

“ETERNITY IN MIND”: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY ON BUILDING POSITIVE
TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS IN CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

by

Joy Diane Stouffer

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this systematic grounded theory study was to understand how teachers and students from open-enrollment Christian schools in Guam and Hawaii described the process of building positive teacher-student relationships. The framework guiding this study was social constructivism and Vygotsky's (1980), Bruner's (1997) and Bandura's (1993) theories on the influence of environmental factors on the perceptions of the teacher-student relationship. The central research question asked how teachers and students described the process of building positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools. Data collection methods included online surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews. A systematic, grounded theory approach, data analysis, and coding was utilized to identify the themes, which were developed into a model to describe the process of building positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools.

Keywords: positive teacher-student relationships, Christian schools, social constructivism, middle school, high school

Dedication

To a fellow educator who showed me what it means to stand tall in Christ, sure footed in my unshakeable identity as His child, and to live each day to know Him a little better and make Him known to those around me. You have exemplified what it truly means to live an authentic, Christian life with no regrets. You have been a colleague, a faithful mentor, a dear friend, a big sis. Laurie Wilson, thank you for the eternal impact you have had in my life.

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“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, His mercy endures forever” (Psalm 136:1, KJV). The goodness of my God has been clearly evident in this doctoral journey. His grace and love have been channeled through individuals who have prayed for me and encouraged me. In Christ, I have found joy and purpose for my life. To Him be all the glory and praise.

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My parents have always believed in me, and my dad has encouraged me for many years to write a book. I am not sure that this is what he had in mind, but I have finally been published. My immediate and my extended family have always encouraged me to follow God’s call in my life and that has led to many unexpected places in the far corners of the earth, but I know that I can always rely on their love and prayers.

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List of Abbreviations

Bible Fellowship Christian School (BFCS)

Emotional Intelligence (EI)

International Christian School (ICS)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

New Life Christian School (NLCS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Educational researchers have explored the most effective methods for education, leading to various assertions regarding the primacy of positive teacher-student relationships to the educational process. Christian educators have sought to utilize the best practices from educational research and integrate these practices with a biblical worldview. This chapter provides the reader with an understanding of the background and relevant literature regarding positive teacher-student relationships that illuminates the empirical research gap regarding positive relationships in Christian schools, and thus solidifies the significance of this systematic, grounded theory study. Delineating the research questions and boundaries of this study allows educators to easily analyze and implement the results of this study. This chapter provides the reader with an understanding of the background and relevant literature regarding positive teacher-student relationships that illuminates the empirical research gap regarding positive relationships in Christian schools, and thus solidifies the significance of this systematic, grounded theory study.

Background

The process of transmitting knowledge to the next generation spans the history of humankind and transcends the boundaries of place and time. Cultures vary in the value they place on education, as well as the method in which they train future leaders, yet for a civilization to thrive, such a transmission of knowledge is vital. Within Western civilization, Judeo Christian ethics have shaped, at least in part, most educational models (Bramer, 2010; Lawrence, 2007). Although many educational theorists have diverged from biblical foundations, Christian schools have sought to ground the educational process in a biblical framework (Woodrow, 2006).

Regardless of philosophical underpinnings, both secular and Christian educators recognize that education encompasses the transmission of academic, social, emotional, and moral or spiritual values. Therefore, focusing solely on academic content, to the neglect of the other aspects of development, will be an incomplete education.

In light of the need for a holistic education, researchers have historically highlighted the importance of positive teacher-student relationships to the educational process (Bernard, King, Murnan, Nabors, & Vidourek, 2011; Cornelius-White, 2007; Martin & Dowson, 2009).

Confucius, who developed his educational philosophy around 500 B.C., recognized the value of education built on respect for others and solid relationships (Gutek, 2011). Subsequent educators were viewed as the content experts, sifting through the accumulated knowledge base to determine which information to impart to the learner.

Prior to the advent of formal classroom instruction, Socrates and Plato exemplified an early teacher-student mentoring relationship, wherein the more experienced teacher provided guidance to the learner (Gutek, 2011). Plato advocated for a general, universal education, which would equip individuals to live a life of excellence. Plato also believed in shaping a child's intellectual, emotional, and spiritual values at an early age and the teacher knowing each individual student to determine specific aptitudes (Gutek, 2011). Aristotle studied under Plato, but unlike Plato, he believed that truth and reality could be experienced and observed by the senses. Plato asserted that holistic education should promote the acquisition of intellectual and moral virtues (Gutek, 2011). Interestingly, though, Aristotle advocated for stages of schooling, with the primary school focusing on the acquisition of moral values, the secondary stage for developing skills, and higher education for intellectual development. Thomas Aquinas incorporated some of the early philosophies of Aristotle, but incorporated them with the study of

theology with the purpose of cultivating human spirituality (Gutek, 2011). As such, Aquinas was purposeful in creating an educational model that emphasized a total education. Erasmus also viewed spiritual development as a necessary component of the educated person. John Calvin and the Protestant reformers continued to emphasize the importance of spiritual development in general education. Calvin's commitment to the Bible as the sole authority for faith and practice continues to echo in the philosophies of current Christian education. Calvinism's impact on Evangelical Protestantism led to the religious overtones that overshadowed the educational models in the United States. Likewise, Johann Comenius, a Moravian minister, viewed scientific observation and learning as a complement to specific revelation in the Bible. Comenius also proposed the concept of stages of development and allowing children to progress at a natural rate of development (Gutek, 2011). Comenius strongly believed in the importance of safe, emotionally secure learning environments. His ideal was mutual respect of the teacher and student in the learning environment. Out of this philosophy of teacher-student relationships grew the notion that teachers are responsible for developing a positive, or a welcoming and caring, classroom environment and developing meaningful relationships with students. Although early educational models primarily focused on acquiring knowledge and skills, researchers gradually began to embrace the vital role of relationships in positive academic, social, and spiritual development (Evans, Harvey, & Yan, 2011; Weissberg, 2004). As social beings, learners develop meaningful schemas in the context of their interaction with relevant learning material and positive relationships (Vygotsky, 1980). Furthermore, social learning theorists developed a constructivist framework to structure the argument that individuals are influenced by a variety of factors, and developed their own meaning and perspective based

on the interaction of human and environmental factors (Bandura, 1993; Bruner, 1997; Vygotsky, 1980).

Since environmental factors and social interactions heavily influence learners, it is critical for educators to understand the role of relationships, as well as the process of building relationships. Research has linked effective teaching with positive relationships (Evans et al., 2011), but failed to adequately address how to build positive teacher-student relationships. This qualitative grounded theory study provides a glimpse into the essence of building positive teacher-student relationships, framed in the empirical educational research, for the purpose of building a theoretical model for educators in Christian schools.

Situation to Self

I have been an educator in the general education classroom for 10 years in charter, public, and private schools, and I am currently in the position of an elementary administrator at a Christian school. In observing educators who seemed to positively contribute to their school culture and make a difference in students' lives, a common denominator, in all the schools of which I have been a part, has been educators who were able to establish positive relationships with students. These positive relationships appeared to directly influence achievement and positive social outcomes. In personally experiencing the phenomenon of positive teacher-student relationships and the effect on student development, I desired to hear the voices of educators and students to understand how they developed positive relationships and how it affected both the teacher and the student.

I studied the phenomenon of interest through the paradigm of constructivism that accounts for multiple accounts or perspectives (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2013). My axiological assumptions are heavily influenced by biblical values grounded in a biblical

worldview. I would define a biblical worldview as a belief in a literal understanding of God, as described in the Bible, who created the universe and humankind with a purpose to glorify Him (I Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 1:16). However, humankind chose to disregard the restraints of the Creator and sin entered the world (Genesis 3; Romans 5:8, 12). As a result, humans are born with a sin nature and require a Savior (Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23). In His mercy, God provided redemption and forgiveness through Christ, with the promise of eternal life and purpose in His kingdom plan (Colossians 1:14; Ephesians 1:7). I believe that God has revealed Himself through general revelation in creation (Romans 1; Hebrews 1:1-2), and through special revelation in the Scriptures. Epistemologically, and based on a constructivist framework, I believe that truth can be known, but it must be measured by its fidelity to the specific revelation of the Bible (II Timothy 3:16-17). My axiology and my worldview undoubtedly influence how I interpret data, but this aligns closely with a qualitative, grounded theory design and a constructivist paradigm (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). I am employed in full time mission work at one of the research locations, and I am passionately committed to using education as a tool to share biblical truth. My goal is that the data provides a model to assist fellow Christian educators in building positive relationships, both for academic gains and for the spiritual development of students.

Problem Statement

Research studies indicate that many educators understand the importance of positive teacher-student relationships, and recognize that they should seek to build positive relationships (Alderman & Green, 2011; Wayne & Youngs, 2003). Numerous quantitative studies have established a correlation between positive teacher-student relationships and positive academic and social outcomes (Cornelius-White, 2007; Munoz, Scoskie, & French, 2013). Likewise, there

is a preponderance of literature that highlights the devastating effects of negative teacher-student relationships (Anderson et al., 2011; Bernard et al., 2011; Martin & Downson, 2009; Wayne & Youngs, 2003). Additional studies have compared teacher and student perceptions and discussed the effectiveness of specific interventions with troubled students (Anderson et al., 2011; Stetson, Stenson, Sinclair, & Nix, 2012). Researchers have acknowledged phases in relationship, as well as the process nature in building relationships (Newberry, 2010; Sands, 2011). However, there is a paucity of research addressing how relationships are formed and thus few teachers are adequately trained in the vital role of building positive teacher-student relationships (Blackmore, 2013; Maulana, Opdenakker, denBrok, & Bosker, 2012; Newberry, 2010). Researchers have not provided a thick, rich description of both teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the phenomenon of building positive relationships. Furthermore, there is little empirical research exploring the influence of positive relationships on the academic, social, emotional, and spiritual development of students, within the context of Christian schools (Banke, Maedonado, & Lacey, 2012; Meyers, Gutacker, & Gutacker, 2010; Milacci, 2003). Merely understanding the importance of positive teacher-student relationships is inadequate; the problem is that educators require a roadmap, grounded in empirical research, in order to be equipped for the vital task of building positive teacher-student relationships.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this systematic grounded theory study is to understand how teachers and students from three open-enrollment Christian schools in Guam and Hawaii describe the process of building positive teacher-student relationships. At this stage in the research, the relationship-building process is defined as teachers and students growing in their understanding of and care for the other individual, until they develop a self-described positive relationship (Bajaj, 2009).

Although the specifics may vary for each participant, positive relationships are generally defined as trusting interactions that include caring and respect (Bajaj, 2009). Social constructivism and specifically Vygotsky's (1980), Bruner's (1997) and Bandura's (1997) theories on the role of environmental factors, as they relate to the perceptions of the teacher-student relationship provide the framework for this study.

Significance of the Study

With the introduction of any research study, one must answer the critical question of why. Why does it matter? How will this study contribute to the everyday lives of educators? How will it add to the theoretical and empirical knowledge base in the field of education? How will it impact the lives of students? Can the results of this study be utilized in other locations? Providing a roadmap for educators in building positive teacher-student relationships could have practical, empirical, and theoretical significance for educators and students in Christian schools.

The practical implications of this study are that teachers in Christian schools will have a research-based model for understanding and building positive teacher-student relationships for the purpose of influencing academic, social, emotional, and spiritual development of students in the context of Christian schools. This model could be used in staff development and has the potential to positively affect school culture and climate. Students in Christian schools will benefit from educators who are trained and equipped to build positive teacher-student relationships. Based on the conclusions from previous empirical research, positive teacher-student relationships can improve academic performance (Evans et al., 2011), and provide emotional, social, and spiritual support for adolescents (Meyers et al., 2010). This, in turn, influences the family, as well as the school and work community. Positive teacher-student

relationships can also open pathways for the transforming message of the gospel to take root in a student's life (Meyers et al., 2010).

In addition to the practical significance, this study has theoretical significance. Theory is defined as a “set of well-developed categories that are systematically developed in terms of their properties and dimensions and interrelated through statements of relationship to form a theoretical framework that explains something about a phenomenon” (Hage, 1972, p. 34). McMillan and Schumacher (2001) asserted that useful theory should (a) provide a simple explanation of the observed relations relevant to a phenomenon, (b) be consistent with both the observed relations and the already established body of knowledge, and (c) stimulate further research in areas that need investigation. As such, this study shows the relationship between concepts and further defines the effects of positive teacher-student relationships, based on the participants' perceptions and the existing research on teacher-student relationships. In addition, by exploring the context of a Christian school environment, this study fulfills the criteria set forth by McMillan and Schumacher of providing a useful theory in an area that needs further investigation. By explaining how specific participants' actions interact to form positive relationships, the participants in this study contributed their experiences to form a core category that led to a theoretical model (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

By grounding this study in the constructivist framework, this qualitative, grounded theory study adds to the empirical research available that deals specifically with Christian education. Since empirical research deals with direct observations and experiences, this study allows participants to share their first hand experiences with the phenomenon of positive teacher-student relationships. Tying into the constructivist framework, the empirical data differs significantly based on the perspectives and experiences of the participants. The online surveys, focus groups,

and individual interviews provide primary sources to develop a workable theory. By exploring the work of other researchers, I built on the empirical research of other studies and investigated a particular niche in the Christian school context.

Research Questions

Building on the criteria for a useful theory with theoretical, empirical, and practical significance, this systematic grounded theory study is based on the premise that the phenomenon of positive teacher-student relationships affects positive social, academic, and spiritual outcomes (Anderson et al., 2011; Cornelius-White, 2007; Martin & Dowson, 2009). The methodology and research questions that guide this study are built on constructivism, or the belief that multiple perspectives can create perceptions that differ widely with the individual. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), a researcher “approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework that specifies a set of questions that he or she then examines in specific ways” (p. 30). Although in grounded theory, a theory results from the research (Creswell, 2013), yet the researcher is still guided by a theoretical lens or framework. Since, how “you study the world determines what you learn about the world” (Patton, 2002, p. 125), it is essential to clearly articulate the theoretical basis for the research questions that guide this grounded theory study on building positive teacher-student relationships. The following section will articulate the four research questions of this study and briefly explain the theoretical support for each question.

1. What teacher and student characteristics facilitate the development of positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools?

Constructivism rests on the premise that development and learning occurs as individuals actively engage in social interactions (Bandura, 1997; Bruner, 1997; Vygotsky, 1980). The interplay of environment and social experiences shape expectations, beliefs, and ultimately trust.

Bandura recognized the importance of teacher modeling and how beliefs and perceptions color relationships. Furthermore, according to researchers, teacher characteristics, such as emotional intelligence, play a critical role in the formation of positive relationships (Curci, Lanciano, & Soleti, 2014; Gliebe, 2012). Numerous studies have tested the correlation of age, gender, years of experience, type of training, and many other teacher factors to determine the effect on teacher-student relationships (Newberry, 2010; Van Maele & Houtte, 2010). Student factors, though, also play a role in relationships. Students' level of trust and overall perception of relationships can be influenced by a number of social and cultural factors (Noddings, 1988; Van Maele & Houtte, 2010). Recognizing the interaction of socioeconomic and home factors is also critical in analyzing student characteristics and the development of positive teacher-student relationships (Van Maele & Houtte, 2010). Students who sought help and demonstrated a teachable spirit also affected teacher perception and thus the teacher-student relationship (Van Maele & Houtte, 2010). Although research indicates various teacher and student characteristics that seem to play a role in developing relationships, these characteristics are not explored in the context of a Christian school. Individual characteristics, then, perhaps play a role in specific behaviors and strategies that help to build a positive relationship.

2. What specific strategies do teachers and students describe as helpful in building positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools?

Research confirms that specific strategies, and particularly an intentional focus on individual students, contributes significantly to developing positive teacher-student relationships. Connection strategies that teachers utilize include using names and remembering student interests, using humor, demonstrating respect, and showing care and compassion; these all affect the teacher-student relationship (Noddings, 1988; Pattison, Hale, & Gowens, 2011). Establishing

organized and positive climates also seemed to impact the relationships of teachers and students (Nizielski, Hallum, Lopes, & Schütz 2012). Just as specific strategies can aid relationship building, certain obstacles or hindrances seem to impede the process of building relationships.

3. What do teachers and students describe as hindrances to building positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools?

Relationships are made up of cyclical stages, and meaningful relationships must overcome obstacles or hindrances (Newberry, 2010). Newberry (2010) also cited a lack of teacher consistency as a barrier to relationships. For example, teachers tend to respond more favorably to cooperative students. Likewise, teachers often exhibit different attitudes and management techniques towards students who are emotionally draining (Newberry, 2010). Van Maele and Houtte (2010) identified the importance of establishing and maintaining trust between teachers and students. Understanding emotional triggers and sources of conflict allows teachers and students to deepen their relationships (Curci et al., 2014; Gliebe, 2012). In contrast, a failure to regulate emotions can negatively impact teacher-student relationships (Nizielski et al., 2012). Other hindrances to positive relationships include cultural differences (Edgell, 2007; Noddings, 1988; Van Eersel, Hermans, & Slegers, 2010), a lack of love (Colomy & Granfield, 2010), an inability to self-regulate (Bandura, 1997), and an overall lack of training in the process of building relationships (Gliebe, 2012). Since research indicates positive results in academic, social, and emotional development (Anderson et al., 2011; Gliebe, 2012), the final research question focuses on an aspect of development that is not as fully explored in the literature, that of spiritual development.

4. How do positive teacher-student relationships influence the spiritual development of students in Christian schools?

Within the Christian community, much emphasis has been placed on mentoring and discipleship. Research confirms the value of mentoring, but little research has been done as to how this can be implemented in a traditional classroom setting (Meyers, Gutacker, & Gutacker, 2010). Furthermore, different types of Christian schools place varying degrees of emphasis on the importance of discipleship. Many Christian schools seek to deliberately influence spiritual development, but fail to articulate how to be intentional in that process (Laats, 2010). While some question the effectiveness of the Christian school mission and purpose (Laats, 2010), others see the aspect of spiritual development just as essential to a holistic education as focusing on cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development (Pazmino, 2010). Research by Piaget and Inhelder (1969) and Erikson (1993) set the groundwork for a stage theory of development, and Fowler (1981) articulated the correlation of spiritual development with other aspects of development. In studying the philosophy of open-enrollment Christian schools, the heart of this type of ministry is to influence students in their biblical worldview and growth into Christlikeness. Indeed, it is indispensable to Christian education to believe that it is possible for Christian educators to influence and impact spiritual transformation in students (Davies, 2007; Donlevy, 2007; Engebretson, 2012; Fisher, 2008; Miller & McKenna, 2011; Van Eersel et al., 2010). Since teacher beliefs seem to impact the method of relationship building (Banke et al., 2012; Baurain, 2012), the final research question seeks to understand from both the teacher and student perspective what role or impact the teacher-student relationship truly has in developing Christ-like attitudes and behaviors.

Research Plan

This systematic, grounded theory, qualitative study was conducted in three open-enrollment Christian schools, utilizing a theoretical sampling of students in sixth grade through

12th grade, and teachers in K-12th grade who reported a positive teacher-student relationship. Data include online surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews with 17 teachers and 21 students, since this is the ideal sample size suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2015) for a grounded theory study. Using the constant comparative method, data was analyzed and coded until theoretical saturation occurred (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Throughout the process of data collection and analysis, themes were identified which enabled the construction of a theoretical model to describe the process of building positive teacher-student relationships in a Christian school.

Delimitations

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), delimitations are the factors that the researcher controls in order to establish clear guidelines for the study. The delimitations, or boundaries for this study include the use of open enrollment Christian schools, in which parents and students do not have to affirm a certain belief system, and specifically examining the teacher-student relationship in the K-12 context. Students who were selected for this study had to be in sixth grade or above. The students could choose to nominate any teacher with whom they had a positive teacher-student relationship, including those who were currently teaching K-5th grade. The teachers selected for this study were currently teaching in K-12th grade, had at least two years teaching experience, and had a positive teacher-student relationship with a fellow student participant for at least one school year.

Definitions

1. *Christian school* – a school that ascribes and teaches subjects through a Judeo-Christian lens and believes that the Bible is the authority for faith and practice (Woodrow, 2006).

2. *Constructivism* - Constructivism is the idea that meaning, learning, and even reality are constructed by the individual, with heavy focus on the social setting or learning context (Pritchard & Woolard, 2010).
3. *Convenience sample*- a sample population that is easily accessible to the researcher (Creswell, 2013).
4. *Open enrollment school*- a school that does not require students or parents to agree to a statement of faith as a prerequisite for enrollment (Simmons, 2012). Some schools have open enrollment for certain grades, such as the elementary grades, but require statements of faith at the high school level. This type of school would be considered partial open-enrollment.
5. *Positive teacher-student relationships* - Positive relationships are generally defined as trusting interactions between teachers and students that include caring and respect (Bajaj, 2009).
6. *Self-regulation* - The ability of individuals to exercise influence over their own behaviors (Bandura, 1991).
7. *Theoretical Sampling*- a flexible process that integrates data collection and analysis until theoretical saturation (no new information) emerges (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Summary

Recognizing the background of empirical research devoted to teacher-student relationships leads to an understanding of the historical and theoretical foundations and the constructivist framework for this study. Clarifying personal assumptions and motivations, as well as interest in the phenomenon, positions me to provide a platform for the participants' voices and experiences. Recognizing the background for the study and surveying recent research

demonstrates a gap in the literature and a strong support for conducting a qualitative, grounded study for understanding the process of building positive teacher-student relationships in open-enrollment Christian schools. A model of this kind is instrumental for the Christian educator who hopes to influence academic, social, and spiritual development in students. The research questions, definitions, and delimitations fence in the study to provide a structured, systematic plan.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Credible research studies are grounded in empirical and theoretical research. Understanding the theoretical and historical significance of previous research allows contemporary researchers to support and frame their research. Building on a constructivist theoretical framework, this literature review examines constructivist and developmental theorists, and delineates how research on positive teacher-student relationships is built on theorists, such as Piaget (1969), Erikson (1993), and Fowler (1981). The other related literature on this topic explores the value and characteristics of positive relationships, the role of teacher and student characteristics in positive relationships, the significance of specific relationship-building strategies, and the importance of positive, mentoring relationships to Christian education.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this grounded theory study is rooted in the paradigm of constructivism and specifically the separate theories of Vygotsky (1980), Bandura (1993), and Bruner (1997). Anfara and Mertz (2015) shared that a paradigm guides how one views the world, while a theoretical framework applies empirical research to understanding a specific phenomenon. A theoretical framework provides the skeletal support for a study and integrates the “concepts, terms, definitions, models, and theories of a particular literature base and disciplinary orientation” (Merriam, 2009, p. 67). Furthermore, researchers commonly include multiple frameworks to provide a more comprehensive explanation of a phenomenon (Anfara & Mertz, 2015). Although theoretical frameworks may vary in complexity and level of detail, they provide the filter or grid for determining methodology, research analysis, and data collection

(Miles & Huberman, 1994). Indeed, the choice of theory has a profound influence on the direction and outcome of any study, since it shapes what a researcher looks for and focuses on throughout the study (Anfara & Mertz, 2015). Delineating an overview of constructivism and a detailed description of the theories of Vygotsky, Bandura, and Bruner provides a clear rationale for the theoretical frameworks and related research included in this grounded theory study on positive teacher-student relationships.

Constructivism

This study is situated in a constructivist paradigm, recognizing that there are multiple perspectives that shape the issue of positive teacher-student relationships. Constructivism is influenced by the theories of Vygotsky (1980), Bandura (1993), and Bruner (1997), as well as others, but it is not simply a synthesis of these individual theories. Constructivism rests on the idea that meaning, learning, and even reality are constructed by the individual, with heavy focus on the social setting or learning context (Pritchard & Woolard, 2010). Vygotsky, Bandura, and Bruner were influential founding theorists who impacted the notion that learners construct their own meaning and that optimal learning is inquiry based, and grounded in an experiential, interactive social setting. Constructivism, then, aligns with a study of teacher-student relationships because it reflects the views and experience of a researcher, framed by the various layers of diverse perspectives from the participants (Creswell, 2013). However, to better understand the constructivist paradigm, one must explore the individual theories of Vygotsky, Bandura, and Bruner.

Vygotsky. Vygotsky (1980) provided foundational work in the area of social learning theory, and studied the influence of environmental and cultural factors. In contrast to previous psychological theory, Vygotsky believed that an intense study of development, memory, inner

speech, and play led to an understanding of complex processes. Vygotsky (1980) championed the methodology of change, or the interaction of changing social conditions and behaviors, and advocated a new approach to experimentalism. A key concept in Vygotsky's (1986) theory is the zone of proximal development, or the difference between what an individual can do alone or with support of the more knowledgeable other. Using this line of thinking, building relationships is a collaborative process that depends on environmental interactions and individual development. Vygotsky (1986) viewed development as a cyclical process of stability, crisis, and transformation. In the same way that a more knowledgeable individual (teacher) introduces a concept, models it, and scaffolds the information for students until they are able to complete the task independently, so relationship building is a process of a more mature individual knowing the individual needs of another and interacting in such a way to model and develop positive relationships. This idea of mutual cooperation permeates constructivism. However, as validated by later constructivist thought, Vygotsky posited that the meaning of relationships is based on the perception of the individual. Vygotsky (1980) considered "the most vital challenge" to be "uncovering and bringing to light the hidden mechanisms underlying complex human psychology" (p. 122). Vygotsky (1986) discussed the role of inner dialogue, whereby the individual learns to reflect and deliberately control his or her thinking. This reflection could be developed into conscious strategies to facilitate learning (Kozulin & Gindis, 2003). Later theorists, such as Bonds and Bonds (1992) defined metacognition as "knowledge and awareness of one's cognitive processes and the ability to regulate, evaluate, and monitor one's own thinking" (as cited by Collins in Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014, p. 56). Chohan (2010) also considered the role of reflection in evaluating perceptions and assumptions. While Vygotsky (1986) believed that inner dialogue and reflection could lead to self-regulation and

heightened motivation, negative inner dialogue can also sabotage the success of an endeavor (as cited by Collins, 2014). Similarly, researchers explored the role of negative self-talk and the devastating effect on relationships (Martin & Downson, 2009). Vygotsky (1986) maintained that the perceptions were constructed specifically through social interactions and experiences. In learning to develop positive relationships, teachers, as the more knowledgeable other could scaffold students in modeling and encouraging behaviors that lead to more positive relationships (Vygotsky, 1980). Furthermore, understanding how changing social conditions influence behaviors provides teachers with the ability to structure learning environments within a given culture to facilitate the development of relationships. With the understanding that relationship building is a process, and not a product, teachers are better able to model appropriate interactions, until students can independently engage in similar behaviors.

