad day or unfortunate encounter is something both parties must deal with on an ongoing basis. While easier said than done,

it is the responsibility of the teacher to remember his or her obligation as a professional and have a fresh start to each day. Critical factors in mentoring relationships with students identified by Sipe (1999), state that along with maintaining a steady and consistent relationship with the student the adult must "take responsibility for keeping the relationship alive and realize it will probably be one sided at times" (p.15).

One must also recognize the dynamic of an imbalance of power that is encompassed in the student-teacher relationship. There is the adult/child imbalance as well as the teacher/student imbalance of power, which may cause problems when mixed with adolescents and their desire for independence. Plax and Kearny (1990) contend that the breakdowns in student-teacher relationships commonly occur when teachers put themselves in a *we-they* stance with students. While common goals and expectations are critical to any relationship, the student-teacher relationship is not one of peers or equals. The nature of the student-teacher relationship is one where the system plays a role because, in the United States, students must legally be in school, and there is a finite number of teachers for any given class. The notion that a student *has* to deal with a specific teacher and the teacher *has* to deal with a particular student is a factor. For these reasons there is a delicate balance and a continuum of work on everyone's part to maintain a positive relationship between a student and a teacher.

As previously discussed in chapter 1, the theory of school membership (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko & Fernandez, 1989) described the four components of school membership: (a) attachment-personal investment in meeting the expectations of others, caring what others think, and positive reciprocal teacher and student relations; (b)

commitment-complying with a school's rules and demands; (c) involvement-active participation in school activities and tasks; (d) belief-valuing and trusting the institution. While each of the four components of school membership are critical and relate to this study, specifically component (a) attachment-personal investment in meeting the expectations of others, caring what others think, and positive reciprocal relationships between a student and teacher is the component with the greatest significance. Student focus group data and perceptual data from the Student-Teacher Relationship survey would suggest that students value, desire, and expect positive relationships with teachers and are clear in stating that their academic performance is likely enhanced by those positive relationships. Many students readily made the connection that if a relationship with a teacher was not one with mutual respect, cooperation, and kindness some students would not put forth as much effort or time into their school work for that particular class. When adults demonstrate their personal and professional commitment by supporting students academically and personally, students are more willing to participate in the learning environment and exceed school expectations. This reciprocal relationship fosters successful and rewarding experiences for the student and the adult (Wehlage et al., p. 114). Overall, key elements of the theory of school memebership are confirmed by the fact that students and teachers at this Midwestern school seemed to show consistency when describing a positive student-teacher relationship and the data from the Student-Teacher Relationship Survey would also support this idea. Both student and teacher focus groups discussed characteristics such as respect, having a positive attitude, being a caring individual, and showing kindness as reciprocal necessities for a successful relationship

between students and teachers. The Student-Teacher Relationship survey data identified student perceptions of how positive relationships were demonstrated at their school. Ninety-nine percent of students expressed their belief that teachers know their names and 82% of students felt accepted by their teachers. Additionally, there were strengths in the climate and culture evident with 87% of students who shared they felt their teachers trusted them.

Question 2: How Do Teachers and Students Define Student Achievement?

A significant theme that emerged from the data was that by and large most identified measures of student achievement and student success shared by students and teachers alike were *softer* or less quantifiable than what was required for state mandates or the federal requirements of NCLB. Maturation, getting along with peers, putting forth effort, feeling prepared for the next level, and socialization were some of the measures noted by both students and teachers. This evidence was reflected in the mission and purpose of this Midwestern secondary school.

The mission of the school reads, "We are determined to discover what each student is passionate about, where their strengths and skills are, and coach them and their parents in that direction." The purpose of the school states, "To teach kids to THINK, LEAD and to SERVE!" While at many schools the mission and purpose are mere statements created every 5 years by stakeholder groups, these concepts are implemented differently at this Midwestern secondary school. Most districts or buildings use a consensus building process and spend many hours carefully selecting the right words and phrases to craft their mission and purpose; however, the mission and purpose are not

living and breathing in the day-to-day interactions of those at the school. The mission and purpose at this Midwestern secondary school are just that, living breathing concepts encompassed in all that goes on daily. They are posted throughout the community, hung in every classroom, and are at the top of all communication that flows in and out of the building on paper and electronically. Each teacher can articulate what the mission and purpose are and the rationale behind them. The principal refers to this laser-like focus articulated in the mission and purpose on a daily basis, and it is his mantra. It is evident that this particular school is far more interested in developing young people to be competent, caring, and contributing members of society rather than focusing on state tests and federal guidelines. By no means is it being suggested that student achievement is unimportant or that there is not a strong focus on curriculum, instruction, and assessment because that is the vehicle by which the mission and purpose are fulfilled with one exception, the relationships.

The superior academic accomplishments of students at this school would not be possible without those relationships. In considering the feedback of students and teachers regarding their definitions of student achievement, it is clear that both groups are looking ahead to the students' future, interested in the student being prepared for the next steps in life, and students having the social competencies to form and sustain a variety of relationships and connections. While there is significant emphasis on academics and cocurricular activities, it appears that the bigger picture of citizenship, learning, and connecting are the cornerstone of the experience at this school. When considering Whelege's theory of school membership, it appears this Midwestern secondary school

continues to embody the components described by Hirschi (1969): social bonding, attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief, which are presently not components in NCLB.

An additional theme that emerged was a minority of students reported quantifiable measures of student achievement rather than measures that aligned with the mission and purpose of the secondary school. Those measures include ACT scores, GPA, and earning a diploma, though teachers did not mention these as measures. All but a few students and every teacher interviewed did not view student achievement or student success at the secondary level using any measure by which nationally or internationally educational success is typically quantified as important. It is unusual that this school measures student achievement within the context of citizenship and character rather than test scores and grades.

Question 3: What Level of Connection, If Any, Exists Between Positive Student-Teacher Relationships and Student Achievement?