Bandura. Bandura (1997), the key theorist in social cognitive theory, articulated the idea that a relationship must be in place for teachers to influence student behaviors. Teacher self-efficacy, or a teacher's perception of their own effectiveness, could significantly affect the relationship process. Bandura (1993) aptly stated "among the mechanisms of agency, none is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control" (p. 118). Therefore, if they believe they are able to make a difference, teachers will contribute greater effort to the process of personal growth and student learning (Bandura, 1993). Expectations regarding relationships fuel motivations and behaviors (Bandura, 1993). Interestingly, teachers with low self-efficacy attribute their own perceived failure to lack of ability, but teachers with high self-efficacy attribute personal failure to lack of effort. Highly self-efficacious teachers seek ways to maximize the process of personal, as well as student learning (Bandura, 1993). Furthermore, Bandura (1991) studied self-regulation, or the ability of

individuals to exercise influence over their own behaviors. This is a vital component of social cognitive theory. For teachers to improve in teacher-student relationships they need to have a proper view of personal, as well as student, successes and failures (Bandura, 1991). Teachers have to be able to honestly assess their current performance in relationships and recognize factors that can bring about positive change. Indeed “people cannot influence their own motivation and actions very well if they do not pay adequate attention to their own performances, the conditions under which they occur . . . and the effects” (Bandura, 1991, p. 250). For change to occur, teachers have to be convinced of the value of positive relationships and their ability to influence the relationship through their behaviors.

Bruner. Bruner (1997), who is the father of discovery learning theory, emphasized the role of social context and how culture shapes thinking and perception, as it relates to self-efficacy. Bruner defined culture as outside social forces that shape individual meaning. Bruner believed that learning is active, and that learners acquire new knowledge and skills based upon previous learning. In Bruner’s words “acquired knowledge is most useful when it is discovered” (Bruner, 1997, p. 12). Bruner also emphasized the importance of recognizing similarities and differences, which is a critical factor in relationship building and modeling. Gehlbach, Brinkworth, and Harris (2012) confirmed this by stating that both students and teachers must try to find common ground, in order for relationships to continue on a positive trajectory. Bruner understood the importance of development and readiness for learning. This readiness for learning and utilizing age appropriate strategies also play a significant role in the process of building positive teacher-student relationships. For example, teachers must take into consideration the age and development of their students in order to choose the most effective relationship building strategies. Bruner’s theories overlapped somewhat with the developmental

theories of Piaget and Inhelder (1969), but Bruner placed more emphasis on the social context. Like Bandura, Bruner also considered the key factor of motivation in learning. Since many cultural and personal factors affect learning, the role of the teacher is to structure learning in such a way that a student can understand and build on previous learning and meaning assigned by the individual. Thus, learning is a combination of social experiences and interaction. Bruner also considered perception a facet in categorization of concepts. In the context of relationships, both teachers and students must define the attributes of a positive relationship and then determine how they interpret the interactions between teachers and students. Bruner believed that learning should be personalized and structured in an engaging way that the student could comprehend. Bruner theorized that interactive, problem based learning scenarios caused cognitive and social development. Likewise, in the process of building relationships, individuals must understand the disposition and needs of the other individuals to facilitate the positive interactions. Similarly, Bruner's model of learning moved from concrete, to pictorial, or visual, and then to abstract or symbolic. This sequence mirrors Piaget and Inhelder's (1969) stages of child development. This progression also correlates with later research regarding the phases of relationship (Newberry, 2010). In Bruner's opinion, learning cycles through these stages and he asserted that a combination approach would be most effective in the learning process.

Summary of Constructivist Theorists

In summary, Bruner (1997) proposed an active, rather than a static, approach to learning, wherein teachers weighed the individual and developmental needs of the child, within a specific social context. Building on the framework of constructivism and the social learning theories of Vygotsky (1980), Bandura (1993), and Bruner (1997), many researchers have gone further in depth regarding the value of positive relationships, and the characteristics of both teachers and

students who have positive relationships. Examining social learning theories requires a parallel survey of developmental theories to better understand the various factors that influence positive teacher-student relationships.

Developmental Theorists

Since emotional, social, cognitive, and spiritual factors all play a role in the process of building positive teacher-student relationships, a brief overview of key developmental theorists will explain the needs and experiences of students at various stages. A common link in the developmental theories is the notion of discernible differences and progressive stages, whether physical, spiritual, or emotional. Piaget and Inhelder (1969) are credited with the observation and articulation of typical physical and cognitive development in children. Although Fowler's (1981) theory is not as common in educational research, his perspective on spiritual worldview development is critical to a discussion of the role of relationships in spiritual development. Lastly, Erikson's (1993) contributions in the context of social-emotional development provide a well-structured framework to support the importance of child development to positive teacher-student relationships.

Piaget. Piaget is perhaps best known for his theories of child development. Piaget and Inhelder (1969) described three sequential stages, sensorimotor, concrete, and formal operations. The order of these stages is constant, with each stage dependent on the acquisition and assimilation of the previous stage, yet the age of acquisition may vary widely. In general, though, the sensorimotor stage encompasses the first six to seven years, the concrete stage lasts from seven to 11 years of age, and the formal operation stage typically commences around age 11 or 12 (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Piaget and Inhelder studied the development of childhood behavior, and theorized that mental, physical, social, and emotional development is inextricably

intertwined. The sensorimotor stage includes notable elements, such as developing object permanence, understanding reversibility, recognizing cause and effect, developing perception, and recognizing the reality of objects and individuals. In the concrete operation stage, logical thought begins, but it applies only to concrete objects. Also, an understanding of symbolism develops and new stimuli are integrated into existing schema to be organized and assimilated. This process of equilibration, or making sense of new stimuli, furthers the maturation process. Piaget and Inhelder also recognized that social and physical experiences are essential to the maturation process, which aligns with the constructivist viewpoint. In particular, socialization requires “active assimilation by the child” in order to be effective (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969, p. 156). Once the cognitive and social aspects of the concrete stage have occurred, a child moves into the formal operation stage. This adolescent age is marked by intellectual change, and most notably the ability to think abstractly, organize more effectively, participate in higher order thinking, and form logical conclusions. Children at this stage are able to think more creatively and make inferences. Likewise, adolescents are able to detect inconsistencies and wrestle through beliefs and structures. For equilibration to occur in this stage, self-regulation is essential. Again, Piaget and Inhelder noted that environment influences social, physical, emotional, and cognitive development. Therefore, understanding the stages of development is critical to interpret the perceptions and responses of students at each stage. The intellectual, or cognitive, development is always closely linked to the affective domain, or the motivations of the individual, which is later echoed in Bandura’s theories. This brief overview of Piaget’s theory provides support for the interaction of cognitive, social, emotional, and physical aspects of development and the notion of using relational strategies that take into account a child’s stage of

development. However, as researchers seek to maintain a holistic view of development, Piaget's theory does not address the critical aspect of spiritual development.

Fowler. Fowler (1981) built on Piaget's (1969) theory of sequential stages of development as he proposed the stages of spiritual development. Fowler's theory of spiritual development is fluid and the ages sometimes overlap. The first stage, the primal faith, is from birth to age two. This stage is characterized by developing trust and security in nurturing relationships, particularly with the primary caregiver. These early steps are essential to faith development. The second stage, the intuitive-projective faith, is from age two to seven. Much like Piaget, Fowler reasoned that an individual at this age is unable to think formally and logically, and is often characterized by blurred lines between fantasy and reality. Children are still very self-centered and may have imaginative ideas about God and faith (Fowler, 1981). The mythical-literal faith stage is from five to 10. At this stage, children begin to evaluate actions and perspectives and have initial understanding of judgments and the consequences of decisions. The synthetic-conventional faith stage is typically during adolescence and is characterized by adopting the worldview and opinions of those with whom children have the closest relationship. Some individuals never progress beyond this stage, but unequivocally accept the views and opinions of others. The individuative-reflective faith stage usually develops in early adulthood. This stage is characterized by questioning the validity of previously held convictions and ideas and developing personal convictions based on personal reflection. At this stage, individuals are able to integrate faith values and construct personal meaning from their faith. This brief overview of Fowler's stages of faith development underscores the fluidity of spiritual development.

In order to consider the impact of relational strategies on spiritual development, one must account for the other intertwining aspects of child development. Piaget and Inhelder's (1969) stage theory, as well as Fowler's (1981) theory on spiritual development, provides a firm rationale for using participants which are at a formal operation stage, and better able to think through and articulate abstract ideas, such as building relationships. Furthermore, Piaget and Inhelder's theory solidifies the role of motivation and perception in cognitive and social development. Therefore, the interaction of teachers and students is a significant environmental factor influencing all aspects of development.

Erikson. Erikson (1993) also firmly believed that relationships should be grounded in a framework that accounts for developmental needs. According to Erikson, all children need to have a sense of belonging and security, but physical, social, emotional, and even spiritual factors at various stages of development heavily influence individual needs and perceptions. Erikson was influenced by Freud, but rather than focusing on sexuality, he studied how individual needs lead to a crisis point and the individual seeking equilibrium in core conflicts. A brief overview of Erikson's eight stages provides a framework for how socialization and environment interact to affect a sense of self and how this in turn influences relationships (McLeod, 2013).

In the first stage, trust versus mistrust, the infant's primary relationship is with a mother or primary caregiver, and the successful resolution of basic needs leads to hope and trust. In the second stage, autonomy versus shame and doubt, the toddler achieves increasing independence and develops a sense of will. In the third stage, initiative versus guilt, the young child has increasing interaction with peers and teachers, asks many questions, and develops a sense of purpose. In industry versus inferiority, children learn many academic and social skills, and successful completion of this stage leads to a sense of competence in their abilities. Teachers

play an important role in this stage as they develop relationships with students and help them to resolve social conflicts. In identity versus role confusion, children are increasingly aware of their body image and struggle with their role and place in society. This time of adolescence is a crucial time of identity and spans from approximately 12 to 18 years of age. Since this stage is considered by Erikson (1993) and other theorists to be the crucial age of identity and personality development, this is the ideal age for studying the role of the teacher-student relationship and its influence on development. The next three stages span adulthood, with intimacy versus isolation leading to love and familial relationships. Generativity versus stagnation focuses on individuals establishing family and community relationships and becoming productive members of society. From 65 years of age and beyond, in ego integrity versus despair the desired virtue is wisdom and a sense of accomplishment over life achievements. Although Erikson (1993) does not specify why or how individuals transition through stages, he does describe the sequential stages of development. Although age may vary and individuals may not successfully complete every stage, Erikson, like Piaget, believed strongly in sequential stages of development and the necessity of resolving the crisis in each stage. Erikson's psychoanalysis of the needs and virtues specific to each age group provides educators with a better understanding of individual needs and the importance of nurturing and trust in the teacher-student relationship.

Summary of Developmental Theorists

Understanding the basics of child development is a critical element in building positive teacher-student relationships. Both Piaget (1969) and Erikson (1993) recognized that a child's developmental stage influences that child's perception and interaction with parents, peers, and teachers. A variety of factors and social experiences, as well as the active assimilation by the child will influence whether a student can even understand and interact in a positive teacher-

student relationship. An educator, who understands the needs of children at each stage of development, will be able to gear relationship-building strategies to meet students at their current level of development. Although young children are capable of forming and even describing healthy relationships, during adolescence children begin to think more abstractly about their relationships and independently decide whether to accept or reject the values and content that is presented by adults, whether parents or teachers. A firm grasp of developmental needs leads educators to consider the impact of positive relationships on all aspects of development.

Related Literature

With the developmental impact in mind, researchers explored the value of positive relationships, and the defining characteristics of those relationships. These factors are not simple cause and effect, but are influenced by student factors, teacher factors, and various environmental influences. Culture and emotional intelligence are two critical components, which will be considered in more detail. Since this study is designed to examine the process of building relationships in a Christian school context, various research on the mission of Christian schools, the differences between different types of Christian schools, as well as biblical models of relationship building and mentoring, will be explored.

Value of Positive Relationships

Understanding the stages of development and its impact on relationships is crucial in recognizing the value of positive relationships. Many educators assert that positive relationships are the most important factor in academic success (Anderson, 2011; Cornelius, 2007; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Sands, 2011). Bajaj (2009) defined positive relationships as trusting interactions that include caring and respect. Covey (2008) further delineated reciprocal trust as the basis for all meaningful, positive relationships. Juvonen (2006) noted “What is especially striking about

teacher-student relationships is not just that they matter, but that they appear consequential for such an extraordinary number and variety of academic and motivational outcomes for students” (p. 2). Further research confirms that positive relationships indeed affect motivation, engagement, and achievement (Martin & Dowson, 2009). Positive relationships are critical at all ages, but particularly in middle school and the adolescent period described by Piaget and Erikson (Anderson, 2011; Erikson, 1993; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Sands, 2011). Correlating with the work of Bandura (1991), changes in perception regarding positive relationships were correlated to self-efficacy and motivational factors (Gehlbach, Brinkworth, & Harris, 2012). Therefore, if positive relationships play such a critical role, it is imperative to identify the characteristics of these relationships.

Characteristics of Relationships

Recognizing the value of relationships prompted researchers to explore the characteristics that define positive teacher-student relationships. In understanding the nature of teacher-student relationships, there are phases in relationships (Newberry, 2010), and significant changes in teacher-student relationships can occur within the course of a year (Gehlbach et al., 2012; Waldrup, Reese, Fisher, & Dorman, 2008). Newberry (2010) concluded that there are four distinct phases in relationship-appraisal, agreement, testing, and planning. In the appraisal stage, teachers and students are getting to know each other. In the agreement stage, rules and routines of interaction are established. The testing phase consists of students testing boundaries and limits. The planning stage consists of reflecting and taking intentional action to move the relationship forward. According to Newberry, students and teachers cycle between these different phases.

Interestingly, however, even given the cyclical nature of relationships, teachers and students differ widely in their perceptions of the relationship (Kavenagh, Freeman, & Ainley, 2012; Maulana et al., 2012). Building on the stage theory of relationships, teachers and students often view themselves at different stages. Similarly, using different quantitative instruments to measure the characteristics of a positive relationship, Bernard, King, Murnan, Nabors, and Vidourek (2011) studied a convenience sample (N = 419) of Ohio elementary and middle school teachers in their use of connection strategies and the effect on student perceptions. Using a school connectedness subscale, Bernard et al. discovered that teachers often rated their relationships higher than students; yet the students' perceptions were the most critical factor in the degree of academic and social impact of the teacher-student relationship (Bernard et al., 2011; Maulana et al., 2012). Maulana, Opdenakker, den Brok, and Bosker (2012) labeled this divergence in perception as "wishful thinking" on the teacher's part (p. 267). Regardless of the motivation for different perceptions, Bruner (1997) likewise maintained that relationships cannot be divorced from the meaning conferred by individuals and the surrounding culture. Therefore, relationship building techniques are not certain to transfer across cultures, since interpretations vary according to the individual (Bruner, 1997; Vygotsky, 1980). Despite teacher and student differences in rating the relationship, expectations and beliefs colored interpretations and perceptions of both teachers and students. These beliefs can become cyclical or a self-fulfilling prophecy, if participants respond solely based on perceptions. For example, a student who perceives a teacher as uncaring may respond harshly, which, may in turn, elicit a negative response from the teacher and confirm the student's original perception. However, a strong commitment and investment in a relationship can overcome misunderstandings and wrong initial perceptions (Kim & Schallert, 2011).

Furthermore, the role of trust, from both teachers and students, is a critical factor in positive relationships (Van Maele & Houtte, 2010). In a quantitative study utilizing multi-level analysis, Van Maele and Houtte (2010) sampled teachers ($N = 2,104$) and students ($N = 11,872$) and discovered that teachers' perceptions of students' teachability strongly predicted teacher trust. Likewise, Van Maele and Houtte concluded that "when students perceive that teachers support them, students' attachment to school increases" (p. 86). Trust, therefore, is a "reciprocal phenomenon" and a necessary ingredient that characterizes positive relationships (Van Maele & Houtte, 2010, p. 97).

Student factors. Since teacher and student perceptions differ, one must examine the research results regarding the similarities and differences in student and teacher perceptions. Consistency, trust, and cooperation were essential for both teachers and students in building positive teacher-student relationships (Newberry, 2010). In addition, taking another's perspective and perceiving similarities were factors for both teachers and students in stronger relationships (Gehlbach et al., 2012). High parental involvement also correlated strongly in student factors regarding positive teacher-student relationships (O'Connor, 2010; Stetson et al., 2012). Gender factors also played a role, with girls having a higher perception of teacher-student relationships (Cornelius-White, 2007). Boys, however, most valued positive feedback and caring, helpful attitudes from their teachers in their perceptions of strong relationships (Kavenagh et al., 2012). Gender, social economic status, and immigrant status were all student variables that affected teachers' perceptions of students' teachability and level of trust, which in turn impacted the students' perception of the relationship (Van Maele, 2010). Furthermore, age also impacted relationships, with middle school and high school students tending to have less parental involvement and, overall, less positive relationships with teachers (O'Connor, 2010).

This also correlates with Piaget (1969) and Erikson's (1993) assertions that adolescence is a time of struggle regarding identity and role in society. Overall, although perceptions on both sides impact the relationship, student perceptions of the relationship tended to be a more accurate predictor of students' academic success than teacher perceptions (Cornelius-White, 2007).

Teacher factors and interventions. While student factors definitely play a role, teacher characteristics likewise significantly affect positive relationships (Wayne & Youngs, 2003). Regrettably, teachers are not generally instructed in how to develop relationships, but researchers strongly urge the integration of relationship training in teacher education (Campolongo, 2008), since professional development in relationship building may significantly improve relationships (O'Connor, 2010). Furthermore, focusing on relationships, rather than addressing behavior or academics in isolation, should have a more direct impact on overall student outcomes (Campolongo, 2008). Researchers found that specific teacher interventions, such as creating dialogue journals with students, conducting home visits, and setting specific student goals with parents have improved the teacher-student relationship and also affected positive social outcomes (Anderson et al., 2011; Stetson et al., 2012). Other research based connection strategies utilized by teachers included using names, showing respect and sensitivity, incorporating humor, using praise, being consistent and flexible in discipline situations, and being a positive role model all encouraged the perception of relational connectedness in teachers (Bernard et al., 2011; Evans et al., 2011; Wolfson, 2009). In general terms, however, individualized caring and respect were the dominant characteristics of excellent teaching (Pattison et al., 2011). Teachers skilled in caring influence students' feelings of acceptance, develop greater confidence in students, and consistently heighten student motivation and achievement (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Goodenow, 1993; Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog, 1997;

Ryan & Grolnick, 1986). Martin and Dowson (2009) concluded that high quality interpersonal relationships based on an ethic of caring contribute to academic success and behavioral regulation. Interestingly, elementary teachers tended to use more connection strategies (Bernard et al., 2011), yet effective classroom management and organization at all grade levels allowed teachers to focus on positive relationships (Munoz et al., 2013). In contrast, teaching experience, education level, gender, and ethnicity were not statistically significant in teacher effectiveness (Munoz et al., 2013). However, teacher perceptions did influence their behavior towards students (Newberry, 2010), and teachers valued help-seeking from students the most in their rankings of behaviors that promoted strong teacher-student relationships (Kavenagh et al., 2012). In an interesting study mentioned previously, Van Maele (2010) also studied the correlation between low socio-economic status (SES) and teacher perceptions. Teachers of lower SES and immigrant students perceived students as less teachable and trustworthy (Van Maele, 2010). However, in contrast, higher teacher salary and higher teacher self-efficacy had a positive correlation with more in-depth relationships with students (Van Maele, 2010; O'Connor, 2010). This line of inquiry was more fully developed by other researchers who explored the role of job satisfaction and productiveness. Teachers making time for self-evaluation also strengthened relationship perceptions (Maulana et al., 2012). Richardson and Radloff (2014) also discovered that frequent teacher-student interactions heightened student engagement and a closer match in teacher and student perceptions of satisfaction regarding the relationship. Knowing students was also critical to understanding and influencing student motivations (Nizielski et al., 2012).

Knowing students' strengths and weaknesses has tremendous benefit at all levels. Teacher established, but student centered, environments and interactions based on students' needs impact relationships even as early as the preschool level (Fumoto, 2011). Fumoto (2011)

emphasized the importance of building trust at early levels by valuing ideas and suggestions, but still maintaining the security of appropriate boundaries. Throughout all grade levels, though, teachers shape student perceptions and attachment to school. Not surprisingly, teacher expectations and communication drastically affected student motivation (Ali, 2009; Hallinan, 2008). Kim and Schallert (2011) conducted a qualitative research study to determine the trajectory of relationships based on perceptions and individual knowledge of both teachers and students. They concluded that caring relationships are “influenced by complex associations among expectations and beliefs of the students and the teacher, and their interpretations of each other’s words” (Kim & Schallert, 2011, p. 19).

Emotional intelligence. Another teacher factor that significantly impacts teacher-student relationships is the concept of emotional intelligence (EI). Although the emotional aspect of teacher and student development has been a subject of discussion for some time, the systematic study of EI has developed only in the last 25 years. Goleman (1995), one of the leading researchers of emotional intelligence, linked brain research with emotional competencies. Curci, Lanciano, and Soleti (2014) and Gliebe (2012) defined emotional intelligence and advocated for the importance of including EI training in teacher training courses. Providing a basic overview of EI will allow one to analyze the correlation to positive teacher-student relationships, and the practical ways educators are integrating EI research in the Christian school context.

Emotional intelligence (EI) has been defined in various ways, including “cognitive processes, motivational factors, and personality characteristics” (Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2004, p. 431). EI has four components: perceiving emotions, using emotions, understanding emotions, and managing emotions (Curci et al., 2014). Interestingly, EI can predict job performance in highly emotional jobs. EI affects any work environment, but teaching

tends to elicit more emotions than other occupations (Nizielski et al., 2012). This may be due, in part, to the emotional drain of caring for many individuals with vastly different academic, social, emotional, and spiritual needs. High EI teachers control emotional outbursts and look for positive solutions. These teachers are able to reflect and evaluate their own behaviors, as well as students. However, knowledge and awareness of emotions does not automatically translate into regulation and application of emotional intelligence (Nizielski et al., 2012). Teacher EI positively affects student achievement because of the students' perception of their own abilities (Curci et al., 2014). High teacher EI is also negatively related to student misconduct. Since there is a reciprocal nature of teacher behavior and student outcomes, it is critical to recognize that teachers' emotional intelligence is not just a personality trait; it can be trained and improved (Curci et al., 2014; Gliebe, 2012; Nizielski et al., 2012). Gliebe (2012) suggested incorporating EI training in the education college curricula, and focusing on basic strategies, such as making eye contact, reading body language, engaging in self-reflective journaling, reflecting on current coping methods, and planning alternative solutions in emotionally tense situations. Regrettably, though, most teachers are not provided the opportunity to observe and learn from experienced teachers with high emotional intelligence (Fumoto, 2011). According to Dewaele (2011), a teacher with high EI is able to heighten students' self-esteem, impact motivation and perceptions of the teacher-student relationship and thus positively influence behavior and overall school performance. Supportive teachers with high EI create a positive climate that nurtures positive teacher-student relationships (Nizielski et al., 2012). There is a strong connection between EI, classroom management, and the ability to control and regulate emotions. Effective teaching is inseparable from the ability to regulate emotions (Gliebe, 2012). The rate of progress in a positive teacher-student relationship is accelerated by a positive classroom atmosphere coupled

with the positive emotional interaction between teachers and students (Dewaele, 2011). Given the critical importance of teacher EI, Nizielski et al., (2012) suggested that teacher selection should include EI testing. Furthermore, Nizielski et al., advocated for further research to investigate the impact of EI in teacher-student relationships in other cultures.

Curci, Lanciano, and Soleti (2014) provided a quantitative, validated study of the effect of teacher EI on student perception of ability and actual achievement. This study was done with Italian junior high school students and math teachers. The four basic aspects of EI, perceiving, using, understanding, and managing emotions, provided the framework for Curci's et al. (2014) research. Simply put, perceiving is the ability to identify and distinguish emotions in one's self and in others. Using emotions is the ability to focus attention and think rationally, logically, and creatively. Understanding emotions is the ability to analyze and articulate emotions in one's self and in others. Managing emotions is the ability to regulate moods and emotions in one's self and in others.

According to the research of Curci, Lanciano, and Soleti (2014) and others, EI can be trained and improved, just like any other skill (Gliebe, 2012). The results of EI studies overlap with numerous other studies on motivational factors and the premise that perceptions influence reality. Basically, teachers set the environment with how they deal with their own emotions and the emotions of others. Used positively, teachers can stimulate excitement and reduce anxiety. By recognizing emotional signals from students, teachers can pre-emptively manage dysfunctional responses that may occur as emotions escalate. Furthermore, teachers with high EI can channel positive emotions, and enhance student self-esteem, which translates into more successful school performance. High EI influences positive teacher-student relationships,

heightens optimism and overall teacher job satisfaction, and positively correlates with higher grades and student achievement.

Emotional intelligence in the Christian school context. Gliebe (2012) also discussed the basics of EI, but provided practical application to the Christian school context. Gliebe's stated goals were to incorporate EI into curricula, train teachers to enhance their EI, and incorporate a Biblical perspective in the EI discussion. Gliebe described teachers with high EI as those who teach with optimism, attribute positive characteristics to others and look for the best, and are caring and empathetic with others. Gliebe recognized that teaching is a highly emotional endeavor and that "teaching efficacy and emotional regulation skills are inseparable" (p. 254).