Students and teachers, by and large, are on the same page regarding their definitions and characteristics of positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement alike. However, the true disconnection does not lie with the definitions sought out in research Questions 1 and 2 but falls squarely within research Question 3. On the whole students in this study strongly believed that a positive relationship with their teachers helped to motivate them, engage them in instruction, and overall perform better academically. However, teachers in this study, on the whole, did not believe that a positive relationship with students had much effect on student achievement. Herein lies the disconnection, and the student perception is the reality that must be examined

carefully. Students are the clients, the ones the teachers serve, and the reason educators are working so hard. What students think and how students feel are significant components of the relationships at a secondary school. When considering the climate and culture of an organization, leaders need to ensure that each stakeholder group, including students, have a voice and multiple methods for that voice to be heard (Cushman, 2006). Should students take over and run the school? Of course not, but they need a voice and they need to be listened to often and with open minds and hearts. If teachers fail to see the influence and power they have in their classrooms and the potential effect that influence and power have on student achievement, through relationships coupled with quality curriculum, instruction, and assessment, then the potential for some students might not ever be reached due to lack of connectedness to the students' educational experience.

The theory of school membership describes the critical components of connectedness for students to the school environment. When examining the theory of school membership more deeply, Hirschi's (1969) definition of *social bonding* describes a social-psychological state or outcome in which a student exhibits the four elements of attachment, commitment, involvment, and a belief in the norms, activities, and people of an institution. The first element*, attachment* refers to when an individual has a personal stake in meeting the expectations of others and rising to those expectations because he or she genuinely cares what other people think of him or her and his or her behavior. The idea of attachment is one that is reciprocal. If an individual does not care what others think, then it is easy for him or her to begin to feel isolated and eventually disconnected

to the instituion (Whelege et al. 1989). The data in this study suggested a breakdown in attachment reciprocity.

An additional disconnection lies with the gap between the schools mission and some teachers' beliefs. The schools mission reads, "We are determined to discover what each student is passionate about, where their strengths and skills are, and coach them and their parents in that direction." It would seem fair to assume if teachers are implementing the secondary school's mission with integrity and fidelity that they would be developing positive relationships with students to identify strengths and skills, while coaching students and their parents. There is much dialogue and emphasis on the school's mission and purpose; however, if the perception of teachers as reflected in the focus group data states that the relationships they have with students do not have much impact on student achievement, it would seem incongruent and that the teachers are not fully embracing the mission and purpose.

Some teachers suggested that students do not necessarily perform better academically because of the positive relationship they have with their teachers. For example, one teacher stated that most students "respect the environment and the expectations, not necessarily me and that is what enhances student performance." This teacher believes that the tone of the classroom and high expectations yield high results. It is perceived by the researcher that the teacher's belief is that he or she is not the actual motivating entity. The researcher contends that if students "respect the environment and the expectations," in a classroom that is tantamount to saying the student respects the teacher because the teacher is the one that sets the expectations and the tone of the

environment (Jones, 2000). The perception of the teacher, however, is that he or she has little influence setting the tone and expectations of the class; thus, the connection between student-teacher relationships and student achievement is a nonexistent one. The data from students would suggest the opposite, that the teacher has a significant influence on the student-teacher relationship, thus a potential connection to student achievement.

The researcher also contends that a disconnection exists regarding the belief that students have a relationship with the school as a whole and not with individuals within the school. Relationships and connections are formed one at a time and over time through common experiences and effort from those in the relationships (University of North Carolina's Counseling Center, 2007). Each student is different from other students, and each teacher is different from other teachers. People connect and relate to each other in various ways and to some individuals better than others. To presume that students value each teacher in the same manner is short sighted.

This study confirms that this school is not a picture perfect situation and that because a high school is small or in a small community, assumptions might be falsely made that everyone knows everyone, so educators may have a false sense of connectedness to their students. The data clearly demonstrated that disconnections between students and teachers still occurs, because the ideas between students and teachers are different regarding the power of the student-teacher relationship and its potential effect on student performance. This research sheds light that some problematic student-teacher relationships are not due to unclear expectations of the relationship or of

what it takes to be successful in high school but rather the differing perceptions between students and teachers of the power of the student-teacher relationship.

Implications for Social Change

For students to be considered *postsecondary ready* they must first be postsecondary or in other words, graduate from high school. The goal is having more students stay in school and graduate and complete rigorous coursework. The point of a high quality high school education is to educate the whole person and to help students to think critically, have compassion for others, and get ready to contribute to and be part of a community. This study examined one school's definition of positive student-teacher relationships, student success at the secondary level, the students' perspectives on the relationships they have with their teachers, and the potential effect student-teacher relationships have on their academic achievement. For educators to be able to connect with their students they must first know the perspectives, thoughts, and ideas of their students on a variety of issues and topics.

This study has implications for deeper understanding of student's perceptions and affords the opportunity to examine root causes and eventually eliminate barriers that occur within the student-teacher relationship. If more students feel connected to their educational environment, fewer would drop out, fail courses, or have trouble. While most students at this school have attained above average grades and all graduate, the data would suggest a need for a thorough examination of the data from this study by the high school faculty. From that examination, further investigation into the beliefs of teachers around their impact on student achievement through student-teacher relationships could

be beneficial for the climate and culture of the school, and more importantly, for future students as they matriculate, graduate and join society at large. Students eventually must be able to sustain a living wage and be able to support themselves independently. To that end, K-12 educators must make every possible effort to connect with students and their learning. When teachers enhance students success in school, they are better able to produce a highly qualified workforce and a society of young people who are capable of continuing the cycle of growth and change which is the ultimate goal.

Challenges of the Study

Challenges of this study revolve around data collection in three ways. If this study were to be replicated, rather than two focus groups of potentially 10-12 participants, a recommendation of three or four smaller groups may yield deeper conversation amongst the teachers and may be more beneficial. Next, rather than only two focus groups of students, a researcher might consider additional groups. Perhaps dividing them in smaller grade level clusters; for example 7^{th}-8^{th} graders, 9^{th}-10^{th} graders, and 11^{th}-12^{th} graders would be beneficial. When student participants responded in groups representing 7^{th}-11^{th} grade, factors such as age, maturity, and grade level became more obvious and perhaps prohibitive for younger students. Lastly, collecting data the last two weeks of school was not ideal. While the teacher focus group participants were candid and thoughtful with their responses, perhaps a mid-year data collection opportunity would encompass more time and less stress around the demands of the culmination of the school year.

The teachers were invited to attend one of two focus groups based on the convenience of the teacher. In the first focus group 6 out of 7 teachers were female and in

the second focus group 10 out of 12 teachers were male. This imbalance of gender was a coincidence, though there could be limitations to the homogenous groupings.

The final and most significant challenge of this research revolved around the assumption made by the researcher that when discussing the definition and characteristics of student achievement with students and teachers during focus group conversations, participants would have identified a quantifiable element by which to measure a connection between student-teacher relationships and student achievement. The researcher forecasted that students and teachers would determine at least one quantifiable measure of student achievement, for example grade point average or ACT scores as a measure of success and they did not. Thus, it created a greater challenge to determine quantitatively whether or not a connection between student-teacher relationships and student achievement did exist and to what extent, if at all. The qualitative data reflects a strong connection between student-teacher relationships and student achievement as perceived by the students. In reflection, this research would be better served if it were qualitative only rather than a mixed method approach.

Strengths of the Study

A thorough, rich description was used when analyzing the focus group data, which was then strengthened by the student perceptual survey results. During the focus groups, students and teachers overall were in alignment regarding their characteristics and definitions of positive student-teacher relationships and student success. The survey results in most cases verified and corroborated what students indicated during the focus

groups regarding their beliefs whether or not the rapport they had with a particular teacher had an effect on their academic performance in a particular class.

The number of students and the number of teachers who participated in focus groups and in the survey were significant. Eighty-eight percent of students participated in the survey and 83% of teachers on staff participated in a focus group.

An additional strength of the study was the Student-Teacher Relationship Survey. The instrument had a .915 reliability estimate using a Chronbach Alpha test with the data from a pilot test during October 2007.

Lastly, data and information from this study could have implications for public consumption in the educational community. Administrators and teachers could benefit from the findings of this research to evaluate the current state of student-teacher relationships in their schools.

Recommendations

For this Midwestern secondary school, future recommendations might include a thorough examination of both the qualitative data and the quantitative data that was collected during May 2008. Structured dialogue could be facilitated during professional development in such a way that areas of strength and suggested areas of improvement can be identified by the teachers. Next, determining what goals and how the school might measure those goals would be critical. An example of possible measureable goals might be increases or decreases on identified items on the Student-Teacher Relationship Survey. Additionally, a tightly aligned action plan would then need to be crafted by a teacher driven leadership team who could identify resources, determine action steps, distribute

accountibility, and provide support to the staff and students to ensure the plan is implemented.

Additionally, next steps could be a student satisfaction survey and/or an assessment of programs inventory tailored to focus on student-teacher relationships. The school could administer the My Voice survey from the Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations to collect further data on student perceptions around student-teacher relationships and to assess the level of student voice felt by the student population as decisions are made in the school environment. The school would also work on improving the self-concept of students so they feel more engaged and connected to school, with the purpose of increasing student achievement by incorporating an amended version of the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory compatible with K-12 public education. Coupled with the student component, there may be professional development opportunities for teachers and their curricula to ensure instruction is increasingly more personalized for students to raise the level of student engagement. Some teachers may be uncomfortable relaxing and giving up some control in the classroom to shift from a sage on the stage style of instruction to a skilled facilitator of learning. Allowing student choice and collaborative interaction amongst secondary students to construct their own knowledge can be a powerful and personalized method of instruction (Jones, 2000).

This study was specifically focused on students' and teachers' definitions of positive-student teacher relationships and student achievement coupled with the perceptions of students regarding the student-teacher relationships they have currently. Future research implications from this study could include:

1. A qualitative study examining how problematic external issues of job dissatisfaction, frustration and accountability are for high school teachers and do they have an effect on student-teacher relationships?

2. A qualitative study, which expands on the current study, examining the teachers' perceptions of their student-teacher relationships and comparing them to the students' perceptions of their student-teacher relationships to determine similarities and differences.

3. A replicated study disaggregating quantitative data by gender or grade level.

4. A mixed methods study examining potential connections between student-teacher relationships and national trends of the decreasing college enrollment of males and the potential economic hardships that could cause in the future for families and society.

5. Further study regarding student behavior specific to manipulation of teachers for academic benefit.

6. Further research is to explore the vastly different perceptions of academic success perceived by teachers, students, the educational community, and the public at large.

Conclusions

Good teachers have instincts about how to relate to students to make them feel valued, and they feel a personal responsibility to see their students succeed. The focus group findings related to research Question 1, "How do students and teachers define a positive student-teacher relationship?", were not surprising. Students and teachers alike

responded predictably, with descriptors of a positive student-teacher relationship such as kindness, compassion, and responsibility on the parts of both students and teachers.

The focus group findings related to research Question 2, "How do students and teachers define student achievement?", were somewhat unexpected. Neither the students nor the teachers put emphasis on grades, test scores, or college entrance measures but rather the priority was being and feeling prepared for a student's next steps after graduation, having tried hard during high school, and having the confidence to continue the journey of life, whatever that may entail. Most educators are focusing on state or federal measures of NCLB, which include test scores, attendance, graduation rate, and other measures of a student's and a school's success. Though students and teachers in this study did not respond with many quantifiable measures of student achievement, they did respond similarly to each other. This overlap in thinking demonstrates the mission and purpose at this secondary school is on its way to being alive and in practice.

Research Question 3, "What level of connection, if any, exists between positive student-teacher relationships and student achievement?" is ultimately the crux of the disconnection between students and teachers. Students almost unanimously agreed that the better the rapport with the teacher the more effort they put forth, thus achieving better academic performance. This idea is further supported by the results from the Student-Teacher Relationship Survey, which overall indicated positive student perceptions about the relationships they have with their teachers thus performing better in class. The teachers, however, almost unanimously agreed that the rapport they have with their students had little to no effect on student achievement. The researcher collected and

analyzed both qualitative and quantitative data and determined to reject the null hypothesis, which states there is no connection between student-teacher relationships and student achievement.

Perception is reality, and the student perception is that the relationships they have with their teachers do, in fact, affect their academic performance. This study confirms that if educators listen to their students, they can enhance the school experience for them by challenging themselves to different and more personalized behaviors within the classroom. Ideally, this will connect more students to their learning environment and create fewer dropouts, and in turn, create a more productive, competent, caring society as we continue to produce the workforce of future generations.

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APPENDIX A:

IRB APPROVAL FOR RESEARCH

To: cmodlin@aea11.k12.ia.us
Cc: DoctoralStudy@waldenu.edu, nlong@waldenu.edu
Date: 05/12/2008 08:53 AM
Subject: IRB materials approved-Cheryl Modlin

Dear Ms. Modlin,

This email is to notify you that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your application for the study entitled, "Student-Teacher Relationships and Their Impact on Student Achievement at the Secondary Level."