Using the four aspects of EI, perceiving, using, understanding, and managing emotions, Gliebe (2012) offered key questions to identify the level of emotional intelligence. In perceiving, "Do I know what I am feeling and why? Do I know what my students are feeling and why? Do I notice the emotional status of myself and others?" In using emotions, "Can I identify emotional swings in myself and others? Do I delay decisions and responses in emotional mood swings? Do I recognize optimal times for my students to work on certain activities and projects based on their emotional status?" In understanding emotions, "Do I express my own feelings and help students to express their feelings? Do I understand why students behave in a certain way and recognize developmental influences on their emotions?" In managing emotions, "How do I respond to unexpected circumstances? Can I self-regulate under difficult circumstances? Can I model and explain self-regulation to others?" These basic questions are essential to determining current levels of emotional intelligence. Gliebe (2012) acknowledged that emotions are God-given and reminded educators that the goal of Christian education is to integrate a biblical framework with all areas of development, including academic,

emotional, physical, and spiritual. Knowing God is an intensely emotional relationship, and how one relates to Him impacts one's emotional response to others. Part of the path in becoming Christ-like is growing in self-control, which includes the understanding and regulation of God-given emotions (Galatians 5:22-23). A truly Christian educational experience has Christ at the center, reigning over all aspects of life and practice (Gliebe, 2012).

If EI is critical to student achievement, classroom management, and students' perception of success, then it is critical that teachers understand and utilize strategies to enhance EI, both in themselves and their students. As one studies Scripture, and particularly the Psalms and the Minor Prophets, one notices the depth of emotion, and in particular how David and the prophets were aware of and expressed the full range of emotions. However, merely recognizing and expressing emotions is insufficient. Throughout Scripture, individuals are commanded to manage their thinking and emotions and bring them in line with a Biblical view (Romans 12:1-2; Philippians 4:8). Although circumstantial optimism will be insufficient for the real problems of life and the classroom, true optimism rests in the eternal hope of the gospel and the promises of God, as revealed in His Word. Empathy and caring are strengthened, not by mere force of will, but by reflection on the sacrifices of Christ, and the indwelling Holy Spirit in the life of a believer.

Understanding the research basis, as well as the Biblical grounding of the principles of EI, necessitates practical application for the educator. Gliebe (2012) and Curci, Lanciano, and Soleti (2014) suggested teaching students to communicate clearly, and listening to the needs of others. A simple application is for educators to include a time of sharing between students every morning, when students are required to listen attentively, ask questions and repeat information that others shared. Students could also be coached in responding to non-verbal signals from

teachers and classmates. At the beginning of the year, this includes teaching students non-verbal signals to use with each other and role-playing how to respond correctly. Situational conflict provides numerous opportunities for modeling EI. Students can learn to maintain eye contact, face others, and express feelings clearly. Before modeling for students, teachers must evaluate how they typically respond to conflict. Reflective journaling can be helpful for teachers to recognize current levels of awareness, when emotional situations tend to escalate, and how they responded. Like any other skill, growth will be incremental, so teachers must set attainable goals. Likewise, teachers must submit their own flaws to the Lord and allow the Holy Spirit to guide and change their emotional responses. A final practical application is for educators to ask mentors to hold them accountable and offer suggestions of ways to improve EI in the classroom.

EI is one of many factors which can make a profound impact on the classroom environment. High EI is essential not only for student success, but for the emotional well-being of educators. Awareness of current levels of EI is the first step to integrating practical ways to improve EI in the classroom. Realizing that many of the ideas of EI correlate with Biblical concepts should only strengthen the Christian educator's resolve to understand and model effective EI practices in the classroom.

Other Cultural Factors

Factors outside the school environment can aid understanding in how caring relationships are built (Bajaj, 2009). Within an international context in Zambia, Bajaj (2009) explored the internal and external processes in teacher and student lives that intertwine to develop true caring. Social context and culture play an integral role in shaping and developing caring relationships. According to Bajaj, caring in a relationship is a process by which both parties offer and receive something from the relationship. Within the cultural context of a Zambian school, smaller class

sizes and smaller schools cemented a deeper bond in the teacher student relationship. Van Maele, (2010) also confirmed in a study in the United States that smaller schools may be an easier environment to build trusting and positive relationships. Furthermore, since care was a core principle of the schools in this study, this led to the selection and retention of teachers with similar internal principles. Other factors that influenced the teacher-student relationship were the deliberate and intentional actions of teachers, longer school days, which translated into longer hours of interaction with the students, and ongoing professional development for teachers to support the importance of the caring principle.

Noddings (1988) recognized that relationship building practices in the United States may differ significantly than in an international context. Whatever the cultural setting, Noddings dismissed the notion that teachers develop a friendship with students, but rather proposed that teachers develop a parent-like relationship through modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation, which would provide greater continuity between home and school. Another key element in building relationships that account for different cultures is to consider the ramifications of the economic and social context. Rather than forcing a one size fits all approach to building relationships, instead capitalize on the strengths of each individual culture. Van Eersel, Hermans, & Slegers (2010) related to different economic cultures by a mutual attempt at understanding and participation in thoughtful dialogue. By being sensitive to the needs of the other and trying to adopt their perspective, this student centered approach focuses on individual, culture specific needs (Van Eersel et al., 2010).

History and Purpose of Christian Schools

Having investigated the factors that characterize and influence positive teacher-student relationships, one can probe into the role of relationships in the Christian school context. In

early American culture, educational institutions had a primarily religious purpose (Lawrence, 2007). Gradually, distinctive Christian values and approaches to education all but disappeared from public education. Churches reacted to the secularization and removal of religious teaching from the public schools, and formed Christian schools. Many of these Christian schools were originally started as a ministry of the church, and early Christian educators were often more interested in mentoring than scholarship (Lawrence, 2007). As Christian education became more professionalized, some Christian schools lost the priority of positive teacher-student mentoring relationships, which characterized early institutions. Nevertheless, Christian education continued to gain momentum, due to the belief that faith and learning integration were essential to equip students to adopt a distinctively Christian worldview (Campolongo, 2008). As such, Christian schools began to develop a dual purpose of academic excellence and spiritual development (Banke et al., 2012; LeBlanc & Slaughter, 2012). Many Christian schools developed mission statements to reflect their desire to glorify God in all areas of life, including academic pursuit (I Corinthians 10:31). Since the stated goal of many Christian schools is to integrate faith in all of life's experiences, then educators must know how to affect true inner change (Edgell, 2007).

Spiritual development in Christian schools. As Christian educators began to refine their mission and purpose statements, researchers likewise began to articulate the priority of spiritual development to a holistic education. Edgell (2007) asserted that what one believes is his or her reality, or character, which dictates his or her behavior. Core beliefs, or the basis of character, form slowly over time, and may be different than what is verbally professed (Issler, 2009). Although an individual may express or affirm a set of values, eventually both actions and words reveal what is in the heart. Core beliefs are more settled and do not change easily, since change requires a realignment of priorities. Indeed, core beliefs can actually be a barrier to truth. Yet,

encountering truth is the catalyst to core belief transformation (Issler, 2009). Christian educators recognize that spiritual and thus core belief transformation is dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit, and is truly a lifelong process of growing in Christ-likeness (Bramer, 2010). However, Christian teachers have the challenging task to participate in developing core beliefs, based on the truth of Scripture. Pazmino (2010) suggests for educators to have a dependent humility in prayer, and a flexible, holistic approach to education, which leaves room for the Spirit's leading. Pazmino described Christian education as a "deliberate, sustained divine and human effort to share appropriate knowledge, values, attitudes, and skills" (p. 359). Such effort blends the necessary knowledge of Christianity with the appropriate application of truth in all areas of life. This requires rigorous study and effort, so that the living Word of God never grows stale (Pazmino, 2010). Stiebel (2010) contends that a transformational approach to education must lean on the Bible as its foundation. The Apostle Paul presents the claim that "Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (II Timothy 3:16, KJV). Educators who are humbly transparent about the transformation process in their own lives provide a platform for changed lives, homes, and communities (Pazmino, 2010). Since developmental theorists argue that relationships impact all aspects of development, Christian educators must seriously consider the impact of teacher-student relationships on spiritual development and biblical worldview.

Open-enrollment vs. closed enrollment Christian schools. If Christian education is an effective tool to influence spiritual development, then one must understand the nuances of the differing Christian school methodologies. Although Christian schools have been divided at times on various doctrinal issues, many have united in their reverence for the Bible and an aversion to the corrupting influence of secular culture on youth (Laats, 2010). However, an

ongoing fundamental difference in Christian schools is the question of purpose, which directly impacts enrollment policies. Some would maintain that the primary focus of a Christian school should be evangelism, while others hold to the strict indoctrination of professing believers. This divide in philosophy is the primary difference between open enrollment and closed enrollment Christian schools. An open enrollment school allows students to enroll, regardless of religious affiliation, while a closed enrollment Christian school typically requires a statement of faith and membership in a particular church or denomination. An open enrollment Christian school views education as a tool to evangelize students and families with the gospel of Jesus Christ, while a closed enrollment philosophy looks negatively on the influence of non-believing children and families in the Christian school environment. Those who support a closed enrollment policy assert that children are malleable and unable to effectively persuade others to a particular belief system, but are rather influenced by negative social and cultural factors. Supporting Scriptural texts for a closed enrollment school include injunctions to separate from worldly influences (I John 2), knowing that “evil communications corrupt good manners” (I Corinthians 15:33 KJV). In contrast, an open enrollment Christian school maintains that the Great Commission mandate “to go and make disciples” (Matthew 28 KJV) and be “salt and light” (Matthew 5:13 KJV) would apply to the area of education as well. Furthermore, in open enrollment schools, positive teacher student relationships are considered an effective means for evangelism in the classroom (Thiessen, 2013). For an open-enrollment Christian school, the purpose is two-fold, to share the gospel with unbelievers, but also to disciple young believers into Christian maturity (Laats, 2010). This study was not designed to compare or promote different types of Christian schools, but rather to provide a brief overview of the differences between the two philosophies of Christian education.

Given the diverse population, even with a clear purpose, open enrollment Christian schools are often characterized by a plethora of religious beliefs. Although numerous factors affect students' well-being, teachers can positively impact students of a different belief system (Donlevy, 2007; Engebretson, 2012; Fisher, 2008; Van Eersel et al., 2010). Again, teacher-student relationships play a large role in the spiritual development of students from mixed religious backgrounds and cultures (Davies, 2007; Miller & McKenna, 2011). The choice to accept or even consider the educator's belief system or worldview is greatly influenced by the quality of the teacher-student relationship (Sherr, Huff, & Curran, 2007). Research with college participants also supported the premise that seamless integration of faith and learning is an effective tool in the process of spiritual transformation (Watterson, Rademacher, & Mace, 2012). Since teachers' religious beliefs directly impacted their treatment of students and the formation of positive relationships (Baurain, 2012), Banke et al., (2012) concluded that authentic modeling and teacher reflection heightened spirituality in students. However, for long term spiritual impact and transformation, the educator's manner of life needed to match the message (Beagles, 2012). Indeed, Moore (2014) concluded that the most common teacher characteristics leading to sustained student spiritual development in a spiritually diverse culture were positive classroom environments, Christ-like attitudes, and an intentional focus on spiritual development.

Impact of Relationships in the Christian School Context

Although the goal of Christian education may be evangelistic, discipleship, or perhaps both, some question whether Christian education is making any true long term relational impact. ApSion, Francis, and Baker (2007) conducted an interesting study on the perception of male Christian school graduates. Although there were some negative findings on teacher preparation, the graduates overwhelmingly supported the benefits of quality, caring relationships, which had a

lifelong implication on morality development. The caring teacher-student relationship far outweighed the secondary disadvantages of fewer academic and extra-curricular options in a Christian school (ApSion, Francis, & Baker, 2007).

Impact of caring in troubled relationships. Detached teacher-student relationships, in contrast, led to numerous behavior problems and even student dropouts (Colomy & Granfield, 2010). Colomy and Granfield's (2010) study examined Christian school dropouts and concluded that close relationships impacted caring, student engagement, and student resilience. Close relationships with teachers were the primary reason for the re-engagement of secondary dropouts. Re-engagement was typically initiated by teachers, who affirmed students and showed love, care, and interest. They spent time with the kids outside class meeting individualized needs. Teachers were willing to share failures and their personal lives. Classroom management, in previously troubled environments, was significantly improved by educators strengthening the bonds of the teacher-student relationship.

Spiritual development in cross-cultural relationships. Positive teacher student relationships not only affect the disengaged, but also those from vastly different cultural contexts, since the need for biblical worldview development transcends cultural boundaries (Edgell, 2007). Okamura (2009) explored the effect of relationships in cross-cultural spiritual transformation. Japanese students studying in the United States experienced spiritual transformation because of crisis situations created by cultural conflict and positive experiences with Christians. Interpersonal connections were a critical component to the Japanese students' transformation to Christianity. Okamura and Richards (2005) both concluded that caring and loving relationships are inseparable from spiritual transformation in cross-cultural relationships.

Biblical Models of Positive, Transformational Relationships

Indeed, the Bible is brimming with injunctions to develop loving relationships and replete with excellent models for relationship building. In the Old Testament, Abraham mentored Isaac, Moses mentored Joshua, Naomi mentored Ruth, and Elijah mentored Elisha, just to name a few. Simply put, mentoring, which will be discussed shortly in greater detail, is the “cultivation of young adults, the tender caring for and nurturing of them so that they will grow, flourish, and be fruitful” (Meyers, Gutacker, & Gutacker, 2010, p. 29). In the New Testament, the apostle Paul provided a model for pedagogy in his epistles, and in his numerous mentoring relationships (Judd & Hilton, 2014). Timothy, Titus, Silas, John, Mark, and others in Scripture testify to the life-changing impact of positive relationships. In Paul’s letters to Timothy, Paul repeatedly reminded Timothy to cling to and follow after the truths that had been taught to him by Paul, as well as his grandmother and mother (II Timothy 1:5-6). Likewise in II Timothy 2:2, Paul enjoined Timothy to commit truth to faithful men, and teach them to continue to follow Christ. Indeed, I Corinthians 13 (KJV) emphasizes the pre-eminence of love in any successful work for Christ. Christ modeled the ultimate educator in his mentoring relationships and servant leadership (Wasukundi, 2012). Although he influenced thousands, he intentionally poured into 12 men in a mentoring relationship. These 12 ordinary men proceeded to turn the world upside down with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, the opportunity and potential impact of mentoring in positive teacher-student relationships bears further scrutiny.

Mentoring

As modeled by Christ and the Apostle Paul, mentoring is a concept imbedded in Scripture, yet recognized as beneficial even in public education. Intergenerational bonding, or mentoring, positively impacts parent, teacher, and student relationships, as well as influences

student achievement and discipline problems (Chan et al., 2013; Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004). Furthermore, school based mentoring programs have been shown to reduce student aggression and greatly improve relationship quality between teachers and students (Cavell, Elledge, Malcolm, Faith, & Hughes, 2009).

Mentoring can also have a significant impact on the spiritual development of adolescents (Lanker, 2010). Campolongo (2008) asserted that mentoring can be a “dynamic force” in forming godly young people (p. 80). The attitudes and behaviors of older mentors (including teachers) are significant in forming the discipleship attitudes of adolescents who desperately need spiritual mentoring (Beagles, 2012). Effective mentoring, however, requires specific training and spiritually sensitive professional development targeted at building positive relationships (Campolongo, 2008; Larkin, 2010). Teachers impact students’ spiritual well-being when they are grounded in their own ideology and form intentional relationships characterized by Christ-like attitudes and behaviors (Fisher, 2008; Moore, 2014). Although Christian schools may have well-crafted goals of salvation and discipleship, mere presence or attendance in a Christian school does not equal true spiritual transformation. Piaget and Kohlberg, child psychology theorists, both considered relationships as the breeding ground for discussion and the development of moral reasoning (Moore, 2014). Likewise, faith development typically happens with an intentional plan to grow and develop Christ-likeness (Fowler, 1981).

In pursuit of intentional Christ-likeness, Jeff Myers (2010) crafted a book on mentoring to assist Christians who seek to be influential in life transformation. To reiterate what is meant by mentoring, Meyers, Gutacker, and Gutacker defined mentoring as the “cultivation of young adults, the tender caring for and nurturing of them so that they will grow, flourish, and be fruitful” (p. 29). By developing a model he terms “life-on-life mentoring,” Meyers, Gutacker,

and Gutacker proposed six actions, or relational gestures, which will build a mentoring relationship (p. 63). First of all, modeling demonstrates for a mentee what successful living looks like. This requires a mentor to have a Biblical worldview, but also a relationship with Christ that is real and authentic. Modeling requires spending time together, and friendship requires vulnerability and trust between the two individuals. Secondly, friendship offers companionship and builds confidence. Advising provides direction and insight for life challenges. Advising involves sharing stories and wisdom gleaned through positive and negative experiences. Coaching helps a mentee grow in skill and application. Coaching is about listening, asking the right questions, and drawing out the potential for change. This involves assessing the current reality and helping the mentee walk out an attainable goal. Teaching provides opportunities to understand and rightly divide truth. Palmer (2005) maintained that true teaching hinges on connectedness.

All good teachers . . . have a capacity for connectedness. They all connect their selfhood with their students and their subject. Good teachers weave a fabric of connectedness between all three, and the loom on which they do the weaving is their own heart (p. 74). Lastly, sponsoring helps a mentee move intentionally towards a platform of greater influence (Meyers, Gutacker, & Gutacker, 2010). This requires affirming the mentees' potential, inviting their participation in a worthwhile endeavor, and launching them to lead on their own.

Christian schools can function as the avenue for intentional maturation of Christ-like disciples. Discipleship, or mentoring, in the classroom must be a teacher's overflow of a personal relationship with Christ, modeled by a respect and care for students (Moore, 2014). This focus on spiritual development is what sets Christian schools apart. The "dual responsibility" of spiritual development and academic excellence uniquely positions Christian

schools for the task of influencing the next generation with the gospel of Christ (Banke et al., 2012, p. 21).

Summary

Resting in a constructivist framework, birthed out of the theories of Vygotsky (1980), Bandura (1993), and Bruner (1997), this literature review establishes the importance of positive teacher-student relationships, and provided a comprehensive picture of what these relationships should look like. Undoubtedly, both teacher and student characteristics, as well as other environmental and cultural factors play a role in the development of positive relationships. Within Christian education, research has explored the value of mentoring and spiritual transformation, yet there remains a gap regarding the process of how to build positive teacher-student relationships in a Christian school. This qualitative, grounded theory study will build on the previous research regarding positive teacher-student relationships and mentoring in Christian circles to provide a model to assist educators in building positive teacher-student relationships in open enrollment Christian schools.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Based on the gap in the empirical research, this chapter examines the methods which were utilized to answer the research questions regarding the process for building positive teacher-student relationships in open-enrollment Christian schools. The methodology and rationale for a qualitative, systematic grounded theory study is discussed, as well as delineating how the research questions relate to the theoretical framework. Furthermore, the role of the researcher, including experiences and biases, is discussed. The rationale for the settings and the participants, along with the features of the sites are discussed. The data collection and data analysis methods grounded in the research design of Corbin and Strauss (2015) are explained. Finally, trustworthiness and ethical considerations are addressed and discussed in detail in this chapter. This chapter closes with a summary of the methodology for this study.

Design

The qualitative method was utilized for understanding the process of building positive teacher-student relationships. A qualitative method is best suited to this study to explore the essence of the phenomenon of building positive teacher-student relationships since it allows the researcher flexibility to explore the process of how meaning is developed in understanding phenomena (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, the perspective of the participants is central in a qualitative study (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), and this element is underdeveloped in current research on positive teacher-student relationships.

The specific design for this qualitative study is grounded theory. Grounded theory is a valid design for this study because the phenomenon of interest is the process of building positive teacher student relationships and the goal is to develop a theoretical model for educators. As

such, grounded theory goes “beyond description to generate or discover a theory” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015 p. 107). Researchers utilizing grounded theory discover concepts by gathering data, identifying themes, connecting ideas, and creating a visual or theoretical theory to explain a process (Creswell, 2013). Grounded theory can either generate new theory, or modify existing theory. Corbin and Strauss (2015) highlighted the value of extending research to include specific populations previously unexplored. This study builds on previous research on positive relationships to provide a model for building positive teacher-student relationships with the specific population of Christian schools. As such, this study provides a bridge for the current gap in empirical research for the Christian school context. Furthermore, grounded theory provides educators with an explanation for why positive relationships sometimes develop more readily in certain contexts.

The systematic approach within grounded theory was chosen primarily because this structured approach to data collection methods and analysis was recommended by Corbin and Strauss (2015) and Creswell (2013) as best suited to novice researchers. The systematic approach uses detailed procedures and various levels of coding in the analysis phase. This structured approach also utilizes the constant comparative model, or the process of analyzing data during data collection, as well as memoing, or providing a written record of analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Keeping the meaning established by the participants central, a systematic approach facilitates a visual or theoretical model emerging from the data (Creswell, 2013).

Research Questions

The research questions guided this grounded theory study and structured the process for collecting data on how to build positive teacher-student relationships in a Christian school

setting. As recommended by Patton (1990), these open-ended questions were developed from the literature review and allowed me to elaborate on current relationship building research and explore topics that are essential to build a research model that explains the specific context of open-enrollment Christian schools.

1. What teacher and student characteristics facilitate the development of positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools?
2. What specific strategies do teachers and students describe as helpful in building positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools?
3. What do teachers and students describe as hindrances to building positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools?
4. How do positive teacher-student relationships influence the spiritual development of students in Christian schools?

Setting

The research was conducted in three different open enrollment Christian schools. Open enrollment schools were purposefully chosen to provide a greater diversity in the student population and to enhance the transferability of the findings. One of the schools is located in Guam and two of the schools are located in Hawaii. Three different schools were selected to provide a theoretical sampling of teacher-student relationships, and to seek to provide a theoretical model that could transcend cultural differences between the three diverse locations. Theoretical sampling is based on “collecting data from people, places, and events” in order to maximize an understanding of the relationships between concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 134). Theoretical sampling provides flexibility by integrating data collection with analysis and allowing concepts to guide the data collection process (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Theoretical

sampling was chosen for this study to allow me to sample teachers and students and determine what concepts required further development. These three schools were chosen as a convenience sample, or a population that is easily accessible to the researcher (Creswell, 2013), due to my location in Guam, and because they all affirm a Christian mission and philosophy. A convenience sample allowed me to sample teacher and student populations where I had personally observed positive teacher-student relationships, and had the opportunity to conduct in person focus groups and individual interviews. These schools also have a reputation for prioritizing teacher-student relationships and emphasizing the cultivation of a biblical worldview. The settings were also chosen based on educator and administrator recommendations regarding the quality of the teacher-student relationships at these institutions.

International Christian School

International Christian School (ICS) (pseudonym) is in Guam, with a school population of over 1,000 students. Guam is an ethnically diverse island in the Pacific Ocean. English and Chamorro are the primary languages, but Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, and Korean are significant minority groups. According to the U.S. Census (2010), the population breakdown is 37.1% Chamorro, 26.3% Filipino, 11.3% other Pacific islanders, 6.9% white, 6.3% other Asians, 2.3% other races, and 9.8% mixed. However, the population of ICS is predominantly Asian and Filipino, with a small minority of Pacific islanders and Caucasian students. In contrast, most of the teachers are Caucasian, who came from the continental United States. ICS is an open enrollment Christian school, which means that students and parents do not have to agree to a statement of faith in order to enroll at the school. Although the staff affirms a common Christian belief system, approximately 70% of the student population would be considered non-believers. The sample population included believing and non-believing students. For the purposes of this

study, a believing student was defined as one who professes the basic tenets of Christianity, such as the creation, the Fall of man and humankind's depravity, and the sufficiency of Christ's atonement for the forgiveness of sins. While religious beliefs may vary drastically, believing students were defined as self-professed Christians. A population of believing and non-believing students creates a tremendous spiritual diversity in this cross-cultural Christian school. The selection of this site was purposeful, based on the criteria of a Christian school with the phenomenon of interest, positive teacher-student relationships.

Hawaii-Location of Two Research Sites

Two of the research locations are based in Hawaii. Hawaii is composed of hundreds of islands that span 1,500 miles. Hawaii is a very diverse culture composed of predominantly Asians, Caucasians, and Pacific Islanders, and is the only state with an Asian plurality. Its tropical climate is a magnet for tourists (over 6.4 million), and its economy depends on industry, military, and tourism revenue. In matters of religion, Hawaii is 29% Christianity, 9% Buddhism, 1% Judaism, 10% other religions, and 51% unaffiliated (State of Hawaii, 2000). Its educational system is centralized, and it is the only state with a unified set of standards for all the school systems. This unification is based on the desire to provide an equitable school experience for all of the islands. Hawaii also has the largest percentage of students in private schools (17%). Due to the diverse culture, Hawaii is a unique mix of cultures, yet overall, Hawaiians are known for their hospitable, relational approach to life.

New Life Christian School. New Life Christian School (NLCS) (pseudonym) is based in Hawaii. The population is 47% Asian, 20% Caucasian, 5% Pacific Islander, 3% African American, and 25% of mixed race (School website, 2015). This K3-12th grade school is a mission, open-enrollment Christian school of approximately 100 Christian workers and 750

students. This school is accredited by the American Association of Christian Schools (AACCS), as well as the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. This independent, non-denominational, Protestant school has been in operation for over sixty years. The school's mission is to train students in "the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). Its goal is to train students academically, socially, emotionally, physically, and spiritually in biblical values. Specifically, the school seeks to develop lifelong learners who love God, love others, and adopt a biblical worldview lens for life. Practically, NLCS seeks to utilize a Bible-centered curriculum to develop responsible citizens. Furthermore, NLCS is a strategic partner in the Schools of the Future initiative, which seeks to better prepare students for work and exemplary citizenship. This initiative encourages student-centered learning through inquiry, project based learning, and technology integration. This site has a similar mission and philosophy of education to ICS.