Your approval # is 05-12-2008-0328871. You will need to reference this number in the appendix of your doctoral study and in any future funding or publication submissions.

Your IRB approval expires on May 12, 2009. One month before this expiration date, you will be sent a Continuing Review Form, which must be submitted if you wish to collect data beyond the approval expiration date.

Your IRB approval is contingent upon your adherence to the exact procedures described in the final version of the IRB application materials that have been submitted as of this date. If you need to make any changes to your research staff or procedures, you must obtain IRB approval by submitting the IRB Request for Change in Procedures Form. You will receive an IRB approval status update within 1 week of submitting the change request form and are not permitted to implement changes prior to receiving approval. Please note that Walden University does not accept responsibility or liability for research activities conducted without the IRB's approval, and the University will not accept or grant credit for student work that fails to comply with the policies and procedures related to ethical standards in research.

When you submitted your IRB application, you a made commitment to communicate both discrete adverse events and general problems to the IRB within 1 week of their occurrence/realization. Failure to do so may result in invalidation of data, loss of academic credit, and/or loss of legal protections otherwise available to the researcher.

Both the Adverse Event Reporting form and Request for Change in Procedures form can be obtained at the IRB section of the Walden web site or by emailing irb@waldenu.edu: http://inside.waldenu.edu/c/Student_Faculty/StudentFaculty_4274.htm

Researchers are expected to keep detailed records of their research activities (i.e., participant log sheets, completed consent forms, etc.) for the same period of time they

retain the original data. If, in the future, you require copies of the originally submitted IRB materials, you may request them from Institutional Review Board.

Please note that this letter indicates that the IRB has approved your research. You may not begin the research phase of your dissertation, however, until you have received the Notification of Approval to Conduct Research (which indicates that your committee and Program Chair have also approved your research proposal). Once you have received this notification by email, you may begin your data collection.

Jenny Sherer, M.Ed.
Operations Manager
Office of Research Integrity and Compliance
Email: irb@waldenu.edu
Fax: 626-605-0472
Tollfree : 800-925-3368 ext. 1278
Office address for Walden University:
155 5th Avenue South, Suite 200
Minneapolis, MN 55401

Information about the Walden University Institutional Review Board, including instructions for application, may be found at this link:
http://inside.waldenu.edu/c/Student_Faculty/StudentFaculty_4274.htm

APPENDIX B:

LETTER OF COOPERATION

Badger Creek Community School District
520 First Avenue
PO Box 257
Badger Creek, Iowa 50261

December 1, 2007

Dear Ms. Modlin,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled "Student-Teacher Relationships and Their Impact on Student Achivement at the Secondary Level" within the Badger Creek Community School District. As part of this study, I authorize you to invite members of my organization, whose names and contact information I will provide, to participate in the study as interview subjects. Their participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Greg DeTimmerman
Superintendent

John Carver
Jr./Sr. High Principal

Researcher Signature

APPENDIX C:

STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP SURVEY

This instrument is adapted with permission from ICLE's Learning Relationship Survey. Students will take this survey online using Test Pilot software.

High school students respond to the following questions using a Likert scale of:
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

1. Most of my teachers know my name.
2. My teachers take an interest in my future goals and education plans.
3. I have opportunities to ask my teachers questions about what we are learning in class.
4. I talk with teachers in settings outside of class.
5. There are teachers I could ask to write me a recommendation for a job, college or an award.
6. Most of my teachers are willing to help me with a personal problem.
7. My teachers trust me.
8. My teachers pay attention to all students, not just the top students.
9. My teachers keep their promises.
10. My teachers help me catch up if I am behind.
11. I feel supported by my teachers.
12. The support I get from my teachers encourages me to learn more.
13. My teachers make me feel special and unique.
14. I feel my school has a welcoming environment.
15. Most students respect teachers.
16. I enjoy being at school most of the time.

17. Students have input in decisions made at my school.

18. I feel accepted by my teachers for who I am.

19. I have a teacher who I can look up to as a person who sets a good example for me.

20. Most teachers recognize students for being friendly and setting a good example for others.

21. I feel my teachers care about me as an individual. Most teachers make school fun and an exciting place to learn.

22. My teachers usually think the best of me and expect me to be successful.

23. My teachers notice and comment upon my return if I am absent from school.

24. Most teachers respect students at my school.

25. Most of my teachers seem to have fun at school.

26.Please indicate your gender:

Male Female

27. Please indicate your grade level:

7 8 9 10 11 12

Thank you for your input on this survey!

APPENDIX D:

IRB APPROVAL FOR DATA SET

Email communication October/November 2007 between Dr. Endicott and IRB regarding permission to use existing data that the local district has gathered for purposes other than the current research.

Dr. Edicott,
Thank you very much for your response and consideration. I appreciate your flexibility.
Sincerely,
Cheryl Modlin
--
Cheryl Modlin M.A.T., C.H.E.S.
Professional Learning and Leadership Consultant
Heartland AEA, Region 3
6500 Corporate Drive
Johnston, IA 50131-1603
515-270-0405 ext. 4645
800-255-0405 ext. 4645
fax: 515-270-5383
cmodlin@aea11.k12.ia.us

On Wednesday, November 7, 2007 11:16 AM, IRB@waldenu.edu wrote:
Great questions. Yes, this sounds like an approvable data collection process (from the info you provided). In fact, if your doctoral committee happens to approve the version of the survey that was administered in October then you can also apply to use archival (existing data) in addition to the May data.

We generally don't encourage students to "count" on being able to use existing data but I just wanted to let you know that it is a possibility (dependent on whether the committee approves the survey as a valid and reliable data collection tool).

Sincerely,
Leilani Endicott, Ph.D.
Chair, Walden University Institutional Review Board
Email: IRB@waldenu.edu
Tollfree : 800-925-3368 ext. 1210
Fax: 626-605-0472

Please note: Jeffrey Ford and Kathryn Green no longer work in the IRB department.

Information about the dissertation process can be found at this link:
http://inside.waldenu.edu/c/Student_Faculty/StudentFaculty_4276.htm

Cheryl Modlin <cmodlin@aea11.k12.ia.us>
11/04/2007 09:50 AM
Please respond to Cheryl Modlin <cmodlin@aea11.k12.ia.us>

To: <irb@waldenu.edu>
Cc: <nathan.long@waldenu.edu>
Subject: Data collection question

Dr. Endicott and members of the IRB,

My name is Cheryl Modlin and I am hoping to propose my study to my doctoral committee in late December or early January, and hopefully submitting my IRB application shortly thereafter. The Chair of my committee is Dr. Nathan Long and he suggested I e-mail you regarding my data collection question, to make sure we are on the right track.

I currently work for Heartland AEA in central Iowa which is an intermediary service agency between local school districts and the Iowa Department of Education. I serve as a Professional Learning and Leadership Consultant for four local districts. My study is a sequential, exploratory, confirmatory one focusing on positive student-teacher relationships and their impact on student achievement. The study will begin with focus groups of staff and students, then a survey will be administered to students and finally a single case study will be analyzed to triangulate the data. I will be using one of the four districts I serve as my research focus. The administration, staff are eager to be part of my study.

The district is asking for a survey to be administered in Oct. and again in May to measure student-teacher relationships before and after the implementation of an Advisory program during the course of the 07-08 school year. I have modified and added questions to an existing survey from the International Center for Leadership in Education, with permission. The district will be using these data independently. My questions is regarding the spring data collection in May. These are the data I would like to use in the quantitative portion of my research and I am only interested in the May data collection, not the baseline data collected in October. I have crafted and modified the instrument, it will have been piloted and tested for reliability to meet my Agencies requirements and Walden's.

My agency also has an application I am required to fill out prior to collecting any data with our local districts and I am in the process of working on than now. Because this study is in essence using existing data and involves a third party I wanted to make sure I was permitted to use the spring data for my study.

I want to make sure what I proposing is legal and above board and seeking permission now made more sense than running into trouble later. I would be happy to answer any follow up questions you may have or provide you with any additional information that you may require. Thank you in advance for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,
Cheryl Modlin

APPENDIX E:

IRB APPROVAL FOR WAIVER OF CONSENT

E-mail communication from the IRB November 26, 2007
Re: Active consent forms for students participating in the Student-Teacher Relationship survey.

Subject: Re: follow up question

Ms. Modlin,

Provided that the school removes all identifies before providing you with the data, you will only need a Data Use Agreement from the school, and will be able to avoid gathering consent from all individual students and parents.

Thank you,

Jeff Ford
Operations Manager
Office of Student Research
Walden University
Email: IRB@waldenu.edu
Tollfree : 800-925-3368 ext. 1210
Fax: 626-605-0472

Information about the Walden University Institutional Review Board, including instructions for application, may be found at this link:
http://inside.waldenu.edu/c/Student_Faculty/StudentFaculty_4274.htm

Cheryl Modlin <cmodlin@aea11.k12.ia.us>

11/23/2007 02:20 PM
Please respond to
Cheryl Modlin <cmodlin@aea11.k12.ia.us>

To: <irb@waldenu.edu>
Cc: <nathan.long@waldenu.edu>
Subject: follow up question

Dr. Endicott,
I have a follow up question for you regarding my potential use of existing data. (I have attached our previous correspondence for your review to jog your memory of my particular circumstances.) To confirm, I will need a consent/assent form from the adult and student participants of the focus groups.

My question lies with the existing survey data set that the school has had the students take in Oct, 2007 and will take again in May, 2008. This student survey is required by the school district and pending IRB approval and committee approval, I am hoping to use the existing data.... do I need to secure permission from parents of the survey participants? They will have already taken the survey once for district purposes and consent was not obtained by the district at that time. When I consulted the federal regulations I think my research would fall under 46.116 section d which states that if a study is minimal risk, a waiver would not affect the rights or welfare of the subject, the research could not be conducted without the waiver and that the subjects would be provided with pertinent information at the conclusion of the project then consent could be waived. Could you please clarify for me whether I need consent for survey participants? Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Cheryl Modlin

APPENDIX F:

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Teachers:

1. What characteristics make up a positive relationship with a student?
   a. On your part
   b. On the part of the student

2. What characteristics make up a negative relationship with a student?
   a. On your part
   b. On the part of the student

3. How do you define student achievement?

4. Describe what it means to have student achievement or student success in high school?

Students:

5. What characteristics make up a positive relationship with a teacher?
   a. On your part?
   b. On the part of the teacher?

6. What characteristics make up a negative relationship with a teacher?
   a. On your part?
   b. On the part of the teacher?

7. How do you define student achievement?

8. Describe what it means to have student achievement or student success in high school.

APPENDIX G:

PERMISSION TO MODIFY SURVEY

E-mail communication September 2007 for permission to modify the Learning Relationship Survey from the International Center for Leadership in Education from Dick Jones.

Dick,
Thanks for your willingness to share your expertise and survey with Heartland and for my schoolwork. The conversations that will take place once data has been gathered I believe will be powerful. I do appreciate your support! I'll keep you posted:)
Cheryl
--
Cheryl Modlin M.A.T., C.H.E.S.
Professional Learning and Leadership Consultant
Region 3
6500 Corporate Drive
Johnston, IA 50131-1603
515-270-0405 ext. 4645
800-255-0405 ext. 4645
fax: 515-270-5383
cmodlin@aea11.k12.ia.us

On Wednesday, September 12, 2007 4:14 PM, Richard Jones <rdj@nycap.rr.com> wrote:
Cheryl,

Thanks for checking in with me. You have permission to use the survey as modified. This looks good. Are you going to survey students and teachers with similar questions. The difference between student perceptions and teacher perceptions is great fuel for conversation.

The degree prospectus is exciting, we need more research the highlights the importance and impact of student relationships.

Dick Jones

On Sep 10, 2007, at 11:33 AM, Cheryl Modlin wrote:

Hi Dick,
I am hopeful you may remember the ongoing conversation we have had regarding your Learning Relationships Survey. A year ago you gave Heartland AEA (Iowa) permission to use the survey with our schools who were participating in professional development around Rigor, Relevance and Relationships. We gave the survey to about 20 schools. When the data came back many schools were interested in removing the neutral response and modifying some of the questions slightly. We spoke about this in March at a HS Project learning opportunity at the zoo and you were agreeable to the modifications.