Bible Fellowship Christian School. Bible Fellowship Christian School (BFCS) (pseudonym) is also based in Hawaii. The population is 52% Asian, 12% White, 8% Pacific Islander, 23% mixed race, and 2% other. This is a small, independent, open enrollment Christian school for 250 students from K3-12th grade (School website, 2015). This school differs from the first two schools in that open enrollment is the policy in K-8th grade; however, high school students who are new to the school are required to sign a statement of faith. In contrast, students that have already been in the school prior to ninth grade may continue in the school system without signing a statement of faith, if they wish. Although this may be considered partial open enrollment, this school was still selected based on the diversity of the student population and the similitude to other open enrollment schools. This school is licensed through the Hawaii Council of Private Schools and targets parents who wish to have their children excel academically and develop good moral character. Their 25 staff members must ascribe to a statement of faith and

their mission to train and encourage students spiritually, academically, and socially, so that they might trust Christ, grow in Christlikeness, and develop a Christian worldview. Doctrinally, this school is similar in philosophy to NLCS and ICS.

Participants

This study was a purposeful theoretical sampling of teachers and students in open enrollment Christian schools who had a shared phenomenon of self-reported, positive relationships. Since this was a volunteer study, participation was dependent on the educators' and students' willingness to participate in the study. The questions for this study pertain specifically to the K-12 positive teacher-student experience.

Selection Criteria

All teachers in grades K-12th grade and all students in grades sixth-12th grade from the three research locations were invited to participate in the online survey. Teacher participants for the focus groups and individual interviews were selected based on the following criteria: nomination from the administrators in an online survey (see Appendix J for Online Survey for Administrators), personal teacher responses in an online survey (see Appendix K for Online Survey for Teachers), and student nomination in an online survey (see Appendix L for Online Survey for Students). In the teacher online survey, one of the questions required teachers to describe their relationships. Another open-ended question asked about the ideal student. In order to be selected for further participation in the focus group and individual interview, teachers had to rate their relationships as positive and discuss positive relationships in their response to the ideal student question. Teachers also had to fulfill the criteria of at least two years of teaching experience, and be fully credentialed in their field of expertise.

The student participants for the focus group and individual interviews were also selected based on input from the administration, teacher nomination in an online teacher survey, and their personal responses to the student online survey. Students also described their relationships as positive in the online survey and provided information related to positive relationships in their description of an ideal teacher.

By requiring input from students, teachers, and administration, the goal was to select teachers and students that considered their relationship to be positive, and therefore nominated the other party for consideration in this study. Since research indicates that teacher and student perceptions of relationships often differ (Gehlbach et al., 2012), having the perspective of both teachers and students, as well as my focus on theoretical sampling, was a unique asset to this study. The feedback from the administrators via the online survey was a helpful perspective regarding positive relationships, providing a broader frame of reference inclusive of other stakeholders, including the administration, other teachers, and the parents. Based on the results from the student, teacher, and administrator online surveys, I selected a theoretical sample of 15-20 teachers and 15-20 students, as recommended for grounded theory studies by Corbin and Strauss (2015). These 15-20 teachers and 15-20 students were invited to participate in the second phase of the study, focus groups and individual interviews. The range of 15-20 student participants and 15-20 teacher participants allowed for the flexibility regarding the sample size, within a grounded theory design, in which interviews continue until theoretical saturation, or no new emerging data, occurs (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Teacher Participants

The educators for this study were current teachers in K-12th grade, in an open-enrollment Christian school, who had at least two years of teaching experience. For the educators,

maximum variation was attempted through the selection of different ethnicities, ages, genders, and levels of experience and education, as well as content area expertise. Since all of the sites are open enrollment or partial open enrollment Christian schools which require a statement of faith from their staff, all of the educators are self-professing Christians. The teacher participants for the focus groups and individual interviews were selected based on their responses on the online survey regarding their positive teacher-student relationships, and based on diversity.

Student Participants

The student participants, chosen for maximum variation, were current students who were in sixth grade through 12th grade, in an open or partial open enrollment Christian school, of various gender, ethnicity, and religious beliefs. This age range was selected based on the premise that students at this age have a better grasp of abstract notions, such as the process of building positive relationships (Erikson, 1993; Fowler, 1981; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969).

Procedures

Knowing the participants' characteristics and the criteria for participation leads to a more specific delineation of the data collection procedures. Since the Institutional Review Board (IRB) required written permission from each research site prior to the submission of the IRB application, I contacted the administrators of three possible sites, via e-mail, to determine their interest in allowing their school to participate as a research site. After determining initial interest, I further articulated the goals of my research and the specific information regarding participants and data collection so that they clearly understood the recruitment method for teacher and students. I then obtained written permission on school letterhead from each site. Once I had IRB approval, I replaced these permission letters from the schools with the IRB

approval letter (See Appendix A for IRB Approval) in order to protect the confidentiality of the research sites.

Immediately after receiving IRB approval, I conducted a pilot study with two pairs of participants, who were not included in the actual research study. This pilot study aided accuracy and ensured clarity in the procedures and data collection process. Fassinger (2005) confirmed the value of pilot testing to ensure credibility and avoid potential confusion or brevity of response to the research questions. In choosing the pilot study participants, I applied the same criteria for selection as in my actual study, with teachers having at least two years of experience teaching and self-reported, positive teacher-student relationships. The student participants were required to be in sixth through 12th grade.

The pilot study was conducted with two elementary teachers and two students. One of the students was in sixth grade and the other student was in eighth grade. One of the teachers taught both of these students and both teachers interacted with the students in extra-curricular activities. I chose participants to provide feedback on the focus group and individual interview questions, and also to provide an opportunity for me to practice analyzing data. The teachers provided helpful suggestions to improve the clarity of the questions. Both teachers had trouble answering question two, which asked them to use three words to describe themselves. They also needed clarification on question three, which asked who they are when they are at their best. The teachers were uncertain if this was specifically in teaching or any facet of life. The teachers also needed clarification regarding the meaning of culture in question 11, whether this was their personal culture, or the culture in which they teach. Based on their feedback, in the actual interviews, I did not always specify that it needed to be three words, but rather just asked teachers to describe themselves. Also, in the personal best question, I explained that it could be

job related, as a teacher, or just as a person. Finally, in the culture question I also explained that it was open to whichever culture the teachers would like to explain. Overall, I was surprised at the brevity of the teachers' interviews. Although I had allotted 30 minutes, it only took them 10-15 minutes for the individual interviews and roughly 15 minutes for the focus group. This led me to realize that I needed more follow-up questions, which would encourage the teachers to elaborate on their answers.

The student participants were also very brief in their answers, which was helpful in gauging the time to schedule the actual interviews. Also, the students' answers were very literal, which allowed me to rephrase some of my interview questions. I also realized that it was important to not re-word my questions in a way that allowed for simply yes or no answers. For example, instead of asking, "Have you always gone to school here?" it was better to ask "Describe for me where you have gone to school." I was able to get more substantive answers from the sixth grader, while the eighth grader provided answers along the lines of "teachers should give less homework" and "let them do what they want". Based on the literal responses of a sixth grader and the nonchalant replies of an eighth grader, I realized that some of the subtleties of building a positive teacher-student relationship might be better suited to older students, and I purposely chose most of my students for individual interviews from the 10th to 12th grade range. Taking these items into consideration, I evaluated the results of the pilot study and made revisions before beginning the actual study.

Once the pilot study was completed and reviewed, the first step in the actual study was for the administrators to introduce the study to the faculty using a provided script (see Appendix B for Recruitment Script) and providing encouragement for the teachers to complete the online survey. The students' homeroom teachers also received a prepared script (see Appendix E for

Recruitment Letter for Online Teacher Survey) used to introduce the study to the students in their homerooms and answer any questions the students may have had. The Consent form (see Appendix D for Consent form for Administrators Participation) for the administrator's online survey was distributed and collected electronically via school e-mail. At the same time, the recruitment letter for the teachers (see Appendix B for Recruitment Script) along with the Consent form (see Appendix F for Consent Form for Teachers) for the teacher's online survey was distributed and collected electronically via school e-mail. Simultaneously, the recruitment letter to the parents (see Appendix G for Recruitment Letter for Child Participation) with the enclosed parent consent (see Appendix H for Informed Consent for Child Participation) and the student assent (see Appendix I for Assent Form for Child Participation) forms for the online surveys were sent to parents via e-mail, as document attachments, as well as in paper form. Each consent form specified a specific date and method for returning the forms. The consent forms specified the inclusion of identifying demographic information in the surveys. Upon receiving permission from all parties, I distributed an online survey that included basic demographic information to administrators (see Appendix J for Online Survey for Administrators), teachers (see Appendix K for Online Survey for Teachers), and students (see Appendix L for Online Survey for Students). These online surveys allowed me to sift through the student and teacher population, utilizing the specific criteria mentioned, so I could select a theoretical sample to ensure the richest experiences from participants and maximum variation to the study (Creswell, 2013).

Since the nature of the phenomenon of interest was grounded in a constructivist paradigm, which relies on the individual meaning conferred by the participant, a basic criterion for further participation beyond the online survey was a self-described positive teacher-student

relationship. For the purposes of this study, a positive relationship was defined as a mutual care and understanding of another individual (Bajaj, 2009; Noddings, 1988). Teachers who were nominated by students and their administrators as having a positive teacher/student relationship and also fit the criteria previously delineated, were asked to participate in a focus group, and then subsequently in an individual interview. Parents of students who were nominated by teachers as having a positive student relationship were e-mailed to invite further participation in a student focus group and an individual interview. The three articulated methods of data collection, including online surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews allow for triangulation and increase the credibility of the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2013).

The Researcher's Role

As the “human instrument” in this study, my role as the researcher is to first understand my own motivation and assumptions on this topic (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). To discuss my thinking regarding teacher characteristics that make a difference in positive teacher-student relationships, I included a personal biography (see Appendix M for Personal Biography) and kept a research journal to facilitate the reflection process throughout the dissertation process (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). As a classroom educator and administrator, I have a vested interest in understanding and developing a workable model that is not only theoretically sound and grounded in the existing research but also practical and understandable to the novice, as well as the experienced, educator.

My educational journey began with three years in a Christian school, and then being homeschooled through high school by my parents. I completed an undergraduate degree at a small Christian college, a post-baccalaureate degree in Elementary Education from a secular institution, and a master’s degree in Elementary Reading and Mathematics from a different

secular institution. As a teacher, I taught in a charter school, two public schools, and a Christian school.

In all the twists and turns of my educational journey, I had the pleasure of building strong, positive relationships with students and teachers, which had lasting academic, social, and spiritual impact. In particular, teachers who took an interest in me and invested in knowing me as an individual elicited my respect and my best work. Furthermore, various teachers have served as life mentors, and have significantly affected my spiritual journey. In contrast, I also had negative experiences with teachers who seemed to merely view me as a body in the class, rather than as an individual with specific needs. These negative experiences strengthened my appreciation for the positive relationships and heightened my commitment to positively influence my own students.

As an educator for 10 years, students and parents regularly reference the positive relationships that were built in my classroom, and I have maintained ongoing communication and positive, lasting relationships with many students. However, in contrast, I have observed educators who are well-trained and who care deeply about students, but who have not been able to build positive relationships. I have personal beliefs, based on my own experience, about the characteristics and behaviors that seem to build positive teacher student relationships, but I want to investigate whether other educators and students have experienced the phenomenon in the same way and through the same process. Furthermore, I want to ground the experiences in the current empirical research, and not just on isolated experiences. Although I have professional relationships with some of the potential participants at ICS, I am not in a supervisory position over them, to avoid a conflict of interest or the possibility of manipulating the responses to solicit certain results.

The research locations were chosen based on similar philosophical and educational philosophies of training the next generation in a biblical worldview. My goal was to provide a study which will be useful in my own school, but also have application to other Christian school settings. Since my viewpoint and assumptions influence the interpretation of the data, specific protocols such as memoing, member checking, and peer review add credibility and ensure that the participants' voices are being heard, and not merely my own opinions (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In order to ensure a rigorous study, specific data collection and analysis methods were utilized which closely adhere to the structure articulated by Corbin and Strauss (2015).

Data Collection

The data collection began with an online survey of administrators, teachers, and students that were collected separately, but simultaneously. Additionally, I conducted focus groups and individual interviews with teacher and student participants who were selected based on the results of the online surveys.

Prior to the IRB application, the online surveys, focus group questions, and interview questions were reviewed for content and face validity by three individuals with doctorate degrees, who are familiar with the Christian school context. One individual is a professor at a Christian university, another individual is the head of education at a large Christian school, and the third individual is an administrator of a Christian school. The feedback I received from each individual allowed me to revise my questions to ensure clarity, quality, and validity. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) stated that a study can be considered valid "if the research uses methods and procedures that ensure a high degree of research quality and rigor" (p. 657). Face validity deals with whether or not an instrument appears to measure what it claims, while content validity is

more rigorous and requires subject matter experts to evaluate whether the instrument has sufficient content and explanation to assess what it claims (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Online Surveys

The first method of data collection was an online survey for all current administrators (see Appendix J for Online Survey for Administrators), teachers (see Appendix K for Online Survey for Teachers), and students (see Appendix L for Online Survey for Students) in each of the research sites. The administrators' survey allowed the administrators to nominate teachers and students. The teacher survey allowed the teachers to nominate a student with whom they have experienced a positive teacher-student relationship. The student survey allowed the students to nominate a teacher with whom they have experienced a positive teacher-student relationship.

Administrator online surveys. Administrators were asked to fill out consent forms and participate in an online survey. The recruitment letter and consent form were sent electronically to their work e-mail. If the administrators were willing to participate, they needed to fill out the consent form electronically. I sent the survey link (www.surveymonkey.com) to the administrators' e-mail. This survey allowed them to nominate teachers and student pairs, who were perceived to have strong teacher-student relationships (see Appendix J for Online Survey for Administrators) and provide a brief explanation for their choice. However, the administrators did not participate in the focus groups or individual interviews. The administrators' nominations were based on the administrators' personal observations, both in and outside of the classroom. Their impressions were also based on teacher, parent, and student feedback.

Online Survey Questions

Administrator online survey

1. In general, how would you describe the teacher-student relationships at your school?
2. How do you encourage teachers in building positive relationships with their students?

Please identify three teachers whom you believe have positive relationships with their students.
3. Please indicate why you chose the first teacher. More than one category may apply.
 - Personal observation
 - Parent feedback
 - Student feedback
 - Teacher feedback
 - Other (please list)
4. Please indicate why you chose the second teacher. More than one category may apply.
 - Personal observation
 - Parent feedback
 - Student feedback
 - Teacher feedback
 - Other (please list)
5. Please indicate why you chose the third teacher. More than one category may apply.
 - Personal observation
 - Parent feedback
 - Student feedback
 - Teacher feedback
 - Other (please list)

6. Please identify three students with whom you have observed strong, positive relationships with their teachers.
7. Please indicate why you chose the first student. More than one category may apply.
 - Personal observation
 - Parent feedback
 - Student feedback
 - Teacher feedback
 - Other (please list)
8. Please indicate why you chose the second student. More than one category may apply.
 - Personal observation
 - Parent feedback
 - Student feedback
 - Teacher feedback
 - Other (please list)
9. Please indicate why you chose the third student. More than one category may apply.
 - Personal observation
 - Parent feedback
 - Student feedback
 - Teacher feedback
 - Other (please list)

The first two questions in the administrator online survey provided information regarding the culture and environment of the school. As I gleaned more information from the teachers and

students, this background information was useful in analyzing whether characteristics and strategies reflect the general institutional values. Vygotsky, Bandura, and Bruner all ascribed to the role of environmental factors in relationship, so these two questions were targeted at determining the climate of the schools. Questions three through six requested administrator feedback on teachers and students whom they perceive to have positive relationships. Although their input was only one part of the equation, it strengthened the truthfulness of a claim if multiple stakeholders observed and attested to a positive relationship.

Teacher online surveys. At the same time that the administrators' consent forms were being distributed via the administrators' work e-mail, teachers were sent a recruitment letter and a consent form through their work e-mail. If teachers were willing to participate in the survey, they were asked to fill out consent forms electronically. I kept a spreadsheet of all the teachers' names, in order to indicate which teachers participated. This list and the consent forms were kept confidential in a password protected computer and in a secure office. All K-12th grade teachers at the research locations who consented to participate were sent the online teacher survey link (www.surveymonkey.com) through their work e-mail. On the online survey, teachers could nominate current students (within the sixth-12th grade range) with whom they experience a positive relationship. Similar to the student survey, the teacher survey contained basic demographic information such as name, age, grade level, gender, ethnicity, and number of years teaching at the institution to provide context for the rich description of data (see Appendix K for Online Survey for Teachers). There were also open-ended questions asking teachers to describe the positive teacher-student relationship. Teachers were also asked if they would be willing to participate in focus groups and individual interviews.

Online Survey Questions

Teacher online survey

1. What is your name?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. What grade level do you teach?
5. How would you describe yourself?
 - Extroverted
 - Introverted
6. How long have you taught at this school?
7. How long have you been teaching?
8. Which choice most accurately describes your relationships with students?
 - I have positive relationships with most or all of my students.
 - I have positive relationships with some of my students.
 - I have neither a positive or negative relationship with most of my students.
 - I have negative relationships with most of my students.
9. List four or five words that describe the ideal student.
10. In thinking about your students, whom you taught for at least a year, who are now current students in sixth to 12th grades at your school, name up to five students with whom you have the most positive relationship.
11. What year did you begin a relationship with each individual you named in question 10?
12. Briefly describe the characteristics of each positive relationship mentioned in question 10.

13. Would you be willing to participate in a focus group with other teachers and an individual interview with the researcher to discuss more about how you developed your positive relationship(s)?

In the teacher online survey questions, questions one through seven provided basic demographic information. Questions five through seven provided an opportunity to explore the connection of teacher characteristics, such as years of experience (Van Maele & Houtte, 2010). Questions eight through 12 explored basic teacher assumptions and perceptions about positive relationships. According to Bandura (1997), perception and motivation is a key factor in behavior. Question 13 provided information regarding the teachers' willingness to participate in further discussion.

Student online surveys. Prior to participating in the student online survey, all parents who had a child that is in sixth through 12th grade and their child at the three research sites were given the opportunity to learn about this study. As noted earlier, a recruitment letter, as well as the informed consent form and an assent form, were sent to the parents, via e-mail, as document attachments. The parents who agreed to have their child participate in this study were asked to indicate their name on an informed consent form for students under age 18, and the students were asked to put their names on assent forms to participate in this survey. These forms could be returned electronically to me via my work e-mail or printed out and returned to the office. To keep track of which students participated in the survey, the office had a print-out of the students in each homeroom. When the consent and informed forms were turned in, one of the secretaries indicated whether or not the student would participate on the class list spreadsheet. This list and the forms were kept confidential, in a secure office location. After collecting consent and assent forms, the online student survey was distributed during a scheduled computer lab time to all

current students, in sixth through 12th grade, who had parental permission. I assisted students in going to the correct website, www.surveymonkey.com, to complete the survey. This survey was also password protected to protect the confidentiality of the results. This survey contained basic demographic information such as name, age, grade level, gender, ethnicity, and number of years at the institution to provide context for the rich description of data (see Appendix L for Online Survey for Students). There were also open-ended questions asking students to describe the positive teacher-student relationship. At the end of the survey, students were asked if they would be willing to further participate in focus groups and individual interviews.

Online Survey Questions

Student online survey

1. What is your name?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. What is your grade level?
5. How long have you been at this school?
6. Do you consider yourself an
 - Extrovert
 - Introvert
7. How many church services do you attend in one month? Check the one that best applies to you.
 - I do not attend
 - 1-2
 - 3-5

- 6-10
 - 10 +
8. Which choice most accurately describes your religious beliefs?
- I am serious about my religious beliefs.
 - I am somewhat serious about my religious beliefs.
 - My religious beliefs are not important to me.
 - I do not claim any religious beliefs.
9. Which choice most accurately describes the influence of your religious beliefs?
- My religious beliefs do not impact my life.
 - My religious beliefs impact some areas of my life.
 - My religious beliefs impact most areas of my life.
 - My religious beliefs impact every area of my life.
10. Which choice most accurately describes your relationships with teachers?
- I have positive relationships with most or all of my teachers.
 - I have positive relationships with some of my teachers.
 - I have neither a positive or negative relationship with most of my teachers.
 - I have negative relationships with most of my teachers.
11. List four or five words that describe the ideal teacher.
12. In thinking about all of your former teachers, name one or two with whom you have the most positive relationship.
13. How long have you had a relationship with each teacher you identified?
- Teacher one:

- Teacher two:

14. If someone had never met your teacher(s), with whom you have the most positive relationship(s), how would you describe him/her and your relationship?

- Teacher one:
- Teacher two:

15. Would you be willing to participate in a focus group with other students and an individual interview with the researcher to discuss more about how you developed your positive relationship?

Questions one through five provided basic demographic information, which assisted in sampling to achieve maximum variation. Question three also provided cultural context, which impacts relationships (Noddings, 1988). Questions seven through nine provided a baseline for understanding religious belief systems, which was helpful in gauging the influence of the teacher on spiritual development (Banke et al., 2012; Baurain, 2012). Questions 10 through 14 allowed students to share their perception on the teacher-student relationship, which is a key element in the effectiveness of the relationship (Gehlbach et al., 2012; Van Maele & Houtte, 2010). The final question determined whether or not a student would be interested in further participation. Utilizing the results of the online surveys from students, teachers, and administrators, I categorized the results based on the descriptions of the positive relationship and the criteria for participation in the study. Choosing a purposeful sample based on the results of the survey of students and teachers, as well as the administrative input, a minimum of two and a maximum of six teachers and two to six students were chosen from each research location for focus groups and individual interviews. This range, based on recommendations from Corbin and Strauss

(2015), Creswell (2013), and Krueger (1988), provided a safety net to ensure a balanced representation from each research location. These students and teachers who fit the participant criteria mentioned earlier, and who were willing to be interviewed, were contacted for participation in a focus group and an individual interview.

Focus Groups

Teacher participants for the focus group and individual interviews were selected based on the results from the administrator and student online surveys. Simultaneously, student participants were selected based on the results of the teacher and administrator online surveys. The parents of students who have been nominated by others as having a positive teacher-student relationship were contacted to set up a time for the focus group and individual interview. After receiving scheduling information, I contacted the teachers and the students to schedule their respective focus group at their school. At ICS, I contacted the teachers and students via e-mail to schedule a time that was convenient for them. At NLCS and BFCS, the administrators scheduled the focus groups at times that would be most convenient for the participants. The focus groups took place in the principal's office at ICS for convenience and ease of recording. At NLCS, the focus groups were held in a conference room, and in a small classroom at BFCS. All of the individuals received and filled out consent forms, and most took the online survey prior to their interview. I conducted focus group discussions with teachers and a separate focus group with students from the same research site to glean their perspective in a group context. The focus group interview guides (Appendices N and O) were designed to provide structure and focus for the group discussions, yet remain flexible and open to participants' responses (Patton, 1990). This format allowed for a quicker collection of data, and a chance to develop a relational rapport with those who may feel uncomfortable with the individual interview (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

The focus groups were audio recorded, for transcription purposes, and I took field notes, as well. Focus groups were audio recorded using Audacity on my personal computer and my iPhone as a back-up. Transcriptions were done personally and by a paid transcriptionist. The data from the focus groups was analyzed and grouped using memoing and coding, in order to discover salient themes (Corbin & Strauss, 1998). In memoing, I recorded my thoughts and assigned codes to the repetitive themes that emerged (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Using the constant comparative method of data collection suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2015), I elaborated on some questions, based on results and feedback from participants. By analyzing the codes for similarities and differences, I selected a core, central category, which was essential in building the theoretical model.

Focus Group Questions

Teacher focus groups

1. You described your relationship with students as positive. What does it mean to have a positive teacher-student relationship?
2. How is your relationship to students different than other teachers' relationships with students? Why?
3. What purposeful steps do you take to build positive relationships with students?
4. What have you seen other teachers do to effectively build positive relationships with students?
5. If you had unlimited time and resources, what would you do to build positive teacher-student relationships?
6. What student actions build positive teacher-student relationships?
7. What student actions interfere with positive teacher-student relationships?

The first question required teachers to articulate their own meanings ascribed to the term positive relationship. Question two focused on the characteristics of these teachers that set them apart from other teachers. Question three through five asked teachers to articulate specific strategies, which tied in to research question three. Questions six and seven requested teachers to reflect on student characteristics and behaviors that influence the relationship.

Focus Group Questions

Student focus group questions

1. You described your relationship as positive. What does it mean to have a positive teacher-student relationship?
2. How is your positive relationship with this teacher different than with other teachers?
3. Why do you think you get along well with this particular teacher?
4. What can students do to build positive relationships with teachers?
5. What do teachers do that help to build positive relationships with students?
6. What student actions interfere with positive teacher-student relationships?
7. What teacher actions interfere with positive teacher-student relationships?

The first student focus group question required the students to articulate their individual meanings of a positive relationship. Since the results and subsequent interpretation depended on the individual meaning, it was critical to understand the participants (Creswell, 2013). Questions two and three required students to further define and characterize their relationships. Questions four and five tied in to the overall research questions, in asking students to identify strategies that build relationships. Questions six and seven asked students to pinpoint hindrances or behaviors that are harmful to positive relationships.

Individual Interviews

After analyzing the data and reflecting on the results of the focus groups, individual interviews were conducted with 17 teachers and 21 students, or two to seven teachers and two to seven students from each of the three research locations. The interviews were completed so that the teachers and students were scheduled as closely as possible. The online surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews were completed at each research location before moving on to the next location. Individual interviews were face to face, and interview questions included open-ended questions about background, experience, opinions, and feelings regarding the process of building positive teacher-student relationships (Appendices P and Q). An interview guide facilitated systematic analysis and consistency in asking the same questions of the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Patton, 2002). Interviews were audio taped using Audacity on my personal computer and my iPhone as a back-up. Audio were transcribed verbatim by a qualified transcriptionist or by myself for further analysis. The raw data was stripped of individual identifiers and stored separately, as suggested by the IRB, to eliminate the risk of disclosure. Furthermore, member checking was done as I finished the data collection process at each research site, in order to ensure the integrity of the process. Since I had the key with the identifying information, I provided each participant with their own information to check the clarity and interpretation of their part of the data. As with the data from the focus groups, I engaged in memoing and coding to develop themes and categories.