Attached is the draft survey we would like to use. The majority of modifications were to add 'most' to the beginning of some of the questions. The thinking there was if a high school student has more than one teacher we wanted to give a choice that would provide a majority response. I have also added a few additional questions. I have one school who would like to use this modified instrument for a pre/post data collection as they are implementing an Advisory program this year.

I am also working toward my EdD degree in Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning and would like your permission to use this adapted instrument for part of my study. I have attached a copy of my prospectus if you are interested.

Would you please review the modified instrument and let me know if you have suggestions or feedback. Also, would you be willing to give Heartland permission to use this modified instrument, crediting you and ICLE with our schools? Finally, would you be willing to allow me to use this modified instrument for my doctoral work as well? I appreciate your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you!

Thanks,
Cheryl

Cheryl Modlin M.A.T., C.H.E.S.
Professional Learning and Leadership Consultant

APPENDIX H:

DATA USE AGREEMENT

This Data Use Agreement ("Agreement"), effective as of December 1, 2007 ("Effective Date"), is entered into by and between Cheryl Modlin("Data Recipient") and Badger Creek Community Schools ("Data Provider"). The purpose of this Agreement is to provide Data Recipient with access to a Limited Data Set ("LDS") for use in research in accord with the HIPAA and FERPA Regulations.

1. Definitions. Unless otherwise specified in this Agreement, all capitalized terms used in this Agreement not otherwise defined have the meaning established for purposes of the "HIPAA Regulations" codified at Title 45 parts 160 through 164 of the United States Code of Federal Regulations, as amended from time to time.

2. Preparation of the LDS. Data Provider shall prepare and furnish to Data Recipient a LDS in accord with any applicable HIPAA or FERPA Regulations

3. Data Fields in the LDS. No direct identifiers such as names may be included in the Limited Data Set (LDS). In preparing the LDS, Data Provider or shall include the **data fields specified as follows**, which are the minimum necessary to accomplish the research: Student-Teacher Relationship Survey Data, potentially GPA by class, non identifiable demographic data from student management system.

   .

4. Responsibilities of Data Recipient. Data Recipient agrees to:

   a. Use or disclose the LDS only as permitted by this Agreement or as required by law;

   b. Use appropriate safeguards to prevent use or disclosure of the LDS other than as permitted by this Agreement or required by law;

   c. Report to Data Provider any use or disclosure of the LDS of which it becomes aware that is not permitted by this Agreement or required by law;

   d. Require any of its subcontractors or agents that receive or have access to the LDS to agree to the same restrictions and conditions on the use and/or disclosure of the LDS that apply to Data Recipient under this Agreement; and

   e. Not use the information in the LDS to identify or contact the individuals who are data subjects.

5. Permitted Uses and Disclosures of the LDS. Data Recipient may use and/or disclose the LDS for its Research activities only.

6. Term and Termination.

   a. Term. The term of this Agreement shall commence as of the Effective Date and shall continue for so long as Data Recipient retains the LDS, unless sooner terminated as set forth in this Agreement.

   b. Termination by Data Recipient. Data Recipient may terminate this agreement at any time by notifying the Data Provider and returning or destroying the LDS.

   c. Termination by Data Provider. Data Provider may terminate this agreement at any time by providing thirty (30) days prior written notice to Data Recipient.

   d. For Breach. Data Provider shall provide written notice to Data Recipient within ten (10) days of any determination that Data Recipient has breached a material term of this Agreement. Data Provider shall afford Data Recipient an opportunity to cure said alleged material breach upon mutually agreeable terms. Failure to agree on mutually agreeable terms for cure within thirty (30) days shall be grounds for the immediate termination of this Agreement by Data Provider.

   e. Effect of Termination. Sections 1, 4, 5, 6(e) and 7 of this Agreement shall survive any termination of this Agreement under subsections c or d.

7. Miscellaneous.

   a. Change in Law. The parties agree to negotiate in good faith to amend this Agreement to comport with changes in federal law that materially alter either or both parties' obligations under this Agreement. Provided however, that if the parties are unable to agree to mutually acceptable amendment(s) by the compliance date of the change in applicable law or regulations, either Party may terminate this Agreement as provided in section 6.

   b. Construction of Terms. The terms of this Agreement shall be construed to give effect to applicable federal interpretative guidance regarding the HIPAA Regulations.

   c. No Third Party Beneficiaries. Nothing in this Agreement shall confer upon any person other than the parties and their respective successors or assigns, any rights, remedies, obligations, or liabilities whatsoever.

d. Counterparts. This Agreement may be executed in one or more counterparts, each of which shall be deemed an original, but all of which together shall constitute one and the same instrument.

e. Headings. The headings and other captions in this Agreement are for convenience and reference only and shall not be used in interpreting, construing or enforcing any of the provisions of this Agreement.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, each of the undersigned has caused this Agreement to be duly executed in its name and on its behalf.

DATA PROVIDER **DATA RECIPIENT**

Signed: _____ Signed: _____

Print Name: John Carver Print Name: Cheryl Modlin

Print Title: Principal Badger Creek Secondary School Print Title:

Signed:_____

Print Name: Greg DeTimmerman

Print Title: Superintendent, Badger Creek Community Schools

APPENDIX I:

STUDENT CONSENT FORM

Hello, my name is Cheryl Modlin and I am doing a project to learn about student-teacher relationships and their effect on student achievement at the secondary level. I am inviting you to join my project. I picked you for this project because you are a student at Badger Creek Secondary School. I am going to read this form with you. You can ask any questions you have before you decide if you want to do this project.

WHO I AM:
I am a student at Walden University. I am working on my doctoral degree in Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning. While I also serve as Badger Creek's professional learning and leadership consultant from Heartland AEA that is separate and apart from this research.

ABOUT THE PROJECT:
If you agree to join this project, you will be asked to:

- Participate in a focus group with your peers to discuss your thoughts and ideas about student-teacher relationships and student achievement.

IT'S YOUR CHOICE:
You don't have to join this focus group if you don't want to. You won't get into trouble with Badger Creek Schools, Mr. De Timmerman, Mr. Carver or if you say no. If you decide now that you want to join the conversation, you can still change your mind later just by telling me. If you want to skip some parts of the conversation, just let me know.

This conversation does not pose risk to participants. This project might help others by helping teachers and students gain a deeper understanding of one another as they foster relationships. Also, this gives staff some data and a place to start when considering improvement efforts around a personalized learning environment. The more connected students and teachers are the more chances of positive interaction and increased student achievement.

Participants are invited to eat candy as a thank you for your input today.

PRIVACY:
Everything you tell me during this focus group will be kept private. That means that no one else will know your name or what answers you gave. The only time I have to tell someone is if I learn about something that could hurt you or someone else.

ASKING QUESTIONS:
You can ask me any questions you want now. If you think of a question later, you or your parents can reach me at cmodlin@aea11.k12.ia.us or my professor Dr. Nathan Long at nathan.long@waldenu.edu. If you would like to ask my university a question, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 1210.

I will give you a copy of this form.

Please sign your name below if you want to join this conversation.

Name of Child _____

Child Signature _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____

APPENDIX J:

TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Hello, my name is Cheryl Modlin and I am doing a project to learn about student-teacher relationships and their effect on student achievement at the secondary level. I am inviting you to join my project. I picked you for this project because you are a teacher at Badger Creek Secondary School. I am going to read this form with you. You can ask any questions you have before you decide if you want to participate in this focus group.

WHO I AM:
I am a student at Walden University. I am working on my doctoral degree in Administrator Teaching and Learning. While I also serve as Badger Creek's professional learning and leadership consultant from Heartland AEA that is separate and apart from this research.

ABOUT THE PROJECT:
If you agree to join this project, you will be asked to:

- Participate in a focus group with your peers to discuss your thoughts and ideas about student-teacher relationships and student achievement. The conversation will last approximately 45 minutes.

IT'S YOUR CHOICE:
You don't have to join this focus group if you don't want to. You won't get into trouble with Badger Creek Schools, Mr. Carver or Mr. De Timmerman if you say no. If you decide now that you want to join the conversation, you can still change your mind later just by telling me. If you want to skip some parts of the conversation, just let me know.

This conversation does not pose risk to participants. This project might help others by helping teachers and students gain a deeper understanding of one another as they foster relationships. Also, this gives staff some data and a place to start when considering improvement efforts around a personalized learning environment. The more connected students and teachers are the more chances of positive interaction and increased student achievement.

Participants are invited to eat candy as a thank you for your input today.

PRIVACY:
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ASKING QUESTIONS:
You can ask me any questions you want now. If you think of a question later, you can reach me at cmodlin@aea11.k12.ia.us or my professor Dr. Nathan Long at nathan.long@waldenu.edu. If you would like to ask my university a question, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 1210.

I will give you a copy of this form.

Please sign your name below if you want to join this conversation.

Name of Faculty Member _____

Faculty Member Signature _____

Researcher Signature *Cheryl Modlin* _____

CURRICULUM VITAE

Cheryl Dix Modlin
Johnston, Iowa

EDUCATION

WALDEN UNIVERSITY, MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA
Doctorate of Education, Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning, December, 2008
Doctoral focus: Student-Teacher Relationships and Their Effect on Student Achievement
Administrative License, Evaluator Approval Certificate, Master Educator Teaching License

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLNA, COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA
Masters of Arts in Teaching, Certified Health Education Specialist, May 1994
Major: Health Promotion and Education

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLNA, COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA
Bachelor of Science, May 1992
Major: Hotel Restaurant and Tourism Administration

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

HEARTLAND AREA EDUCATION AGENCY, JOHNSTON IOWA
Professional Learning and Leadership Consultant, 2007-present
Responsibilities include support for four local school districts in the areas of organizational development, instructional improvement and professional development and leadership development as they continue to increase student achievement. Main focuses include assisting secondary administrators with needs assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation of programs and services within the district, providing support and leadership to improve student learning and staying current with state and federal legislation and scientifically based research practices. Currently serving region 3 schools Earlham Community Schools, Badger Creek Community Schools*, Waukee Community Schools, Winterset Community Schools and Metro West Learning Academy.

ACTIVITIES, PRESENTATIONS AND RELATED WORKS
Cultural Competency Trainer, 2008
Fierce Conversation Training, 2008
Balanced Leadership Training, 2007
High School Redesign Advisory Board Member, 2007-2008
Department of Education site visit committee member and facilitator, 2004 to present
School Administrators of Iowa Conference Attendee, 2007
Enhancing Education Through Technology Cadre Member, 2007 to present
New Teacher Orientation Facilitator, 2007

School Improvement Consultant, 2004-2007
Responsibilities include half time collaborating with two local school districts in the areas of organizational development, instructional improvement and professional development as they continue to increase student achievement. Main focuses include assisting administrators with needs assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation of programs and services within the district, providing support and leadership to improve student learning and staying current with state and federal legislation and scientifically based research practices. Currently serving PCM Community School and Kuemper Catholic Schools formerly served Saydel Community Schools

2004-2005. Half of my current assignment is the Focus on High Schools Initiative around High School Redesign.

ACTIVITIES, PRESENTATIONS AND RELATED WORKS

Learning Relationships Coaching: Wellman Training, 2006
Reading Recovery Advisory Board member, 2004 to 2007
Instructional Practices Inventory Student Engagement: Valentine Training, 2006

Content Area Capacity Building 4-12 Reading, 2004 to 2007
CRISS Training I and II
Facilitation Training
Needs Assessment Training
Planning, Implementation and Evaluation Training
Heartland AEA School Improvement Goal Group, 2004-2005
Instructor for Professional Development classes through Drake University: "Focus on High Schools: Personalization", "Health Education for the Secondary Educator", "CRISS Coaching", and "Elementary Math Skill Development"

Focus on High Schools Responsibilities

Focus on High Schools State Design Team AEA 11 representative, 2005 to 2007
Focus on High Schools State Trainer-Breaking Ranks II, AEA 11 representative 2005 to 2007
High School Project, International Center for Leadership in Education grant reading committee AEA 11 Representative, Oct 2006
High School Summit Planning Committee 2005-2006
Model Schools Conference, International Center for Leadership in Education participant, Orlando Florida, July 2006
High Schools That Work conference, Southern Regional Education Board participant, Nashville Tennessee, June 2005
Heartland AEA Leadership Design Team, 2005 to 2007
Focus on High Schools Initiative at Heartland AEA, 2005 to 2007