Open Ended Individual Interview Guide

Teacher individual interview questions

1. Tell me about your hobbies and interests. What are you passionate about?
2. What three words would best describe your personality?

3. Who are you when you are at your best?
4. What is your family background?
5. Who has had the most impact on you spiritually?
6. Tell me about your educational background. Where have you attended school?
7. What impact did your teachers have on you?
8. Why did you choose to teach in Christian education?
9. What are your top goals as a teacher?
10. If you could describe the best possible student, what would he/she be like?
11. What value do teacher-student relationships have in your culture?
12. How would you define a positive relationship?
13. Describe a student with whom you have had a positive relationship.
14. What helped to build your positive relationship?
15. Can you identify key moments, or turning points in your relationship?
16. Describe the challenges in your relationship.
17. Has this relationship influenced you spiritually? If so, how?
18. Is there any advice that you would give to other teachers regarding building positive relationships?

The teacher individual interview were structured, to provide consistency, in asking the participants the same questions (see Appendix P for Individual Interview Guide for Teachers). Questions one through five dealt with teacher background, general characteristics, emotional intelligence, and family and cultural factors. These factors all influence the teacher-student relationship and aligned with research question one, regarding the characteristics of teachers (Curci et al., 2014; Gliebe, 2012). Questions five and seven delved into the perception of who

had the greatest impact on the teacher. This revealed interesting information regarding the teacher's personal relationships. This aligned with research question one, regarding teacher characteristics, and research question four, regarding the influence on spiritual development. Research indicates that those who are mentored spiritually make the most effective mentors, and I wanted to determine if this is also true of the participants (Meyers, Gutacker, & Gutacker, 2010). Questions six through nine dealt with educational history and priorities, which aligned with research question one. Questions eight and nine questioned the teacher's alignment with the mission of Christian education, and it was interesting to look at the connections and the degree of spiritual impact from research question five. Question 10 dealt with expectations of students, which aligned with research question one, and question 11 dealt with cultural influences. Question 12 asked for the teachers to share their individual meaning regarding positive relationships and question 14 dealt with specific student characteristics, which is covered in research question one. Question 14 and 15 delved into specific strategies that were utilized, which is a part of research question two. Questions 15 and 16 addressed hindrances or phases in the relationship (Newberry, 2010) and aligned with research question three. Question 17 addressed the spiritual influence of the relationship, which aligned with research question four. The final question allowed the participant to add any additional information.

Open Ended Interview Guide

Student individual interview questions

1. Tell me about your hobbies and interests. What do you like to do?
2. Pick three words that describe you.
3. Whom do you most look up to?
4. Tell me about your educational background. Where have you attended school?

5. What positive influence have your teachers had on you?
6. Why did your parents pick a Christian school?
7. What are your top goals as a student right now? What are your long term goals?
8. If you could describe the best possible teacher, what would he/she be like?
9. What value does your family place on teacher-student relationships?
10. How would you define a positive relationship?
11. Describe a specific teacher with whom you have had a positive relationship.
12. What helped to build your positive relationship?
13. Can you identify important events or turning points in your relationship?
14. Describe any time you did not agree or get along with your teacher(s) with whom you described having a positive relationship.
15. Has this relationship influenced you spiritually? If so, how?
16. Is there any advice that you would give to teachers or other students regarding the best way to build positive relationships?

The individual interview questions (see Appendix Q for Individual Interview Guide for Students) were crafted based on the literature review and the four guiding research questions. Questions one through three identified background, characteristics, and personality factors which may have influenced the relationships (Curci et al., 2014; Gliebe, 2012). These questions aligned with research question one regarding the teacher and student characteristics. Questions four through seven discussed basic views about education and relationships in general. Question six delved into family background and the level of commitment to Christian education. This question, again, aligned with the student characteristics mentioned in research question one, as well as the spiritual influences discussed in research question four. Question seven discussed

priorities and goals and provided interesting information about the academic commitment of students with positive relationships. Question eight revealed student expectations of teachers, which aligned with research question one. Since perception strongly affects behavior (Bandura, 1997), question nine and 10 delved into the family and cultural aspects that influenced individual meaning. Again, these questions aligned with research question one, or student characteristics. Question 11 discussed the characteristics of the teacher, which is another facet of research question one. Question 12 asked students to identify strategies which helped to build the relationship, which aligned with research question two. Question 13 and 14 dealt with hindrances or turning points in the relationships, which were addressed by research question three. Newberry (2010) identified specific stages in the teacher-student relationship and in these questions I sought to understand if the participants also viewed their relationship in stages. Question 15 dealt with spiritual impact, which aligned with research question four, and question 16 was purposely open-ended for any other information the students might wish to share.

Data Analysis

The participants delineated personal experiences with the phenomenon of interest, building positive teacher-student relationships. Throughout the data collection process, I engaged in constant comparative data analysis, or the practice of analyzing data immediately to give ideas and depth of insight to future data collection and interpretation (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The questions for all three data collection tools were broad enough to elicit the necessary information, as well as providing opportunities for elaboration on key concepts. Maintaining fidelity to the original research questions, yet allowing room for further investigation is a critical component in grounded theory research that includes a constant comparative approach to data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

The first step in analyzing the data was to export the survey results to an Excel spreadsheet. Excel provided a user-friendly tool for sorting the data to determine which participants were willing to be part of a focus group and individual interview. I also filtered the results to only include the individuals that responded that they had positive relationships with all or most of their teachers or students. I also analyzed the results from the administrator survey to see which teachers and students were nominated by their administrators for participation. I compared these results with the responses from the teacher and student surveys, searching for teacher and student names that were mentioned by multiple individuals. Next, I searched for teacher and student pairs and attempted to schedule individuals, whenever possible, who had nominated each other. In choosing my participants for the focus groups and individual interviews, I also looked at gender, ethnicity, grade level, and religious beliefs, attempting to maximize diversity in my participants. I also questioned the administrators at each of the three research locations to get their opinion on which students might be better suited to a focus group or individual interview. After selecting my participants, I scheduled the teacher and student focus groups, either via e-mail or through personal contact.

During the focus groups, I made notes and memos for later analysis. After completing the focus groups, I listened to the audio recordings multiple times, while taking notes and beginning the transcribing process. Simultaneously, I began thinking about possible codes and in vivo codes. I also utilized a paid transcriptionist, who spent ten hours transcribing several of the focus groups and interviews, but most of the interviews I personally transcribed. Personally transcribing the data was very helpful in becoming familiar with the data and being immersed in the experiences of the participants. Once I completed or received the transcriptions, I made additional reflective notes on the transcriptions. Rather than waiting for the full collection of

data, I began the coding process immediately, to check for accuracy and provide insight, which was helpful in future interviews. I followed the same process in the individual interviews, listening to the recordings multiple times, and making notes of my thoughts and observations from the interviews in order to discover significant themes (Corbin & Strauss, 1998; Patton, 2002). This phase involved memoing, or the recording of ideas and reflections as the data was collected and analyzed (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, memoing allowed for comparison of similarities and differences and generated useful questions and hypotheses about emerging themes. The constant comparative method of analysis was used as data from interviews, field notes, and memos were analyzed before conducting the next interview (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Once the interviews were transcribed, I sent the transcript to the participants via e-mail or in a sealed envelope, and asked them to review the transcripts and let me know of any changes that they would like made. Several participants commented on the number of filler words that they used, such as “uh” or “um”, but no one requested that I delete or change their answers.

In analyzing the information, I created a database in Atlas.ti 7, which allowed for easy organization and efficient retrieval of information using key terms. In addition, the digital information was backed up daily to an external, password protected drive, so that no data was lost in case of a computer malfunction. Any items printed for analysis was kept in a secure location, and will be stored for up to three years after initial data collection, per IRB regulations. An efficient and confidential method for organization and data retrieval was critical so that analysis was timely and provided a recognizable, iterative process for collection and analysis.

After entering the transcripts into Atlas.ti 7, I continued the process of coding. In the initial open coding, I assigned over 800 different codes. As I analyzed and coded more

interviews, I became more aware of similarities and differences, and identified broad categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2013). Within systematic grounded theory, this included open coding and then further developing concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The initial reading was intended to submerge me in the life of the participants, so that I could understand and describe their story (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This process included utilizing in vivo codes, or the participants' own words (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2013). These codes were identified and included expected, unexpected, or interesting outcomes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2013). Further readings required analysis and reflection to determine the main idea. Concepts that initially emerged in the data were repeated by multiple participants and thus developed into categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Creswell (2013) and Corbin and Strauss (2015) suggested a cycle of data collection and analysis until theoretical saturation, or the point at which no new concepts emerge from the data. The next step was to link the codes together and group them around my research questions. The enumeration of codes is included in Appendix S. Further analysis revealed several core categories with various themes. Finally, I described the themes of the participants' experience with positive relationships and generated a theoretical model to explain and depict the phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Trustworthiness

Corbin and Strauss (2015) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four critical aspects of trustworthiness, which included credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Trustworthiness "is tied directly to the trustworthiness of the person who collects and analyzes the data – and his or her demonstrated competence" (Patton, 2002, p. 570). Competence is

demonstrated by “using the verification and validation procedures necessary to establish the quality of analysis” (Patton, 2002, p. 570).

Credibility

Credibility deals with the internal validity of the study. Credibility is established by triangulation of data, peer debriefing, and member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1996).

Triangulation of data supports credibility and validity by providing evidence from various sources (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2013). In this particular study, triangulation occurred by collecting data from online surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews. Member checks allowed participants to review and give feedback on interview transcripts, analysis, conclusions, and the theoretical model and remove themselves from the study at any point. This accountability aided trustworthiness by ensuring that my interpretations were true to the original meaning of the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2013).

Dependability

Dependability, or the reliability of the study, was supported by a well-documented audit trail. A thorough audit trail (see Appendix R for Audit Trail), or a record of the data collection, as well as the researcher’s thoughts, provides external auditors with the detail to replicate the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1996). Peer review also aided dependability. Peer review involved asking outside investigators, such as administrators, colleagues, and other researchers to give feedback on the process and the emerging themes. Peer reviews provide an objective look and increase a study’s dependability (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). For the purpose of this study, one researcher familiar with grounded theory, two administrators in Christian education, and several current educators were utilized to aid the research process and enhance trustworthiness. After receiving feedback from the peer review, questions were modified as needed to insure clarity and

fidelity to the research purpose. I also solicited peer review of the data analysis and the emerging themes in the coding process.

Confirmability

Confirmability deals with the study's neutrality or objectivity. Providing information regarding the biases of the researcher as well as axiological and epistemological paradigms allows the reader to understand the researcher's theoretical lens. These viewpoints were unpacked in the role of the researcher and the personal biography (see Appendix M for Personal Biography).

Transferability

Transferability is achieved by thick, descriptive data that allows others to make a judgment about applicability to another setting. This description provides an abundance of detail and connects emerging themes, enabling other researchers to determine if the information can be transferred to other settings and populations (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2013).

Maximum variation in the settings and participants also assists with transferability. Thick, rich description is ideally suited for a qualitative study, which focuses on the meaning of the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Lincoln and Guba (1996) suggested that researchers provide a descriptive narrative about the context of the study so that the reader can make an informed judgment about the applicability of findings to other settings.

Ethical Considerations

Before beginning any data collection, I evaluated potential ethical considerations and received IRB approval. To minimize risks, I outlined possible risks before beginning data collection, and used pseudonyms for participants and site. I also ensured the physical and electronic security of data, as well as protected the sensitivity of the collected data by keeping

information in password-protected computers and papers in a secure location. I also clearly stated my own assumptions and biases to clarify my role in data interpretation. Conferring with participants to ensure accurate interpretation of data (member checking) and utilizing outside audit trails also ensured that data analysis was objective and consistent with the participants' experiences.

Despite precautions, there were possible risks in the study. The initial survey could have reflected negatively on teachers who were not nominated for having positive teacher-student relationships. However, this information remained confidential and pseudonyms were used. Student answers could have been influenced by a desire to please teachers or skew results. Therefore, students were discouraged from sharing their nominations with teachers or other students. In the data collection, and particularly the focus groups and individual interviews, I could have uncovered information that reflected poorly on the institution or of negative teacher-student relationships with other teachers. To ensure that sensitive information was handled correctly, I made sure that the interviews were confidential and I knew of a school counselor or someone to refer students to if I uncovered a matter of concern. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants and the sites. Finally, although I did not have direct supervisory authority over the participants, my role as a part of the administration at ICS could have been an ethical consideration, and it required require deliberate care. Likewise, I did not interview individuals under my supervision as a K3-3rd grade principal, or share the specific names or results with other individuals at the site.

Summary

Having a specific and clearly articulated research design, including the procedures for document collection and analysis is critical for any credible study. Based on the purpose of this

study and the suggestions from previous research, a systematic, grounded theory approach was utilized and online surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews were aligned to the specific research questions. The purposeful selection of three Christian schools and student, teacher, and administrator participants allowed me to elicit information essential to understanding the phenomenon of interest, positive teacher-student relationships. Articulating the researcher role as the “human instrument” allows the reader to understand assumptions and bias that may influence the interpretation of the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Providing a clear audit trail and ensuring specific measures increased trustworthiness and minimized potential ethical considerations.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This qualitative study focuses on the process of building positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools. The purpose of this study is to provide detailed insight into the participants in this study and discuss the themes identified in the data. A clear delineation of themes provides the foundation for correlating the research results within the theoretical framework associated with each research question. This chapter describes the characteristics of the participants, the results from the three data collection tools, including the online survey, the focus groups, and the individual interviews, and concludes with a summary of the data results.

Participants

Online Survey Participants

The following section provides broad demographic information for the participants in the online survey. The subsequent sections hone in on more defining characteristics of the participants selected for the focus groups and individual interviews. All of the teacher participants are self-professing Christians who have chosen to work in a Christian school context. Some chose Christian education as a specific platform for discipleship, while others just went the route expected by their parents or educational institution. The majority of the teacher participants for the online survey were Caucasian females, which is the majority of the teaching population at the three research locations. The student participants were a mixture of Asian, Caucasian, Hawaiian, and multi-racial. All of the teacher and student participants, selected to participate in the focus groups and individual interviews, had a self-described positive teacher-student relationship, and specified details describing the relationship in the online survey. A summary of the participants' demographic information can be found in the next section. Since

the purpose of the online survey was mainly to vet the participants for the focus groups and individual interviews, this section will only briefly describe the salient aspects that were pertinent to the selection process.

Administrators

In the three research locations, five administrators participated. There were three males and two females. All five of the administrators were Caucasian. At ICS, four administrators participated. At NLCS, no administrators took the online survey. They did not understand the directions, so instead of taking the survey, they just verbally provided me with the teachers and students that they wanted to nominate as having positive teacher-student relationships. At BFCS, one administrator participated in the online survey.

Teachers

In the three research locations, 44 teachers participated in the online survey. There were 18 males and 26 females. Regarding the ethnicity of the teachers, three were Hawaiian, four were Asian, 32 were Caucasian, four were multi-racial, and one was African-American. Of the 44 teachers, 21 considered themselves extroverts, and 23 considered themselves introverts. Nine of the teachers had been at their current school for one to three years, 12 had been at the school for four to six years, five had been at the school for seven to 10 years, and 18 had been at the school for 11 or more years. Furthermore, seven had been teaching for one to three years, 11 had been teaching for four to six years, four had been teaching for seven to 10 years, and 22 had been teaching for 11 or more years. Of the teachers who responded on the survey 37 stated that they had positive relationships with most or all of their students, and seven indicated that they had positive relationships with some of their students.

Students

In the three research locations, 108 students took the online survey. 45 were males and 63 were females. There were 25 sixth graders, 22 seventh graders, 10 eighth graders, 12 ninth graders, seven tenth graders, ten 11th graders, and twenty-two 12th graders. Over half of the students (62) indicated that they considered themselves extroverts and 46 indicated that they considered themselves to be introverts. Regarding the ethnicity of the students, 19 were Hawaiian, 11 were Caucasian, 54 were Asian, nine were multi-racial, and six chose the classification of other. Regarding church attendance, 28 indicated that they do not attend church, 11 indicated that they attend one to two times per month, 35 attend three to five times per month, 20 attend six to 10 times per month, and 14 attend 11 or more times per month. Regarding religious beliefs, 51 indicated that they were serious about their religious beliefs, 51 indicated that they were somewhat serious about their religious beliefs, one indicated that religious beliefs were not important, and five indicated that they do not claim any religious beliefs. Interestingly, five said that religious beliefs do not impact their life, 27 said religious beliefs have some impact on their life, 45 said religious beliefs impact most areas of their life, and 31 said that religious beliefs impact every area of their lives. Of the student respondents, 90 said that they have positive relationships with most or all of their teachers, and 18 said they have positive relationships with some of their teachers.

Study Participants

Understanding the statistical information from the online surveys provides the framework for the focus group and interview participants. Selection for further participation included affirming that the participants had positive relationships with all or most of their students, as indicated in the online survey. I examined administrator, teacher, and student nominations, and

selected participants who were mentioned most often. Although I did not require the teachers and students to nominate each other in order to be selected for participation in the study, I did have multiple matches occur, and they were included in the study participants.

Focus Group Participants

The descriptive information for the teacher and student focus groups participants is included in Tables 1 and 2, as well as summarized in narrative form.

Teachers. There were six teachers from ICS who participated in the teacher focus group. There were five teachers from NLCS who participated in the teacher group, and four teachers from BFCS who participated in the teacher focus group. There were a total of 15 teachers who participated in a teacher focus group. Of the teachers who participated in the focus group, 12 also participated in individual interviews. Of the teachers in the focus group, eight were male and seven were female. One of the teachers had been teaching for one to three years, seven had been teaching for four to six years, one had been teaching for seven to 10 years, and nine had been teaching for 11 or more years. Two of the teachers had been at this particular school for one to three years, seven teachers had been at the school for four to six years, three of the teachers had been at the school for seven to 10 years, and six teachers had been at the school for 11 or more years. Ten of the teachers identified themselves as extroverts and five identified themselves as introverts.

Table 1

Teacher Participants

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Years Teaching*	Years at School*	Personality
Joe	Male	Caucasian	4-6	4-6	Extrovert
Seth	Male	Caucasian	11+	11+	Extrovert

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Years Teaching*	Years at School*	Personality
Charles	Male	Caucasian	4-6	4-6	Extrovert
Keira	Female	Caucasian	11+	11+	Extrovert
Meg	Female	Caucasian	4-6	4-6	Extrovert
Cade	Male	Caucasian	11+	11+	Introvert
Jack	Male	Caucasian	7-10	4-6	Introvert
Rebecca	Female	Other	11+	11+	Extrovert
Ellie	Female	Caucasian	11+	11+	Extrovert
David	Male	Multi-racial	4-6	4-6	Extrovert
Ruth	Female	Caucasian	11+	7-10	Introvert
Amy	Female	Caucasian	11+	11+	Extrovert
Noel	Female	Caucasian	11+	7-10	Extrovert
Calvin	Male	Asian	1-3	1-3	Introvert
Jotham	Male	Caucasian	11+	7-10	Extrovert
Kyle**	Male	Caucasian	4-6	4-6	Extrovert
Makayla**	Female	Caucasian	4-6	4-6	Introvert
Michael**	Male	Caucasian	4-6	1-3	Introvert

* *Note.* These numbers were taken from the online survey.

** These individuals were only in the focus group. All of the other participants were also in an individual interview.

Students. There were five students from ICS who participated in the student focus group. There were six students from NLCS who participated in the student focus group. There were four students from BFCS who participated in the student focus group, for a total of 15

students who participated in a student focus group. Four of the students who participated in a focus group also participated in individual interviews. Of the 15 total students in the focus groups, eight were male and seven were female. Three of the students identified themselves as introverts, 11 identified themselves as extroverts and one did not answer the question.

Table 2

Student Participants

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Grade	Years at School	Personality	Religious Beliefs	Influence of Beliefs
Julia	Female	Asian	7th	4-6	Extrovert	SS	Some
Kate	Female	Asian	8th	7-10	Extrovert	Serious	Some
Joshua	Male	Caucasian	8th	1-3	Extrovert	SS	Some
Cheney	Female	Caucasian	10th	1-3	Extrovert	Serious	Most
Jenna	Female	Asian	11th	4-6	Extrovert	SS	Most
Ana	Female	MR	11th	4-6	Extrovert	Serious	Most
Sean	Male	MR	11th	4-6	Introvert	Serious	Every
Esther	Female	MR	12th	11+	Introvert	Serious	Every
Jess	Female	Hawaiian	12th	4-6	Introvert	Serious	Most
Kris	Male	Caucasian	12th	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Katrina	Female	Caucasian	12th	7-10	Extrovert	Serious	Most
Jennifer	Female	MR	12th	4-6	Extrovert	Serious	Every
Beth*	Female	MR	7th	7-10	Extrovert	SS	Most
Joanne*	Female	MR	8th	4-6	Extrovert	Serious	Every
Timothy*	Male	Hawaiian	9th	11+	Extrovert	SS	Most

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Grade	Years at School	Personality	Religious Beliefs	Influence of Beliefs
Anne*	Female	MR	10th	11+	Introvert	Serious	Every
Grant*	Male	MR	11th	4-6	Extrovert	Serious	Every
Keith*	Male	Asian	11th	7-10	Extrovert	Serious	Every
Elise*	Female	Caucasian	12th	7-10	Extrovert	SS	Some
Quinn*	Male	Hawaiian	12th	11+	Introvert	Serious	Most
Reese*	Male	Hawaiian	12th	4-6	Introvert	SS	Most

*Note. These participants only participated in the student focus group. The other individuals participated in an individual interview. SS = Somewhat Serious; MR = Multi-racial.

Individual Interview Teacher Portraits

The following narrative information will briefly explain the characteristics of each study participant from the individual teacher interviews, in order to provide a context for their answers. The descriptions were generated based on responses in the online survey and interviews, as well as personal observation.

There were seven teachers from ICS who participated in individual interviews. There were four teachers from NLCS who participated in individual interviews. Finally, there were four teachers from BFCS who participated in individual interviews, for a total of 15 teachers who participated in individual interviews. Of the individual interview participants, eight were male and seven were female. Eleven of these teachers identified themselves as extroverts and four identified themselves as introverts.

Joe. Joe teaches high school English and is very popular with students. He was nominated by many different students as a teacher with whom they have a positive relationship.

Joe is gregarious and heavily involved in a number of extra-curricular pursuits that allows him to interact with students on a number of different levels.

Seth. Seth is a driven, hard-working, middle school teacher. Repeatedly, throughout the interview, he used the expression “your good enough never is” (Seth, teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). He expects excellence from himself and those around him. Seth has a reputation for pushing students to achieve their maximum potential. He takes time to cultivate relationships on his own time and views his students as an extension of his family.

Charles. Charles is a secondary history teacher who is heavily involved in sports. His job allows him to have many counseling type relationships. Many of his positive relationships have developed with the athletes that he coaches. Students are comfortable with him and describe him with a casual nickname.

Keira. Keira has a reputation as a no-nonsense, high school history teacher. She passionately loves her content area, and even students who do not enjoy that subject enjoy being in her classroom because of how she teaches. A straight shooter, Keira does not mince words. Students know what to expect from her and rise to her expectations. Her wide range of interests, coupled with her observant nature, allows her to relate and interact with many different personalities.

Meg. Meg has not been teaching high school English for long, but she has established herself as a leader in her department. Strongly opinionated, she has firm convictions and students appreciate her approachable nature.

Cade. Cade is a high school math teacher who is popular with many of the “intellectuals”, or those who highly value their academics. He makes learning fun and

challenges students to passionately pursue what they love. In having to deal with difficult family circumstances himself, he positions himself as a father figure to many and encourages the young men that they can be real men of God. He seamlessly integrates his biblical worldview in casual conversation and in the classroom.

Jack. Jack teaches high school PE and health. Jack is also heavily involved in athletics and is known for his commitment to discipleship. Students feel comfortable around him and he makes time for them. He has established mentor type relationships with teenagers in the school and in the community. Students described him as real and willing to let them into his life, rather than maintaining a strict professional distance.

Rebecca. Rebecca enjoys teaching languages to the challenging high school students. She considers it a success to take a student who was difficult at the beginning and by God's grace establish a positive, gospel focused relationship. Rebecca focuses on the power of prayer to develop a spirit-filled teaching style.

Ellie. Ellie is a vivacious and outspoken high school history teacher. She loves to travel and get to know students outside of just academics. Having been at the school for quite some time, Ellie was able to identify trends, and positive and negative changes in the school over the years.

David. David has been part of the school, for most of his educational career, first as a student and now as a high school science teacher and coach for more than four years. David is passionate about athletics, and gets to know many students as a coach. While David is committed to providing a quality education, he regularly refers to areas that are more important to him than academics.

Ruth. Ruth maintains that the key to positive relationships is maintaining an open door policy and a willingness to listen to students and let them hang out in her room. A self-described, “truth-teller,” Ruth sees her mission as one in which to inspire a knowledge of and love for the truth (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Although she describes herself as an introvert, she has developed many relationships just by being available. Ruth teaches high school history.

Amy. Amy is a veteran, high school English teacher who freely speaks her mind. Although some may be taken aback by her blunt approach and initially find her intimidating, the students find her honest and predictable.

Noel. Noel is quiet and soft in her demeanor. Noel teaches Bible and reading for high school students. Although Noel does not consider herself an expert teacher, students and other teachers lean on her for support. Interestingly, her students reflect her passions.

Calvin. Calvin considers teaching science and athletics in high school as an avenue to pursue the areas that he is passionate about—sports and discipleship. A strong supporter and participant in summer camping ministries, Calvin has had many opportunities outside the classroom to share his faith.

Jotham. Jotham is a leader in his school. He teaches fine arts and Bible to high school students. He casts vision and inspires others to follow his example. Jotham looks for students with similar hobbies and interests and connects in areas that they are both passionate about.

Individual Interviews Student Portraits

The following narrative information will briefly explain the characteristics of each study participant from the individual student interviews, in order to provide a context for their answers.

These descriptions were generated based on responses in the online survey and interviews, as well as personal observation.

There were five students from ICS who participated in individual interviews. There were three students from NLCS who participated in individual interviews. Finally, there were four students from BFCS who participated in individual interviews, for a total of 12 students. Of the 12 students who participated in the individual interview, eight were female and four were male. Nine of the students identified themselves as extroverts, and three students identified themselves as introverts.

Julia. Julia was the youngest (7th grade) student participant in an individual interview. She has some understanding of religious beliefs, but does not seem to have a clear understanding of salvation. In discussing spiritual influence, she spoke about learning the Ten Commandments, including not lying or taking God's name in vain. She values the moral teaching she has received at her school.

Kate. Kate is athletic and described herself as a “crazy, random, and unique” eighth grader (student individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). She admires her parents and is grateful for their sacrifices. Kate comes from a family who claims Christianity, but they do not attend church. She has strong academic goals, but sees the importance of spiritual training. Kate values openness with teachers and respects teachers who push students to their limits. Her relationship development with teachers has been gradual, and she was unable to articulate specific challenges or strategies that teachers utilize to develop relationships. Kate greatly appreciates the Biblical worldview of her teachers.

Joshua. Joshua was the youngest member of his focus group as well as one of the youngest individuals (8th grade) to have an interview. Although he tried to assert his presence

with the older students, he often copied or repeated what the others had already said. He was eager to participate, however, and shared his opinion freely.

Cheney. Cheney, a 10th grader, who described herself as an extrovert, is serious about her religious beliefs. Although she had only been at the school for a short time, she was very positive and upbeat about her experience.

Jenna. For Jenna, a high school junior, academics is very important. She looks up to those who are successful in school and wants to go to a good college. She has gone to school in a Christian school, a Catholic school, and a traditional Chinese school. Her mom is a believer, but the reasons her parents chose this school were for academic and religious reasons. Jenna admires leaders who are like a father or mother. Teacher relationships are important for the moral teachings a teacher can provide. The teacher she mentioned, Cade, is someone who shares common interests and is willing to help. She could not think of any challenges in her teacher relationships. “Put away our thinking and take God’s thinking” and “take a teacher’s perspective” is some of the advice that Jenna offered about building relationships (student individual interview personal communication, December, 2015).

Ana. Ana is an upper classman, a junior, who takes her academics seriously. Her parents are both teachers and this gave her a unique perspective on the teacher-student relationship.

Sean. Sean, an 11th grader, was quiet, and his behavior affirmed his claim to be an introvert. His interview was brief, and he affirmed the importance of students showing respect to their teachers.

Esther. Esther is a senior who is very artistic and heavily involved in a variety of after school activities. She has been a student at the research location for her entire educational

experience, so she provided valuable information on the relational culture. Esther would ascribe to a personal relationship with Christ. Esther shared that her parents thought a “Christian environment would keep us away from becoming bad kids” (student individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Jess. Jess is a 12th grade student who is creative and views herself as strange. She was quiet and was somewhat intimidated by a one-on-one interview. She has attended different Christian schools and a military school. She values teachers who take time to talk to students outside of class and who are understanding. She identified a specific turning point, when a teacher took the time to talk with her when she was going through a rough time.

Kris. Kris was soft-spoken, but a self-assured senior. Academics are obviously important to him, but he works hard to maintain a balanced life. He described his goals as to, “not reject my social life because of my studies, not reject my studies for my social life either” (student individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). The key to a positive relationship with him was a teacher (Jotham) with similar interests, who shared his passion for drama.

Katrina. Katrina was very confident and well-spoken for a 12th grade student. She has been at the school for a long time and reflects the values of the institution. Interestingly, I heard many of the same ideals from Katrina that I heard from her teachers. She spoke with conviction about empathizing with teachers and working hard to glean the most from her education.

Jennifer. Jennifer has spent most of her educational career being homeschooled, so as a senior she soaks up the opportunity to be in the classroom. She is friendly and helpful, and works as a teacher’s aide.

Results

The results section categorizes the participants' responses and delineates how they intertwine with the research questions. Furthermore, the responses were sorted into themes and used to build a theoretical model on the process of building positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools. The following section will explain the theoretical model, cultivating reciprocal relationships, identify the major themes, and then explain how the theoretical model answers the research questions for this study.

Theoretical Model: Cultivating Reciprocal Relationships

According to Corbin and Strauss (2015), in developing a theoretical model, codes and themes are analyzed until a core category is identified. Throughout the data analysis process, there is the constant comparison of data as themes are linked and grouped for similarities. The following section will explain the theoretical model in narrative form, and Figure 1 (Graphic created by Kristen Carruthers) presents it in visual form.

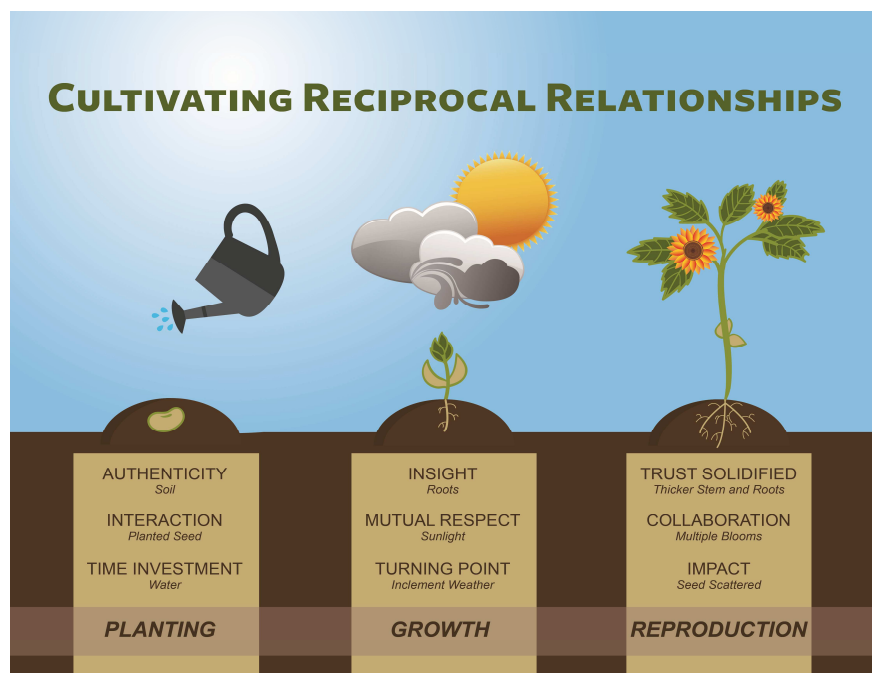


Figure 1. Theoretical Model: Cultivating Reciprocal Relationships

Core Category

As I analyzed the themes, I found that the core category was best described as reciprocal. The nature of this study was constructed to study the topic of positive teacher-student relationships by considering the perceptions and including the perspective of both teachers and students. In analyzing the responses of 38 participants, first I separated all of the teacher and student responses and analyzed what was important to teachers and students. This yielded excellent insight. My next step was to compare the data and look for ideas and themes that were important to both teachers and students. I discovered that fundamentally teachers and students are looking for respect, and affirmation that they matter. Keira simply said, “I know they are always wanting to have connections . . . they are always looking for acceptance, and affirmation that they are loved, and that the accepting of them shows them that you do love them” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). For most of this study, I was determined to find a path or formula to give to teachers, a proven method to build positive relationships. In answering the research questions, I discovered numerous attributes and actions that are necessary for cultivating positive teacher-student relationships. Through the honest dialogue of the participants, I also highlighted numerous attitudes and actions that damage rather than build relationships. I delved into beliefs, mission, and philosophy in seeking to understand what drives Christian educators who have positive teacher-student relationships, and what precipitated spiritual transformation in their students. In answering the research questions, I discovered that the heart of this topic was reciprocity. For a relationship to flourish, both teachers and students have to want it and have to make some level of commitment for it to succeed. If relationships were one-sided, then a fabulous educator could have dynamic relationships with every student, but that is simply not the case. Likewise, a student who did

everything right should be able to have positive, impactful relationships with every teacher, but this is also not occurring. In exploring the theme of reciprocity, certain sub categories were explored, which required the reciprocal action of both teachers and students. Meg described the two-way relationship this way, “So you offer opportunities to all, but you definitely invest in the ones who respond . . . making sure you make the best of your opportunities” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Themes

Within the core category of reciprocity, I identified nine themes. These themes were organized into three different phases to correlate with the phases of a plant’s life cycle. In examining a plant’s life cycle, a variety of factors are essential to the life of the plant. Some plants may barely survive, while others flourish due to various conditions. These factors are not necessarily introduced in sequential order, but there is a natural progression as a healthy plant grows and becomes firmly established. Using the plant analogy, the positive teacher-student relationship themes were grouped into three phases, or stages, of planting, growth, and reproduction.

Planting. At the beginning of a plant’s life cycle, certain conditions must be in place for the plant to develop. There must be soil, a seed, and water. Likewise, in building a positive teacher-student relationship, there must be authenticity, interaction, and time investment. Without these essential elements, the plant will wither and die and similarly, a relationship will be stunted.

Authenticity. One of the most frequently mentioned characteristics desired by both teachers and students is authenticity. In Figure 1, authenticity is depicted as the soil, because this category is fundamental for the positive relationship to flourish. Although professionalism and

distance may have been the norm in previous generations, this generation values those who are open, real, and relatable. In fact, both teachers and students are very willing to forgive the imperfections and flaws of the other. Hypocrisy, or pretending to be someone you never intend to be, however, is inexcusable.

Interaction. For a relationship to thrive, teachers and students must interact. In the theoretical model, interaction is shown as the seed, since this is initial phase of the relationship. Jenna described it this way, “Be able to interact with them, and like talk about like the school stuff. . . . like difficulties that you might have, and they will be able to help you or help you to solve, resolve it” (student focus group personal communication, December, 2015). This happens at the most basic level within the classroom. Communication occurs as students and teachers share their likes and interests, and engage in questions, in the giving and getting of advice and opinions. This interaction very naturally begins around the content area, but it must go beyond the academic realm for the relationship to truly thrive.

Time investment. Another frequently recurring theme was time outside of class. This time investment is depicted as water. Just as adequate water is essential to the growth of a plant, so time investment is crucial to a healthy, positive teacher-student relationship. In a society of virtual communication and relatively zero face to face connectivity, students crave teachers who are available. Typically, this reciprocal relationship occurs as students seek academic help, and then the conversation may branch out into their interests and hobbies. The process is facilitated if both teachers and students make the effort to discover common interests and are willing and available to pursue common experiences, such as sports, the arts, or even travel. One teacher participant in a focus group conversation explained that discovering common interests is “an effective relationship starter” (teacher focus group personal communication, November, 2015).

Students and teachers do not need to have the same interests, but they do need to be willing to pursue (either in conversation or activity) something the other party is passionate about, which may even be the teacher's content area. Such investment is a sacrifice, but as Joe put it "I will not regret continuing to invest in kids" (teacher focus group personal communication, November, 2015).

Growth. Once the initial phase of planting has occurred, a plant has the opportunity to develop. For healthy growth to occur, a plant needs to be able to sink its roots into fertile soil, which provides essential nutrients. Additionally, a plant requires sunlight, and the resilience to survive inclement weather. The three elements of insight, mutual respect, and a turning point are included in this growth stage because they are secondary to a beginning positive relationship. However, if teachers and students want to go deeper in their relationship, they must develop insight and mutual respect, and be able to navigate conflict, which can lead to a turning point.

Insight. Common experiences and time spent together lead to insight. Insight is visualized as roots being sunk into the soil. As students and teachers come to know and understand each other, insight develops, much as roots receive nutrients in order to facilitate the plant growth. In the classroom, with a game face on, a teacher or student may be entirely different than they are outside of class. Many students shared how they long for teachers to know who they really are, and to have a freedom to be themselves. Teachers have a reciprocal desire to be known, apart from their role as instructor or mere disciplinarian. Teachers and students must have some level of knowledge of the other individual for a relationship to blossom. There does not have to be sameness. Personalities can be, and often are, quite different, but both teachers and students want to be known, accepted, and loved unconditionally. This requires an

understanding or empathy from both sides. Without a willingness to take another's perspective, or walk a day in their shoes, teacher-student relationships will be stunted.

Mutual respect. As teachers and students really get to know each other, by spending time together and communicating, a “mutual respect” develops (student focus group participant personal communication, December, 2015). Just as sunlight illuminates and provides the catalyst for growth, so respect is essential for the further development of the relationship. This might be a respect for their abilities, their personality, or their character. As Ellie said, “I know her and I’ve never had reason to question her integrity” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015).

Turning point. As respect is reciprocated, most relationships enter a testing phase. Within the visual model, this is depicted as inclement weather. Although weather changes can be considered unfortunate, at times they are essential to the growth of the plant. Likewise, confrontation and crisis are often essential to facilitate the turning point in a teacher-student relationship. In the individual teacher and student interviews, I questioned the individuals about turning points in their relationships. For both teachers and students, many spoke of a conflict or confrontation. Sometimes one or both parties had to admit that they were wrong and ask forgiveness. Sometimes a teacher had to be willing to risk the relationship to point out in love an area that needed to change in the student's life. Sometimes a sudden turning point came when there was a crisis in either the teacher or the student's life, and the other party was there to support and encourage. Keira (teacher) recalled when she was there to encourage Jess (student) in a time of crisis. After that, “there was something deeper...she just needed a person there” (Keira, teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). For others, however, the turning point was not sudden. Some individuals could not point to a crisis moment,

but instead reflected on the gradual development of the relationship as consistency was shown by both parties over time. Noel spoke of an unplanned time when she took a student to Starbucks, “It had to be a God thing . . . that wasn’t planned, but that definitely took it to another level” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015).

Reproduction. A plant reaches maturity when it is able to reproduce and form new plants. This is a process that requires deeper roots, and blooms. Although the number of blossoms may vary, once a plant is able to reseed it has completed the plant life cycle. Likewise, in building positive relationships, after a turning point, trust must be solidified and then teachers and students can collaborate and experience lasting impact, where change occurs and hopefully, the student chooses to invest in others and have the same type of influence and investment.

Trust solidified. Whether sudden or gradual, with the turning point came trust. In the cycle of plant growth, a healthy plant will continue to develop, and this is evidenced by deeper roots, and a more sturdy foundation. Likewise, as trust solidifies in a relationship, the individuals are able to deepen their relationship and provide opportunity for collaboration. If trust was broken, particularly by dishonesty or arrogance, this was very difficult to regain. However, when trust was earned, valued, and reciprocated, the relationship deepened to a new level. At this level, teachers are able to “get to the heart” (teacher focus group participant personal communication, December, 2015), and students are willing to allow teachers to “help solidify my beliefs” (Katrina, student individual interview personal communication, December, 2015).

Collaboration. With respect and trust as cornerstones of the relationship, teachers and students were able to collaborate on something that they were both passionate about. Within the visual model, collaboration is depicted by multiple blooms, as the plant comes to fruition. Kris

spoke with fondness of a teacher who “always collaborates” (student individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). The teacher that he was referring to, Jotham, spoke of “accomplishing something good together” and being “in the journey with them” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). For some, this might be a play, a project, reading a novel, or coaching one another in a sport. For others, this collaboration occurred on the spiritual level, in a Bible study or a service opportunity.

Impact. Impact happens when both sides are mutually invested in the relationship. This final stage is pictured in the visual model as seed being scattered and reseeded. According to Calvin, spiritual impact “definitely goes both ways” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). There is a mutual trust and respect and a desire to be involved in something bigger than the relationship. Ultimately the student “takes on the same passion” (Jotham, teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). For the Christian educator, one of the most rewarding areas of impact is discipleship and mentoring. Joe described it this way, “Christianity is not a list of dos and don’ts, but it is a relationship that is, um, extremely rewarding . . . eternally. And there are a whole lot of blessings temporarily that go along with that” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015).

Research Question One

The first research question asked, “What teacher and student characteristics facilitate the development of positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools?” To answer this question, I compiled the results of the focus groups and individual interviews into key categories that describe teacher characteristics and student characteristics of individuals who report a positive teacher-student relationship.

Teacher attributes. The umbrella characteristic of teachers with positive teacher-student relationships is love. Rebecca described it this way, “That’s God’s love. It doesn’t come from me . . . It’s not natural . . . It must be showered on them just as He showered it on us” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Teachers and students described this attribute of love in various ways as caring, patient, empathetic, kind, nice, understanding, “merciful” (Julia, student individual interview personal communication, November, 2015), and compassionate. Kris stated that teachers should be “compassionate, but stern and a friend as much as an authority . . . always willing to help you” (student individual interview personal communication, December, 2015).

Helpfulness. Another characteristic highly valued by students is helpfulness. Students want to be able to ask questions and advice on academic and non-academic matters, and they highly value teachers who are available and open. Jack purposely includes students in this way, “When you let them into your lesson planning and kind of let them glimpse behind the curtain, I think that’s huge to a teenager, because often there’s this mysterious world of teens and mysterious world of adults and never the twain shall meet . . . if you can break that down, in very small ways, I think it just goes leaps and bounds towards building a positive relationship with them (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Available. In the same vein, both teachers and students spoke of having an “open-door policy” where students feel comfortable to come to the teacher outside of class time (Ruth, teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015; student focus group personal communication, December, 2015). In a separate interview, a student participant spoke of Ruth and other teachers as knowing “that the teacher will always be there for you, and the

door is always open” (student focus group personal communication, December, 2015). One teacher participant said, “Because they are more comfortable, they tend to talk to you about other things than academics or anything even related to you” (teacher focus group personal communication, November, 2015). This approachable demeanor seems to be an initial step in building positive relationships. Elise put it this way,

I think it’s someone [teacher] you can go to, no matter the problem . . . you can go to them for advice on anything . . . and they don’t scare you or intimidate . . . you’re comfortable around them, you like them, that has to be in place for a good relationship (student focus group personal communication, November, 2015).

Authentic. Furthermore, an open demeanor lends to another teacher characteristic highly valued by students, teachers who are transparent and authentic. Students and teachers used different phrases to describe this characteristic, such as real, open, relatable, transparent, authentic, and living the life. Jotham phrased it as letting kids “see your humanity” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Justin explained his desire for students to “see me as a real person, even though I’m a growing Christian and not perfect, realizing that the Christian life isn’t all flowers and sunshine and rainbows, that they would see our struggles, and that they would see Christ’s work in my life” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Ellie revealed that “as these kids get older they’re more wise in seeing how you live your life, not just what you say” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Ruth acknowledged that the essence of positive relationships lie in “Christianity that is practiced and not just spoken” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). One student participant stated,

It's really important for you to be real, on both sides. Because teachers can tell like when students are being fake, and like vice versa . . . it's important to be real because that establishes a trust relationship between the two of them, so that we know this is who we are (student focus group personal communication, December, 2015).

Students value teachers who are honest about their struggles and do not build a wall of separation between their professional and personal life. As Elise put it, "How are we supposed to like you if you won't even let us into your life?" (student individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). Elise described Jack as

Real . . . of course he keeps the boundary-what it's like to be a teacher, but . . . I don't fear him. I can go talk to him about anything and he talks to us about stuff and I like that. It isn't like this hierarchy or like I'm in charge and you're the student and you're under me (student focus group personal communication, November, 2015).

Joe called this characteristic a "marriage of the professional self and the personal self" (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). In speaking of the influence of transparent teachers on her life, Ruth stated, "Authentic Christianity has made a big impact" (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015).

Communication. Communication is another integral characteristic of teachers with positive teacher-student relationships. Students value honest communication that is consistent and understanding. Ruth stated that good communication originates from, "respect and love which comes from being a truth giver . . . being honest" (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). In a negative vein, students spoke frequently of negative communication patterns being a significant hindrance to positive teacher-student relationships. This will be addressed further in the results for research question three.

Personality. Some would suggest that personality is the key component of positive teacher-student relationships. Interestingly, though, both introverts and extroverts reported positive relationships, often-times with a teacher or student of a different personality. However, certain characteristics were valued by both introverts and extroverts. Students value teachers who are friendly and easy-going. They also value flexibility and humility. Students highly value knowing what to expect in the emotional responses of teachers. Many students spoke of being empathetic if teachers are having a bad day, but they appreciate if teachers are honest, and not generally characterized by moodiness. In contrast, one student participant was put off by a “stand-offish personality” from teachers (student focus group personal communication, December, 2015). This even-keeled demeanor described by students supports the claims of the importance of emotional intelligence, as delineated in the discussion about related literature.

Passionate. Both teachers and students spoke heavily of the importance of passion in a teacher. Esther and Katrina (students) both spoke of how much they value teachers who are passionate about what they are teaching. Joe, in speaking of his teacher, said he “profoundly influenced me by his holistic teaching, not purely academic. Um, his dynamic presentation, along with a life to back it up, and a passion that was appropriate, was very...influential” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). Joe went on to describe his passion for becoming more Christ-like and how that translates into “investing in them [students] so that they grow and so that they come to know God and have an accurate view of God . . . and a healthy walk with Him. That’s my first passion” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). Teachers should be “all-in”, positive, enthusiastic, and excited to share, and engaging and “relevant” (David, teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015) in their teaching.

Knowledgeable. Teachers should be knowledgeable about their subject matter and make it applicable for their students. Ellie described the importance of being knowledgeable in this way,

Three things that every teacher needs to be: you need to be knowledgeable, you need to have integrity, and you need to have compassion. Compassion is important to create those good relationships. If you don't have knowledge, then there's no respect. You have to have all three . . . Any of those three missing-you don't have the relationship that is necessary for the students to succeed academically and emotionally (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015).

Katrina described it as “bringing our studies to life” (student individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). This passion, coupled with being knowledgeable in one's field, translates into opportunities to influence students, not just academically, but also outside of class.

Common bond. As relationships form apart from class time, students and teachers gravitate towards other individuals with common experiences, such as travel, or common interests, such as sports or drama. One group of students described this as “We just kind of go well together” (student focus group personal communication, December, 2015). Jotham put it this way, “We have the same ideas-the same drive . . . you connect on the same level” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Keira described one teacher-student relationship, “I know our relationship was very easy to get off the ground because we saw right away we had similar interests” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). Calvin described that because of “certain life events that have happened in my life, I've been able to help him with, and in return he's gone through a similar thing . . . God

has used something in my life to impact his life as well” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015).

Role model. Even though common interests are a catalyst for building positive relationships, students are not just looking for a buddy, they want leadership and a “role model” that they can follow (David, teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Meg said “I try to show them through my life practicing what it means when someone has given her life to Christ in obedience” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). David said, “The students aren’t your friends; they’re your students” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Students tend to value “strictness . . . which comes with structure” and teachers who establish boundaries (Rebecca, teacher personal communication, December, 2015). Elise cautioned, “Don’t shut down the first day if they act all strict and stuff because they’re trying to set boundaries and they may end up to be really cool” (student focus group personal communication, November, 2015). Joe described a teacher from his youth, “I loved her . . . I would go back and visit her . . . so profoundly influenced my perspective, because it taught me the importance of adhering to rules and laying down the law clearly and observing it” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). Several students spoke of valuing teachers who are “like a second parent” or who collaborate with their parents (Joshua, Jenna, student focus group personal communication, December, 2015).

Family. Teachers likewise commented on the importance of developing family-like relationships and having the support of parents in building relationships with the students. Jenna put it this way, teachers “step up and take care of us and maybe be more like a father like or mother like” (student individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). Seth said

simply, “I see these kids, not as how I want them to be, but as, a, as a son, or as a daughter” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). One focus group participant discussed, in detail, a teacher who invited students and families into his home to “develop this family-type atmosphere” (teacher focus group personal communication, November, 2015).

Intentional. Teachers spoke frequently about the importance of being hard-working. Relationships take effort and require intentional, focused effort. Cade said, “Passivity never builds relationships. You have to be intentional” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). One teacher (Jack, teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015) described himself as driven, while others focused on being “dedicated to giving their best” (Charles, individual interview teacher personal communication, November, 2015).

Observant. Intentional focus allows teachers to be aware of students needs and observant about the opportunities to build relationships. Keira stated,

I’m constantly looking at their body language, reading them-Are they with me, are they not with me? Students, it’s all over their bodies when they are having a bad day and you may not be able to take your full hour of teaching to address it, but it could be as simple as going over in your lecture walking around your classroom as you’re talking and putting a hand on a shoulder. That’s how I found out about the girl’s grandfather. So just open your eyes (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Trustworthy. Spiritually, some students value teachers who are “hope givers” (Ruth, teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015), who are trustworthy,

and who inspire them to follow Jesus. If students trust a teacher, then they will seek that teacher to counsel and speak into their lives. Ruth described the process of building trust,

A lot of times they'll come in a few times and not say anything at all because they're just getting brave enough to say, Can I trust you? So they'll bring a friend, and the friend will unload and next time they'll do something else, and you just have to be willing to catch that (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015).

One teacher participant described this process as “respect from a distance, then trust . . . you have to be available. They have to feel safe. They have to trust you, respect you . . . they have to know that what they say is going to be heard” (teacher focus group personal communication, December, 2015).

Enjoys life. Another characteristic valued by teachers and students is humor. Students look to cultivate relationships with teachers who are “fun” and who seem to enjoy life and their teaching (Sean, Cheney, Jess, and Esther, student individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Students are not the only ones who value an individual who enjoys life. Amy described the ideal student as “kids who have a joy. They come in and they want to do what you're doing” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015).

Student attributes. In this section I describe student attributes that are necessary for a positive teacher-student relationship. A unique feature of this study is including both teacher and student participants that are describing the relationship that they have with each other. Throughout the interview process, I compared the responses of teachers and students, so I will discuss teacher and student responses simultaneously, and categorize them by common themes.