- Personalization/Rigor and Relevance Strands Coordinator
- Personalization Strand Co-facilitator
- Focus on High School Advisory Committee Coordinator
- High School Test Pilot Survey Coordinator
- Focus on High School Program Evaluation Lead
- Career Conference Planning Committee
- Risky Business Conference Presenter 2006

BUSBEE MIDDLE SCHOOL, LEXINGTON SCHOOL DISTRICT TWO, LEXINGTON SOUTH CAROLINA

Related Arts Team Leader and Sixth, Seventh and Eighth grade Health Education Teacher, 2003-2004

Responsibilities: Developed and facilitated related arts team schedules, staff professional development, daily team meetings and mentoring of new faculty. Facilitated and implemented health curricula to approximately 350 middle school students. Student population is of varied socioeconomic status and diverse ability levels. Busbee Middle School is a Red Carpet School, A Flagship School of Promise and and became an Exemplary Writing School during 2003.

ACTIVITIES, HONORS, PRESENTATIONS AND RELATED WORKS

District Health Education Advisory Council
Coalition of the Arts grant recipient
Exemplary Writing grant participant

Cooperating teacher for USC practicum student

ALCORN MIDDLE SCHOOL, RICHLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT ONE, COLUMBIA SOUTH CAROLINA
Curriculum Resource Director 2002-2003
Responsibilities: Serve as a member of the administrative team, oversee curriculum and instruction at all grade levels providing technical support, administration of district assessments, organize and facilitate evaluations for certified staff on each level of the ADEPT process, plan and deliver staff development, oversee the completion of the AAP appeals process, oversee the completion of Academic Plans, oversee new teacher mentoring and support, develop master and bell schedules, grant writing, school contact for business partnerships, other duties as assigned by the principal.

ACTIVITIES, HONORS, PRESENTATIONS AND RELATED WORKS 2002-2003
ADEPT Evaluator training
Institute for Learning, Principals of Learning training
Standards in Practice training
Cognitive Coaching training
AVID Awareness training
SASI training-basic and mass scheduling

URBANDALE HIGH SCHOOL, URBANDALE COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT, URBANDALE IOWA
Health Education 9 and Wellness Education 11 Teacher, 1999-2002
Responsibilities: Developed, facilitated and implemented health curricula to approximately 300 high school students per year. The students were general education, at-risk, special education of all levels and international students. Creation of a mentoring program pairing high school students and elementary students was a means to increase reading scores and social, emotional and behavioral growth for all who participated. Urbandale High School has 1261 students, currently executes a modified block schedule and is included in the Des Moines Metro Area.

ACTIVITIES, HONORS, PRESENTATIONS AND RELATED WORKS 1999-present
Nominated and Accepted to the Iowa Contemporary School Leadership Program and graduated Spring of 2001
Cooperating Teacher for a student teacher, Iowa State University 2002
Mentoring new faculty members 2001-2002
At-Risk Advocate 1999-2002
Elected to Urbandale High School Building Council 2000-2001
Coordinator of New Faculty Mentoring Program 2000-2001
B.E.S.T. (Beginning Education Support Team) training 2000-2001
Reading in the Content Area training 2000-2002
Character Counts Training 2001
Health and Wellness Curriculum Development and Assessment 1999-2002
Dress Code Committee 2001
Mentoring Program with high school students and elementary students 1999-2001
Positive Impact Team 1999-2000
Community Service Awards for Mentoring Program 1999-2001
At-Risk Options Committee 2000

COLFAX-MINGO COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT, COLFAX, IOWA
Healthy Communities-Healthy Youth Coordinator, 1998-1999
Responsibilities: To integrate the 40 Developmental Assets into a K-5 setting, research, implementation and evaluation of pilot curriculum as a sub-contractor for the Bureau of Justice Assistance in collaboration with the Colfax-Mingo Community School District. Develop and execute a mentoring program for at-risk elementary using high school mentors. Management of grant, obtaining additional grants, and future grant funding.

ACTIVITIES, HONORS, PRESENTATIONS AND RELATED WORKS
Success 4 District Contact and Chairperson of Oversight Committee, 1998-1999
Presenter Healthy Community-Health Youth Conference Minneapolis, 1998
Presenter at Risky Business At-Risk Conference Des Moines, 1998
State of Iowa Asset Building Executive Committee, 1999
Systems Thinking the Fifth Discipline, Peter Senge 1999
Dimensions of Learning Training, 1998-1999
The School Portfolio-Framework for School Improvement, Victoria Bernhardt, 1998

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA, COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA
Adjunct Instructor, Department of Health Promotion and Education, 1995-1997
Responsibilities: Taught graduate level courses HPRE 631: "Health Education Methods for Elementary and Middle School Teachers" and HPRE 792: "Health Education Facilitating and Promoting Healthy Life Skill Development."

HOPKINS MIDDLE SCHOOL, RICHLAND ONE SCHOOLS, COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA
Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Grade Health Education Teacher, 1996-1998
Responsibilities: Developed and implemented health education curricula, focusing on the seven priority areas: Self-Awareness and Relationships, Family Health and Sexuality, Nutrition, Safe Living, Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drugs, Personal Health and Environmental Health to middle school students in a rural, culturally diverse setting.

HOPKINS MIDDLE SCHOOL, RICHLAND ONE SCHOOLS, COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA
Sixth and Seventh Grade Science and Health Education Teacher, 1994-1996
Responsibilities: Instructed and implemented health and science curricula to 125 middle school students. Sixth grade science focused on general science and seventh grade sciences focused on life science. Integrated and thematic units were used in teams with a middle school concept and block scheduling.

ACTIVITIES, HONORS, PRESENTATIONS, AND RELATED WORKS 1994-1998
Teacher of the Year Nominee, 1995-1996
District Curriculum Development Committee for Health Education, 1995-1996
Chairperson for Southern Association for Certified Schools Revision Team, 1994-1995
Health Department Chairperson 1995-1997
Health and Wellness Coordinator, 1995-1997
Cheerleading Coach, 1995-1997
Public Relations Committee, 1995-1997
Teacher Appreciation Committee, 1996-1997
Carolina Healthstyles Coordinator, 1995-1996
Presented "Do It Yourself" curriculum at the South Carolina Association of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance Conference, and at district staff developments1996