Teachable. Perhaps the most frequently cited common denominator in students with whom teachers have positive relationships was a teachable, or “coachable” spirit (Keira, teacher

individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). Many teachers confided that they are not looking for the best or the brightest students, but for students that are hard-working and willing to try. Jack stated,

Teachable is probably the first one that comes to mind, because half of, so much of what we do as educators, is pointless if a kid has no desire to change, no desire to learn, no desire to grow, and it just seems so fruitless, so I think teachable is the first, most desirable characteristic as a student (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Another repeated, related theme was that teachers value students who enjoy learning and who ask good questions.

Personality. Regarding personality, teachers and students spoke of the importance of students being outgoing, easy-going, and humble. Keira admitted that, “the outgoing students are the ones we easily connect with, the shier ones who don’t share, they are challenging” (teacher focus group personal communication, November, 2015). Joe, in describing the ideal student, said “humility and motivation . . . I think those two are some of the strongest because humility, they would be willing to listen, and they would be willing to try what you suggest. And then motivation-they actually do what you suggest” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). Students spoke of the value of open-mindedness and not being quick to cast judgment or shut down if expectations do not match reality. Other values that were mentioned were gracious, grateful, joyful, and helpful.

Family experiences. Interestingly, many of the students that were interviewed reported a strong family bond, with someone in their family being the one that they admired the most. Thirteen different participants listed their parents as the one that they admire most, or the ones

that inspired them to pursue their current vocation. Furthermore, 15 of the student and teacher participants with positive relationships have parents who were teachers. Obviously, one does not need to have a teacher for a parent to have a strong teacher-student relationship, but it is interesting that many of the participants expressed a strong family bond and a first-hand understanding of the teacher-student relational dynamic.

Common bond. As with teachers, students tend to gravitate towards teachers with common interests, so positive relationships require a willingness to share hobbies and passions. Many teachers and students spoke of a love of sports, reading, the arts, and travel. Regardless of the pursuit, the common denominator was pursuing a common interest outside of class time. Often teachers took the time to “find out who they are and what they are” (Seth, teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). This openness requires a degree of trust and comfort in order to reach the level of willingness to be vulnerable. Ruth described the process as “start off simply by talking about the mundane and they keep coming back until eventually they trust you, until they realize you’re a real person . . . and they unload” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). A student participant recommended “opening up more and not keeping all your problems to yourself, because when you let them in on it, they’ll try to come back and help you with stuff” (student focus group personal communication, December, 2015). Jotham described it as “being in the journey with them” and “accomplishing something good together” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Joe stated that the “self-disclosure is what helped to increase the relationship” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015).

Perception. Students spoke of the importance of being aware of teachers’ needs and understanding that “teachers are people too” (Esther, student focus group personal

communication, November, 2015). Fundamentally, students need to know that they are valued, and “know that they are loved” (Katrina, student focus group personal communication, November, 2015). As Jack put it “sometimes love listens; sometimes love corrects” (teacher personal communication, November, 2015).

Research Question Two

Research question two asked, “What specific strategies do teachers and students describe as helpful in building positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools?” Although there is a definite overlap between characteristics and strategies, this second question deals with specific teacher and student actions that help to build positive relationships.

Teacher actions. Communication, although framed by different terms, is the most frequently mentioned strategy for building positive teacher-student relationships. This starts in the simplest way, with greeting students by name (teacher focus group personal communication, November, 2015). Strong relationships require teachers who are willing to listen when needed, and communicate clearly at the appropriate time. David elaborated on this theme by stressing the importance of communicating why and not just what is required (teacher focus group personal communication, December, 2015). This “clear communication” is also essential with parents (Ellie, teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Positive teacher-student relationships often seem to hinge on positive parent relationships. Rebecca termed it the “power of the parent, the tri-fold relationship” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). One teacher participant noted that “good communicators who do have good relationships, they do probably also have good relationships at home” (teacher focus group personal communication, December, 2015).

Time. The second most frequently cited strategy is the willingness to spend time. Teachers with positive relationships are busy, but never too busy to invest in students. Joe described this as “investing in them so that they grow and so that they come to know God and have an accurate view of God” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). This requires eating lunch together (Julia, student individual interview personal communication, November, 2015), attending sports functions (Charles, teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015), and often setting aside grading and other necessary tasks to talk to students (Joe, teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). In describing one of his teachers, Jack said, “I always got the sense it was my life they were engaged in, not just my academics” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). While students do value the time that teachers put into preparing lessons and completing class related activities, they are most appreciative of time invested outside of class.

Relational shift. Time outside of class leads to a shift from a strictly teacher-student relationship, to more of a friendship, or as Charles stated, “It’s almost a friendship now” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). One student participant said, “You can see them as a friend, and they can see you as a friend and an example” (student focus group personal communication, November, 2015). Meg described it as “We could just talk as friends, and she didn’t have to always make sure um, that she kept her distance out of respect” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). For some, it does not stay there, but as one teacher focus group participant said, “It goes from being a friendship relationship to now a mentoring relationship” (teacher focus group personal communication, November, 2015). Several teachers cautioned against relationships that are too casual, but both

teachers and students spoke of a shift and a leveling that happens as teachers and students participate in common experiences and pursue common interests. Keira said of one student “I know our relationship was very easy to get off the ground because we saw right away we had similar interests” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). One student focus group participant said if “they’ve gone through the same experience . . . they’re not judgmental at all . . . they’re very understanding” (student focus group personal communication, December, 2015). Even if a teacher does not share the same interests as a student, they can work to know them, their passions and interests. Keira put it this way “find the one thing that lights up their face” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). Giving them space to self-disclose, and allowing time facilitates a shift from just a teacher to someone that students can trust. Keira went on to say,

Just showing interest in them, asking them those questions. Whether or not they reciprocate, or make it seem like that, because they’re not going to gush . . . The fact that they have said a full sentence, rather than 3 words to me, that’s a gush. Hold on to that. And at this point, that’s probably enough emotion in them that they’re drained, so step away and come back later, and if you come back later and you get another full sentence-excellent. Step away-let them recharge (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Recognize students’ strengths. Often getting to know students is a process, which is not necessarily easy. Joe shared his vision for

Helping students to see and get excited about what God has built them for. I LOVE that idea. So if I can uncover a writer, whether they knew it or not, I can uncover a . . . teacher in one of my students. Seeing the qualities and characteristics that they have and

letting them know. Shining a light on it for them, for them to see (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Ruth continued in the same vein,

Wanting students to see what they are capable of, because kids are way more capable than they think they are, and I want them to see that, that they are given strengths. Their strength may not be academic, but that's fine, just trying to help them see the truth, even about themselves, because society is constantly lying to them and their inner voice is constantly lying to them (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Confrontation. Both teachers and students spoke of the importance of having a relationship strong enough to endure correction and confrontation. Meg values “a student who is willing to make note of any comments or corrections I offer for personal improvement” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). Meg went on to talk of a particular confrontation with a student,

Through that we were able to talk on an honest level with a Biblical approach, and after that we can both bring up her failings, but there's no resentment. There's no bitterness. It was a stepping stone for her . . . it made us grow closer, and it helped us to be more honest about other things too (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

While it is dependent on the teacher to confront, there is a reciprocal element of a student being willing to receive correction. Jack mentioned that he was surprised to note that the students with whom he has the strongest relationships are the ones that he has shown tough love to (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). You have to have a

“comfort that is not so precarious that you can’t speak truth to each other . . . sometimes you have to be told the truth and that’s not always comfortable. You have to be loving enough to confront” (Jack, teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Rebecca also mentioned how much she enjoys the hard students, or “the ones you got to work with” and has learned the value of praying “for God to break hearts” and showing “relentless love” in “tough love sessions” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Katrina values her teacher that is “tough on me and blunt” (student individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Cade described one confrontation, “It was hard to say. Those are things he needed to hear, and he knew I loved him and he had to take it, but he matured from it” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). This type of love that endures the hard times was described by Rebecca

Relentless love that doesn’t give up, is not swayed by any kind of emotions and feeling, so that’s the one thing-love instead of responding in anger, and responding ungodly.

Which looking many times I didn’t think it was ungodly, because that’s what I knew.

But the Lord has changed that understanding of how to respond with students that I had the difficulty with now (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015).

As Rebecca articulated her understanding of “relentless love”, she described a teacher from her past that taught her the meaning of this kind of love (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). “This teacher, you know, she reined us in. In Hawaiian we have a term ‘Kaula waha, laina kaula waha’, which means reined in by love. It wasn’t by force . . . it was by love and we respected her” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015).

Recognize another's perspective. Confrontation, however, goes both ways. Teachers have to be willing to admit when they are wrong, and have an appropriate amount of self-disclosure when they are struggling. Elise spoke of her relationship with Jack (teacher) and how much she appreciated not having a hierarchy, but a relationship where she can also encourage him (student personal communication, November, 2015). Although teachers sometimes have to “be the hammer” (Ruth, teacher focus group personal communication, December, 2015), it is imperative that they also can “step into the other perspective” (Jenna, student focus group personal communication, December, 2015), observe responses, and know appropriate timing to deal with a situation.

Pursuit of excellence. Another important indicator in teacher actions is their teaching style. Both teachers and students value the individuals who pursue excellence and push themselves to be the best they can be. Jotham of “pushing them to reach their potential” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Cade spoke of his teacher who “exemplified what excellence means” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). If teachers do not enjoy their job and/or their subject, and maintain a high level of excellence, it is unlikely that students will push themselves past the lowest common denominator.

Awareness. Teachers must be aware and observant of body language, changes in attitude, and “utilize the little moments” to build relationships (teacher focus group participant personal communication, November, 2015). Keira put it this way, “I have to keep my eyes open” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Long-term mindset. Relationships take time and work. They are not built overnight. Teachers who are successful in building positive teacher-student relationships have a long-term

mindset that says I know you, I love you unconditionally, and I will pursue you. Charles spoke of “longevity in Christian education” or a commitment to be in a relationship for the long term (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Student actions. As with teacher strategies, students also place a premium on communication. Esther put it this way “being able to have good, like good communication with your teacher; it really opens up like a whole new door to understanding” (student individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). Jack said, “A face to face conversation, to this generation . . . it’s a precious commodity” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). Teachers highly value students who are able to listen and are willing to talk. Seth spoke of the students who are unwilling to communicate as one of the hardest barriers to positive relationships (teacher focus group personal communication, November, 2015). In contrast, students who are “transparent” and willing to self-disclose are able to forge positive relationships (David, Ruth, teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Joe confirmed that “self-disclosure is what helped to increase the relationship” (teacher individual personal communication, November, 2015).

Effort. Furthermore, teachers highly value students who show effort and get involved. David described this type of student as “hardworking, um, tenacious in what they do, um, seeking for the best in whatever they do. It might not be the best, but it needs to be their best” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Cade echoed this sentiment, “the best possible student is not necessarily the smartest student. It’s the student that wants to develop their own potential, their God-given potential to the best that they can be” (teacher personal communication, November, 2015). A student focus group participant described it as “We work hard in the class and we turn in our work on time . . . this person is

really trying and that can start a relationship . . . That builds the relationship” (student focus group personal communication, December, 2015). This also includes seeking help in academic areas, but also asking questions, advice, and opinions for non-academic areas, as well. One student participant said, “I feel like getting help from your teachers builds a lot of relationship” (student focus group personal communication, December, 2015). Another teacher participant explained the value of “being bold enough to stay after class and ask questions” (teacher focus group personal communication, November, 2015). Multiple teachers, including Cade, affirmed the value of students who were intrinsically motivated, both in their academics, and to a lesser extent, in building relationships (Cade, teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Two way relationship. Students must be willing to take the teacher’s perspective and empathize with their struggles. This reciprocal relationship was described as “walking a day in their shoes” or “both sides give; it’s equal” (student focus group participant personal communication, December, 2015). One student focus group participant put it this way, “I like that we can help the teacher, like teachers sometimes tell us their problems” (student focus group personal communication, November, 2015). Keira said it is “helpful because they sharpen you too without you knowing it” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). Furthermore, students must be willing to assume the best about others. “You have to be open minded and realize how hard this teacher is trying to get you to learn something and to help you succeed” (student focus group personal communication, December, 2015). Many students with positive relationships sense the love that teachers have for them, and are willing to respond in a respectful manner. In particular, students often cited the importance of showing respect as key for students who wish to build positive teacher-student relationships (student focus group

participant personal communication, December, 2015; Cheney, Kate, Sean, student focus group personal communication, December, 2015).

Courage. Likewise, students have to be willing to overcome fears and reach out to teachers. “Don’t be afraid” and “don’t be intimidated” were common themes with the students (student focus group participant personal communication, November, 2015; Ana, student individual interview personal communication, December, 2015).

Thinkers. Teachers value students who know how to think and who ask the right kind of questions. Keira values

A student who thinks, um, even if the question, they don’t know the answer, they’re willing to think through their experiences, the knowledge base that they already have and think through a possible answer, not one that is ridiculous, but one that is plausible, whether it’s right or wrong. You can at least take what the student is thinking and guide them to the right answer, the truth (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Responsibility. Responsibility is another key element of student actions that build positive teacher-student relationships. A student focus group participant gave the simple advice to “pay attention in their class, because if you show that you respect the subject that they’re teaching, then they’ll just naturally look at you differently than the other students” (student focus group personal communication, December, 2015).

Time outside class. As with teachers, the willingness to spend time outside class is a pivotal characteristic of students who are willing to take the next step in a positive teacher-student relationship. Elise described it like this,

Being there, not just for school. Because there are some teachers, who are like . . . this is a business, outside of school don't talk to me, don't try to write me or find me on social media . . . I don't want to talk to you outside of school, unless it's a school question and then you can e-mail me . . . I feel like if you shut yourself off from your students, then students will shut themselves off from you. Be open to them outside of school (student focus group personal communication, November, 2015).

The time spent outside of class leads to friendship, and in some cases discipleship as teachers and students pursue similar hobbies. Various teachers cited extra-curricular activities as opportunities to build relationships. One teacher focus group participant said, "One of the main reasons that I coach is to build relationships" (teacher focus group personal communication, November, 2015). A student focus group participant said, "I guess we connect like as we do things as partners and friends" (student focus group personal communication, December, 2015).

Research Question Three

Research question three asked, "What do teachers and students describe as hindrances to building positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools?" Both teachers and students were very willing to share both characteristics and actions that they considered hindrances to a positive teacher-student relationship.

Teacher hindrances. Since communication was highly valued as a positive characteristic, the lack of communication also came up as a hindrance. Teachers who are unwilling to talk and fail to confront students break down trust with their students. Jack described a fear of confronting in this way, "Teachers tend to find a lot of their identity in being able to impact their students' lives, and so a fear of losing the ability to impact their life, and so

is it worth confronting this thing?” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Lack of control. Furthermore, teachers who lack control in the classroom lose the respect of their students. One student focus group participant said, “When teachers don’t have good classroom control or they just let students walk over them, you lose respect for them. So then you really don’t care about the relationship with someone” (student focus group personal communication, December, 2015). Multiple students discussed the hurtfulness of teachers using sarcasm to maintain control in the classroom (student focus group personal communication, November, 2015). Students identified teachers who were “loud and intimidating” as hindrances to building relationships (Esther, student focus group personal communication, December, 2015). When students are embarrassed or made fun of for asking questions, they are unlikely to trust and open up to a teacher. One student focus group participant said, “Teachers, they can kind of make you feel stupid” (student focus group personal communication, December, 2015). Katrina explained simply that “when you’re learning you’re vulnerable” and teachers can easily crush that vulnerability by their words and actions (student individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Another student focus group participant commented, “Sometimes he [teacher] makes it clear you have a dumb question” (student focus group personal communication, November, 2015).

Emotional separation. Furthermore, teachers who maintain a stiff barrier between their personal and professional life come off to students as fake and unapproachable. Since students highly value authenticity and relatability, teachers who are unwilling to self-disclose provide no common ground for building a relationship. Another hindrance, which both students and teachers recognized, is being focused on the academic side, rather than the person. One teacher

focus group participant described this syndrome as “a tendency to see, instead of the relationship, the grade” or being overly harsh in discipline (teacher focus group personal communication, November, 2015). In contrast, relationships are strengthened when students are able to “sense the love behind the discipline” (Jack, teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Unwillingness to change. Another teacher hindrance is teachers that refuse to update or change, either the content of their teaching, or the way in which they relate to kids. Various teachers described this as “mundane, old, with rust in the gears” (Charles, individual interview teacher personal communication, November, 2015) and “stuck in a rut” (Kris, student individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). As teachers recognize the importance of holding students to a standard of excellence, they too must be learning and growing as educators.

Student hindrances. Similarly, a lack of communication from the student is a sizeable hindrance to positive teacher-student relationships. Perhaps one of the most frustrating characteristics from a teacher standpoint is a student who is unwilling to talk and communicate.

Personal choices. Likewise, students mentioned the crippling effect of students that just shut down, either out of fear, guilt, or sometimes just insecurity or awkwardness. One teacher mentioned that wrong choices can cloud perspective so that students think teachers “want less to do with them, and they’re wrong, but I think they distance themselves” (teacher focus group participant personal communication, December, 2015). One student also mentioned “trash-talking” teachers and insubordination in the classroom as barriers or hindrances to positive relationships (student focus group participant personal communication, November, 2015). Students also suggested assuming the worst and condemning teachers as barriers to relationship.

Academic struggles. Sometimes students struggle in class and become depressed or are too proud to approach the teacher and ask for help. If students are overwhelmed by the amount of work or the difficulty of assignments, this can also be a hindrance to positive teacher-student relationships. On the flip side, it is important for teachers to be “knowledgeable in their field” and able to clearly and articulately communicate information in a way that students can understand (Ana, student individual interview personal communication, December, 2015).

Attitudes. Student attitudes can be a significant barrier to positive relationships. Both teachers and students mentioned laziness as a hindrance to relationships. Although this parallels lack of communication, teachers also cited lack of participation in class as a hindrance. Although many factors contribute to the hindrances mentioned, teachers attributed these hindrances to negative peer pressure and other distractions. Keira lamented, “I can see sometimes when she interacts with her friends and those good things come out, and she makes a difference for the good in that situation, but I also see her cave to peer pressure” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). Jack spent a considerable amount of time discussing the generation gap and a sense of entitlement, which often interferes with relationships (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). Preconceived notions of both the teacher and the student can also negatively impact relationships. A student focus group participant discussed this, “They see how you interact with your friends, before you even get a chance to meet them, they’ll already have thoughts in their mind formed about you, so that could affect the way like your future relationship turns out” (student focus group personal communication, December, 2015).

Family background. Family background was also mentioned several times as an important factor in the development of positive teacher-student relationships. Positive family

dynamics have amazing potential for good. Joe stated that his father, “really shaped who I wanted to be. I wanted to communicate effectively like my father” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). However, family dynamics can also “really disrupt the educational process” (teacher focus group participant personal communication, December, 2015). Furthermore, parents’ educational experiences can cloud their perceptions and the attitudes they convey to their students. Interestingly, teachers also mentioned different belief systems and values as being hindrances to positive teacher-student relationships. One teacher focus group participant stated,

The hindrance often for me is their value set. Which is, you know, honesty; it’s integrity. It’s a value of communication, but even just more than that. If I have a student who doesn’t value education, but who values pleasure, I often find frustration as we try to communicate. Because even if we are not talking about school, um, we often find ourselves on opposite ends of how we view a situation or what value we give to something. Um, those kinds of students, I’ve noticed, are often uncomfortable. Um, whereas, when I approach students who have, you know, they’re not believers, but they have some great values instilled in them by their family. There is such an open door to communicate. There is a joy in being around them, and I can see it’s reciprocated (teacher focus group personal communication, November, 2015).

Jack also stated,

Many teenagers, in my context where I work particularly . . . a lot of unsaved families . . . it’s a vortex, it’s a swirling kind of fluidity to everything and relationships are changing every day and you never know where you stand, and some of them don’t know where they stand with their families, and so to be somebody that’s willing to say, this is who I

am and we find our identity in Christ, this gives me stability to who I am (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Culture. Perhaps coupled with the idea of family background, teachers also discussed the hindrance of cultural differences. One teacher discussed “warm-culture versus cold-culture” as one way to define different types of cultures (Joe, individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). In brief, warm-climate cultures tend to be more relational, and activities tend to be group oriented, versus colder climates where individualism tends to be prioritized. As an example, several teachers discussed the dynamic of Asian culture, which tends to prioritize grades and results more than the teacher-student relationship. Meg said “Asian students are not used to professors being approachable”, and so the research location is a “collision of cultures” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). Another teacher, Cade, said, “Just because I am a teacher, I automatically have the respect of a student because of their background [cultural]” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). Although some teachers spoke of navigating the culture, Jack discussed establishing “my culture as a Christian . . . since culture is the way I view things, what drives me, my defining who I am as a new creature” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). Cade stated that he is trying to develop “a culture that the younger students look at and want to be a part of” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Lack of boundaries. A final hindrance mentioned by both teachers and students is students that are too familiar with teachers and lack appropriate boundaries. Both Ana (student) and Amy (teacher) described the effect of “no boundaries” (student and teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Cade stated, “I think a positive

relationship would be . . . I don't have to be their peer . . . I need to be their mentor" (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). Charles elaborated on this topic,

You can have a relationship with any kid, you just have to talk about what they talk about. But if you want a lasting, respected, loving, mentoring relationship, it takes a long time and it won't happen overnight, because you have to keep the authority . . . so they know you're not their brother, you're not their sister; you're a loving authority who also happens to want to build a relationship with them (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Jack also said, "What can easily happen is the need for approval, the fear of man, can apply even with relationships with teenagers" (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Research Question Four

Research question four addressed the spiritual aspect of positive relationships. "How do positive teacher-student relationships influence the spiritual development of students in Christian schools?" Answering this question must be built on the results from the previous three research questions to properly understand the factors in play in building a positive teacher-student relationship. Once those steps and characteristics are defined, one can examine the influence of the spiritual development on both teachers and students. As Jack put it,

There has to be a relationship, because it's through those relationships you speak truth and that's how the gospel spreads. God uses people as His mouthpiece. Everything I'm doing is trying to point them to Christ, whether that's Christian students that just need to keep their eyes on Jesus, or whether it's unsaved students who need to meet Jesus in a

personal relationship (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

An important factor in understanding the influence of relationships on spiritual development is understanding students' and teachers' religious backgrounds, the teachers' mission, and how a two-way relationship affects both teachers and students.

Students' religious beliefs. Although teachers and students were selected based on their own self-reported positive relationships, there was no spiritual belief criteria for those who were selected for the focus group or individual interview. At ICS, the research location where I work, I was able to select students and attempt to have a diversity as far as beliefs and values. At NLCS and BFCs, I was much more limited in my pool of participants, and the selection was largely based on administrator suggestion and participant availability. With that being said, there was a wide diversity of spiritual values in the online survey participants, but more of a homogenous population in the focus groups and individual interviews. In the student focus groups and individual interviews, every student except one indicated that they were somewhat serious or serious about their religious beliefs, and all but one student indicated that their religious beliefs affect at least some area of their lives. Four students indicated that religious beliefs influence some area of their lives, eight indicated that religious beliefs influence most areas of their lives, and eight indicated that religious beliefs influence every area of their lives. Although religious beliefs were not specifically delineated, this allowed me to ascertain some measure of the acceptance of religious influence. Although many indicated the influence of religious beliefs, this did not necessarily translate into regular church attendance. Furthermore, although some students indicated the role of religious beliefs in their decisions, many did not indicate religious values as the reason for choosing a Christian school.

Influence of teachers' religious beliefs. In regards to the degree of influence of religious beliefs in the teacher population, some teachers were very natural in their discussion of discipleship and spiritual influence while others jokingly said, "I guess I should talk about Jesus" (Amy, teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Another focus group participant stated sincerely, "being Christian really makes a difference. Because we pray with our students. I mean that's probably the biggest, most obvious difference. Jesus makes a difference, and we're free" (teacher focus group personal communication, December, 2015). Kris said of his teacher, "Every day he'll bring the lecture back towards Christian values" (student individual interview personal communication, December, 2015).

Mission. Although the teachers interviewed would ascribe to a common belief system, and the three research locations have a similar goal of evangelism and discipleship, some teachers were obviously much more adept and intentional about a mission of discipleship. For some Christian teachers, their goals were academic "equipping them to be learners" or more generic to "make a difference" (teacher focus group personal communication, November, 2015). For others their "top goal was to show Christ," "teach and share the gospel" (David, teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015), "make sure that every student, before graduating, has had the gospel clearly explained to him in class" (Meg, teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015), cultivate a "Biblical worldview" or to "see kids go to a Christian college" (Charles, teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). For Jack, his goals are both academic and spiritual, to

equip them to be learners, but I try to excite them about learning . . . For my Christian students, that rolls over into both professions, and their careers in college, but also spiritually that desire to learn and grow, is, that's a God given desire, but just an interest

in learning carries over into the realm of spiritual, say that there's a hope that they leave here, if they have a desire to keep asking questions, to keep seeking, well God's seeking them and if they're continuing to ask questions, if I have been able in some small part stir up their curiosity, knowing that God is pursuing them, my hope is that will come to fruition. And that they'll come to know the Lord. Not that that love of learning results in Christianity necessarily, but I hope, I think it's better than sending them out close minded (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

For Ruth and David, their passion is that students “know the truth . . . how to discern truth . . . and figure out what is the right thing” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Some motivations that were given were somewhat nebulous, to “shape kids” (Seth, teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015) or “change a life” (teacher focus group participant personal communication, November, 2015) while others viewed teaching as “always about God's will” (Cade, teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015) and that “Jesus was the difference” (teacher focus group participant personal communication, November, 2015) in their ability to form positive relationships.

The students also varied significantly in their goals. Esther said, “Some of my goals, um, to do my best in school. I think the main one though is like to do my best not so that way I can bring glory to myself but to God specifically” (student individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). However, for many of the students, their goals were to get good grades and get into a good college. The focus of this section will be on the ways that teachers intentionally influence spiritual development, as well as insight from teachers regarding

the spiritual impact caused by students and insight from students on ways that teachers initiated spiritual influence.

Impact of students on teachers. Although the research question specifically addresses the spiritual development of students, many teachers spoke of the lasting impact of students on their own spiritual development. David stated, students “help me to realize my flaws” and spoke of his desire “that they would see our struggles, and that they would see Christ’s work through my life” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Cade put it like this, “In becoming a better teacher, you are actually learning more and more about your own selfishness, as every day you have to go in there and have to serve students who cannot serve you back” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). These teachers recognize that spiritual development is a two way process, impacting both teachers and students.

Teachers’ intentional actions. In addressing spiritual influence and development, however, most of the results hinge on the intentional interaction initiated by teachers. One teacher participant said “I’ve tried to get a little more targeted as to my pursuing specific students” (teacher focus group personal communication, November, 2015). Calvin said,

I also have a responsibility to portray Christ to them and that entails first of all discipleship . . . we can connect outside of school, and I try to make it pretty clear to them at the beginning that we do want to study God’s Word and we want to talk about difficult issues . . . to be really beneficial because it has sort of more of the discipleship and mentoring idea, and I have found that it created a bond that I was not able to cultivate in the classroom (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Discipleship focus. Repeatedly, teachers spoke of building rapport for the purpose of gospel focused discipleship. Ruth admitted that she went into teaching, “just because I want to preach” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). As teachers spoke of their goals and motivations, for many it was to lead people to God and inspire their walk with God. Teachers desire to “get to the heart” (teacher focus group participant personal communication, December, 2015), train students for ministry (Charles, teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015), and “make God’s name famous” (Jack, teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015) by how they interact with students.

“Eternity in mind”. Perhaps an overarching theme was to teach with “eternity in mind” (Jotham, teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015), focusing on the eternal and not the temporary problems, to “impact a life in some way for eternity” (Cade, teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). Cade went on to say that “Eternal success is knowing and doing God’s will . . . the temporal is just training them for jobs, helping them to be successful in their workplace” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). Several teachers, and in particular Ruth spoke of “authentic Christianity” as the catalyst for making an eternal difference (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). In various ways, this lifestyle Christianity was promoted by Charles that it’s your walk, not your talk (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). In light of eternity, teachers viewed failures and challenges as opportunities to influence students for the kingdom of God. Often the challenges are what drove teachers to “pray for specific kids” (Rebecca, teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Furthermore, sharing common interests, whether inside or

outside the classroom, was foundational for eternal impact. While some teachers merely enjoy the positive relationships with students, many teachers view hobbies and time together outside of class as avenues for discipleship. One teacher participant explained, “it’s not just getting this done . . . creating this product. That relationship you build there, it does last for eternity, and it is far more rewarding than having this high average for this test or assessment” (teacher focus group personal communication, November, 2015).

Mentoring. Indeed, a key theme that emerged was that the influenced (often the teacher) in turn established a mentoring relationship with a student and became the influencer. Multiple teachers shared about influential teachers who invested time in them and inspired them to develop mentoring relationships with their own students. Cade described his student as “like my apprentice” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). The passion to “know truth” instilled by her teachers fueled the attempt to “develop a culture” based on Biblical values and discipleship (Ruth, teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Teachers readily acknowledged that this was not a solo effort, but “it takes a village-or a Body” (Noel and Jotham, teacher focus group personal communication, December, 2015).

Collaborative, greenhouse environment. Creating this atmosphere of collaboration is essential. Noel described it as “being in a garden where good things are happening. You know, all the plants, it seems are bearing fruit. It’s kind of catchy-a healthy environment” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Calvin explained it this way, “It’s a set environment; it’s a greenhouse” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Ruth also described an ideal atmosphere as “a greenhouse environment” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). This

type of environment is not established overnight. It takes time to develop and requires individuals who value longevity in relationship. Charles spoke of his relationship with a student as “after he graduates, it’s a help and an encouragement, and an accountability when he goes to college” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Summary

In order for positive teacher-student relationships to develop, there are attributes, attitudes, and actions of both teachers and students, which facilitate a greenhouse environment where positive relationships can flourish. Likewise, there are a variety of hindrances on the part of both teachers and students which negatively impact, or stunt the growth of healthy relationships. Spiritual development is not automatic, but the result of intentional, sacrificial discipleship.

Educators, in general, choose education because of a desire to influence the next generation. For some, this desire is for academic influence, so that students are prepared for the next grade level, for college, and for life. The participants in this study spoke of their desire for students to “love the subject” (Charles, teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015), become critical thinkers, and be successful in life. For others educators, they may desire to influence students’ character to develop outstanding citizens and businessmen. For the Christian educator, however, the fundamental goal is eternal impact. Of first importance is that students know and understand the gospel of Jesus Christ. Knowledge alone, though, is inadequate. If the claims of the gospel and subsequent discipleship are true, then the impact goes far beyond intellectual assent. The process of eternal impact transcends the challenges inherent to teaching “fallen, dirty, rotten sinners” (Ruth, teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Although such a view may seem pessimistic initially,

educators who focus on the hope of the gospel and the hope of influencing students for eternity are able to be transformed by a “relentless love” which originates from God (Rebecca, teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). In addition, for the participants, the rewards of spiritual transformation far outweigh the sacrifices. As Joe stated, “Discipleship is the most rewarding thing about teaching” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Although personal attributes and teaching styles may vary, there are central themes which occur and must be present in the process of building positive teacher-student relationships. First, there must be a transparency, or authenticity, where students and teachers reveal who they really are. As this process of getting to know each other occurs, both teachers and students will test the relationship to see if the other individual has the characteristics that they value, and ultimately the character that they can trust. In this phase of initial interaction, students and teachers hone their communication skills and may experience conflict if different values or belief systems clash. If students and teachers invest time and energy in the relationship, they often develop insight into the other individual, knowing their strengths and weaknesses and valuing that individual for who he/she really is. This knowledge and understanding leads to a mutual respect, built on a baseline of trust. As trust and respect grow, teachers and students typically spend more time together outside of class. This might be pursuing similar interests, or just engaging in conversation. Some relationships will linger at this level, as students enjoy mutual interests and each other’s company. For others, though, there will be a shift or turning point. Some relationships experience conflict or crisis. Others just test the relationship by seeking consistency over time. If a turning point occurs, there is an accompanying transformation. No longer is this strictly a teacher-student relationship. For some, the relational dynamic will

become like a family, with the teacher functioning as a parent figure, or older sibling. For others, the relationship will become more like a friendship, with mutual accountability and common interests. A third possible dynamic is that of discipleship or mentoring. Again, these relational dynamics can overlap, but typically participants described their deep relationships in one of these three ways. Likewise, the same relationship may go through stages and be characterized by different relational dynamics in different seasons. One teacher participant spoke of a relationship going from “being a friendship, to now a mentoring relationship” (teacher focus group personal communication, November, 2015). Ultimately, though, the discipleship or mentoring relationship does not appear to develop haphazardly, or accidentally. Some students and teachers enjoy each other’s company and seem to have developed a friendship with little to no effort, but the mentoring mindset is always precipitated by intentional effort, usually on the part of the teacher. What, then, is the catalyst for teachers to pursue eternal impact? For many, it appears to be rooted in their personal belief system regarding their purpose or calling. At some point, God did a transformative work in their lives, and typically used a parent, sibling, or teacher to disciple them. This desire to mentor seems to be rooted in a desire to give back and invest in the same way someone invested in them. How then do teachers who have a desire for eternal impact begin the process of developing positive teacher-student relationships? First of all, be transparent and real in their struggles and joys. Teachers must be approachable and invite students to “follow me as I follow Christ” (I Corinthians 11:1, KJV). This requires an examination of personal attributes and attitudes that can be developed that are conducive to building positive relationships. Likewise, areas that negatively impact relationships need to be rooted out. I Corinthians 10:23 puts it this way, “Everything is permissible, but not all things are

helpful [or beneficial] (Holy Bible, NIV). Therefore, love for the other individual determines the actions and attitudes of the initiator.

From analyzing the data related to each research question, I identified a core category, reciprocity. As teachers and students navigate the normal phases of the relationship, they must recognize the “two way nature” of the relationship and be willing to communicate and confront, when necessary (Elise, student focus group personal communication, November, 2015). For impact to occur, it requires an investment of time. Not all teachers and students will have the same kind of relationship. As Ruth stated, “I will not relate to every kind of personality” (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). As mentioned by Wasukundi (2012), Biblical mentoring occurred with a few. Teachers recognize that time is limited and they must invest in those who are willing to reciprocate. It is difficult to have a discipleship relationship unless there is common ground and a common value system. Teachers that are willing to invest the time necessary to cultivate positive teacher-student relationships have the opportunity to reap the harvest of souls impacted for eternity.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

Having examined and analyzed the results from the three data sources of online surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews, this chapter summarizes the findings, and discusses the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications. Running parallel to the discussion of this study's findings is the need to delineate the limitations that hedge the parameters of this study. I also discuss recommendations for further study related to the topic of building positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools. In conclusion, I reiterate the basic findings of this study and the resulting theoretical model, which was developed as a result of my research.

Summary of Findings

Research question one asked, "What teacher and student characteristics facilitate the development of positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools?" Based on the answers provided by teacher and student participants, certain attributes, such as love, helpfulness, availability, authenticity, good communication, emotional intelligence (personality), being passionate, being a role model, treating others like family, being observant, trustworthy, and enjoying life were all attributes of teachers who have positive teacher-student relationships. Student attributes included being teachable, being outgoing, being motivated and putting forth effort, having family-like relationships, and having a common bond with teachers.

Research question two asked, "What specific strategies do teachers and students describe as helpful in building positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools?" Specific strategies that teachers utilized included using names, listening, investing time, recognizing students' strengths, treating students like family or friends, being willing to confront, recognizing another's perspective, pursuing excellence, being aware of needs, and having a long-term

mindset. Student actions included listening, being willing to talk, showing effort, allowing a two way relationship, exhibiting courage, thinking and asking questions, showing responsibility, and spending time with teachers outside of class.

Research question three asked, “What do teachers and students describe as hindrances to building positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools?” Teacher and student participants described various hindrances to positive teacher-student relationships. Hindrances included a lack of communication, a lack of classroom control, emotional separation or distance, and being unwilling to change. Student hindrances included poor personal choices, academic struggles, wrong attitudes, family background, cultural differences, and a lack of boundaries.

Research question four asked, “How do positive teacher-student relationships influence the spiritual development of students in Christian schools?” Teacher and students relayed how their positive relationship has influenced them spiritually. A relationship must be in place for spiritual influence to occur. Therefore, the elements in the theoretical model of authenticity, interaction, time investment, insight, mutual respect, turning point, trust solidified, and collaboration were essential for impact and spiritual development to occur in the students’ lives. From a teacher standpoint, it requires a clear discipleship mission and intentional, consistent action that keeps “eternity in mind” (Jotham, teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). From a student standpoint, there must be a baseline of trust, and a willingness to reciprocate and deepen the relationship. The conclusions from this grounded theory research study were rooted in a constructivist theoretical framework delineated in the next section.

Discussion

The following section integrates the results of this study with the theoretical framework of constructivism. The research results are also supported by the assertions of developmental theorists and other related research on the topic of the teacher-student relationship. The research related to Christian education and discipleship is also re-examined as it relates to the results of the research questions in this study.

Integration of Results with the Theoretical Framework

Constructivist theorists. The theoretical framework of this grounded theory study is based in the constructivism of Vygotsky, Bandura, and Bruner. Since constructivism rests on the reality established by the individual's perception, the following section will briefly link the findings that confirm the propositions of the constructivist and developmental theorists within the context of the established theoretical framework delineated in chapter two.

Vygotsky. Vygotsky (1980) centered his theories on the perception of the individual. Likewise, the results from this study confirm that there needs to be a reciprocal nature to the relationship, where both parties recognize the influence of their attitudes and actions on the perception, and the willingness for the other individual to continue in the relationship. Elise elaborated on this idea, explaining the nature of the “two way relationship” and how that impacts the development of a positive relationship (student focus group personal communication, November, 2015). Likewise, students and teachers both discussed the role of inner dialogue. Students recognized that they must assume the best and not cave in to fear or doubt. Ana encouraged students “Don’t be scared” but to operate based on reality and truth (student individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). Similarly, teachers recognized the importance of students developing a stable identity, based on truth and who they are in

Christ. In this same vein, teachers spoke of helping students to combat the misinformation and insecurity regularly planted by fellow students, parents, and society. Furthermore, the cultural differences mentioned by teachers aligned with the role of cultural and environmental factors established by Vygotsky. Vygotsky delineated the importance of structured environments conducive to learning; similarly, teacher and student participants affirmed the importance of structure, classroom control, and boundaries. Vygotsky (1980) highlighted the importance of modeling and creating stability within the classroom. This theme was prevalent as teachers and students affirmed their desire for a role model. Finally, Vygotsky (1986) discussed the idea of stability, crisis, and transformation. The results from this study align with this idea that relationships pass through stages and require a turning point for transformation to occur.

Bandura. Perhaps the most notable and seamless integration of Bandura's (1993) philosophy with this study is the idea that relationships must be in place for interaction to be effective. Both teachers and students shared that if teachers are perceived as fake or not interested in relationship, then students will tune them out. Furthermore, multiple teachers discussed the importance of motivating students by affirming their strengths and communicating, an if-you-could-see-what I-can-see-mindset, you would believe in yourself. Both Joe and Jack shared the importance of believing in students and helping them to recognize and develop their God-given potential (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). In particular, students affirmed the role of self-efficacy as they shared about teachers who believed in them, and helped them to achieve their goals. This self-efficacy is based on the idea that the individual controls factors that assist or hinder the relationship, and this was confirmed by the results of this study.

Bruner. Bruner (1997) also emphasized the importance of cultural and environmental factors, building on previous learning, and recognizing similarities and differences. The participants in this study commented frequently on the importance of finding “common ground” and building on previous common experiences to build the relationship (Keira, teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015; student focus group participant personal communication, November, 2015). Furthermore, Gehlbach, Brinkworth, and Harris (2012) also reiterated the importance of common ground in the teacher-student relationship. Bruner (1997) recommended structuring learning interactions in such a way as to meet the individual needs of students. In the same way, both teachers and students recognized the importance of knowing and understanding the needs of the other party, so as to deepen the relationship.

Developmental Theorists. The developmental theorists, including Piaget, Erikson, and Fowler recognized that individuals pass through stages in childhood and adolescence that may include physical, emotional, and spiritual growth. The process nature of relationships was confirmed by Kate when she explained the gradual development of her relationship with a teacher (student individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Piaget. Piaget and Inhelder (1969) developed their theory on the basic premise that individuals progress through discernible stages. Although the elements of my theoretical model on cultivating reciprocal relationships are not always sequential, there seems to be discernible stages in the teacher-student relationship. For example, although teachers and students may begin with casual interaction and activities, the investment of time led to mutual respect and the cultivating of a deeper level of relationship. Furthermore, as teachers discussed the greenhouse metaphor, it aligned with Piaget and Inhelder’s theory that environment greatly influences development. Piaget and Inhelder believed that conditions must be conducive to achieving and

mastering physical skills at each stage. Likewise, Noel explained that conditions like love and interaction provide an environment that encourages positive teacher-student relationships (teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015).

Erikson. Erikson (1993) highlighted the need for belonging and security. Both teachers and students affirmed their desire to be loved and respected by the other individual. Katrina stated the priceless value of “knowing we are loved by our teacher” (student individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). This baseline of trust and affirmation is necessary for individuals to progress in their relationship. If that trust is destroyed, development is stunted. Likewise, the themes that were identified in this research study show that initial stages of relationship need to be in place before spiritual influence occurs. The level of relationship seems to influence interactions, and just as in physical and moral development, many factors simultaneously impact the ability to build and sustain positive teacher-student relationships.

Fowler. Fowler’s (1981) stages of spiritual development correlate with the research results in showing that relationships also progress from very one-sided to one of mutual respect and accountability. Just as a child is very needy and unable to handle much at an early age, so relationships change over time as crisis, confrontation, and transformation happens. Jack and Elise both discussed the transformation that occurred in their relationship from just teacher student to more of a “two way relationship” (teacher and student individual interview personal communication, November, 2015).

Integration of Results with the Related Literature

Characteristics of Relationships. This study identified a number of teacher and student attributes and actions that facilitate the process of building positive teacher-student relationships. These attributes are supported by previous research. The core category of reciprocity was first

developed by Covey (2008) as he discussed reciprocal trust as the basis for business relationships. Furthermore, Newberry (2010) delineated that relationships go through different phases. The results from this study confirm the dimensions of relationship and that teachers and students cycle between stages. Furthermore, in analyzing both teacher and student responses, this study confirms that perceptions greatly impact the development of a relationship (Maulana et al., 2012). Newberry zeroed in on the importance of consistency and trust, and Gehlbach, Brinkworth, and Harris (2012) discussed the value of taking another's perspective and perceiving similarities. Another theme identified in this study was the importance of parental communication, which was also highlighted by O'Connor (2010). Bernard, King, Murnan, Nabors, and Vidourek (2011) supported being consistent in discipline, utilizing humor, and being a positive role model. Another area that researchers pointed out was the importance of good classroom management and keeping boundaries (Fumoto, 2011; Munoz et al., 2013). Other similarities within the related research include teachers valuing students who seek help (Kavenagh et al., 2012), the importance of frequent interaction (Richardson & Radloff, 2014) and the need for establishing a positive emotional climate (Dewaele, 2011). Participants in this study (Jotham and Noel, teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015) acknowledged the role of cultural factors as mentioned by Baja (2009) and the role a small environment can play in building relationships, and discussed by Van Maele and Houtte (2010).

Although teacher and student participants did not use the terminology, the theme of emotional intelligence was present in the data results. Curci, Lanciano, and Soleti (2014) identified the importance of perceiving, understanding, and managing emotions. Similarly, students discussed the value of teachers who were aware, consistent, and not moody. Also, Gliebe (2012) emphasized that emotional intelligence can improve. This sentiment was echoed

by teachers as they explained ways that they have grown in their love for students and their ability to perceive their needs.

The Difference of Christian Education in Building Positive Teacher-Student

Relationships. The fourth research question examined the influence of the positive teacher-student relationship on spiritual development. This section briefly reviews some of the related literature regarding Christian education that supports the conclusions regarding research question four. Bramer (2010) acknowledged that transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit, and Pazmino (2010) asserted that it takes deliberate effort to apply the truth of Scripture. Thiessen (2013) also recognized that positive relationships are a wide open avenue for evangelism. Sherr, Huff, and Curran (2007) maintained that students will not even consider an educator's worldview without a positive relationship in place. This research undergirds the participants' conclusions regarding the intentional effort that it takes to build relationships, yet simultaneously the necessary dependence on the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, teacher participants shared the sentiment that students will not listen to the message without an authentic Christian life to back up the words. In the same vein, Beagles (2012) stated that the life must match the message. Colomy and Granfield (2010) highlighted the impact of caring, which was repeated over and over from the student participants. Regarding mentoring, Moore (2014) spoke of discipleship happening out of the overflow of a personal relationship with Christ. This dovetails with the comments of Joe and Jack (teachers) and others as they explained the priority of pursuing their own relationship with Christ, in order to impact others (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). The intentional focus and efforts of educators in Christian schools are instrumental in the spiritual development that is described in the theoretical model, Cultivating Reciprocal Relationships (Figure 1).

Implications

Administrators

This study has practical significance for administrators. Understanding that specific teacher attributes and actions can either build relationships or negatively hinder relationships is critical as administrators make hiring decisions. This knowledge is also useful as administrators evaluate current staff and pinpoint areas that need improvement. Understanding that many of the teacher factors are not unchangeable, but rather choices and characteristics that can be taught, is a game changer. If teachers do not have high emotional intelligence, they can learn ways to improve their emotional intelligence. Administrators can easily implement emotional intelligence training through staff book studies and training that introduces, models, and supports the implementation of emotional intelligence activities in the classroom. In so many areas, whether communication, or investment of time, teachers can change their ways of interacting with students, and realize different results. Furthermore, understanding that positive relationships are possible for all teachers should influence administrators to make it a priority, through professional development, peer to peer coaching, and mentoring to match teachers who are proficient at building positive teacher-relationships with those who are not, in order to train and develop teachers from where they are to where they can be. Also, administrators can model the desired characteristics for their teachers and build a relational culture that prioritizes positive relationships.

Teachers

Just as administrators can recognize and implement changes to encourage positive teacher-student relationships, so teachers can hone their skills in this area. Understanding the importance of authenticity, teachers can develop a lifestyle of transparent, open communication,

which is so valued by students. Furthermore, as teachers realize the importance of interaction, they can develop patterns of communication that encourage students to spend time with them. Understanding the critical importance of time spent outside of school, teachers should structure their schedule in a way to allow for this time investment. Although for many teachers, this may seem impossible, this study indicates that for many Christian educators the benefits far outweigh the sacrifices. Furthermore, in spending time, teachers need to be intentional about providing affirmation and respect and truly getting to know students, showing that they value the students for who they really are, not just what teachers want them to be in the classroom. As this mutual respect deepens, teachers must be prepared to handle conflict and crisis in a Biblical manner. Even though conflict may not occur in every teacher-student relationship, teachers must understand how critical it is that they are consistent and loving over time. Relationships will never be perfect, but teachers owning their mistakes and moving forward is a catalyst for solidifying trust with students. As teachers become vested in student relationships, they have the opportunity to collaborate on projects and similar passions and ultimately impact students for eternity.

Students

In analyzing and developing a central theme, I identified the theme of reciprocity. Thus, the foundational, cornerstone characteristics and actions necessary in building positive relationships must be mirrored by students. In order for teacher-student relationships to thrive, students must be willing to be transparent and open with teachers. Allowing teachers to interact with them, whether in communication or activities is one of the first steps to a deeper relationship. This interaction does not have to be initiated by the teacher, but it must be reciprocated or the relationship withers and dies. Just as sunlight and water are vital to the health

of a plant, communication and time are inseparable, life-giving components of a positive teacher-student relationship. Although the pursuit itself is not critical, teachers and students must be able to form a common bond, whether through academic interests, or hobbies, or shared experiences. Keira explained that “You can use daily life to show God . . . use my interests to be able to help others, rather than just, it’s my hobby, it’s mine. I now share it with other people and use that as an avenue to be a testimony” (teacher individual interview personal communication, November, 2015). The greater the investment of time, the more likely it is that students will come to know and understand the personality and heartbeat of their teachers. If the cyclical process of mutual respect and love occurs, mutual trust grows between the teacher and the student. Although a turning point may occur at different stages in different teacher-student relationships, at some point students will have a confrontation or a crisis situation, or they will simply consider a teacher’s consistency over time and decide whether to allow the relationship to deepen and continue. Those students who decide to further cultivate a relationship typically have a transformation in how they view and characterize the relationship. No longer is it merely a teacher-student relationship, but the relationship can be characterized more accurately as familial, as a friendship, or as a mentoring relationship. As trust solidifies, students can collaborate with teachers on a shared passion, which might be academic or spiritual. At this level of relationship, teachers and students have a mutual, indelible mark on the other’s life.

Spiritual

Perhaps one of the keystone implications of this study is that spiritual impact does not happen by accident. In particular, teachers must be intentional about identifying their call and purpose in teaching. Teachers with a mission mindset, who are focused on sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ, look for opportunities to invest in students for eternity. This shapes the trajectory

of every class period and every interaction. This is what sets apart the educator in a Christian school from his/her secular counterpart. Not every educator in a Christian school possesses the inclination to dedicate his/her life to an eternal pursuit, but the Christian school environment provides the climate for such intentional interactions to occur. Such a mindset does not diminish the challenges inherent to teaching, but this mindset views the challenges through a different lens. Second Corinthians 4:17 puts it this way, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (Holy Bible, KJV). This verse encapsulates the theme that undergirded so many of the teacher participants’ responses, the pain is worth the outcome. These educators teach because they desire to impact students’ lives with what matters most to them. They disciple and mentor because someone took the time to pour into their lives and they have never been the same. Although these teachers also have academic and good citizenship goals for students, they are most fulfilled when they see a student pursue Christ. Although the sacrifices to achieve positive teacher-student relationships are significant, these teachers allow God to work through them in developing “relentless love” (Rebecca, teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015). This type of love does not balk when students resist, but rather presses forward, persisting in prayer and humble dependence on God to change hearts. The “relentless love” that Rebecca mentioned is modeled after Christ. The author of Hebrews admonishes all Christians, including educators, by “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12: 2, Holy Bible, NIV). This heavenward focus is succinctly summarized by the basic charge to all educators to teach with “eternity in mind” (Jotham, teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015).

Limitations

Limitations are conditions that affect the conclusions (Creswell, 2013). Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) further defined limitations as factors that are outside the researcher's control, which may weaken the study. Limitations for this study include a small sample size of three Christian schools, with an open-enrollment policy, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other types of schools. These findings may not be transferable to public school settings and higher education teacher-student relationships. Furthermore, the nature of this research is largely retrospective, and therefore not prospective or longitudinal. As such, this study does not measure how individuals may change in their relationships at different stages. In addition, the results of this study could be an anomaly for these three locations, and not indicative of all open enrollment Christian schools. Also, the location of all three research locations is in the islands of the Pacific Ocean, so results may not be transferrable to other geographical locations. In addition, an open enrollment Christian school has a unique mission and purpose, and the implications may not apply to closed enrollment Christian schools. Furthermore, this study focused on one type of participant, who had a self-described, positive teacher-student relationship. Those with negative teacher-student relationships may provide different insight, particularly into the hindrances or barriers to positive teacher-student relationships. In addition, there may be other influences at work, not explored in this study, which caused teacher participants to leave their native home and work at an international, open-enrollment Christian school. These factors may influence the results and again not be indicative of most educators in Christian schools. Likewise, the cultural composition and diversity of the student participants may influence the results and limit the ability to generalize the conclusions to more homogenous populations. A final limitation is the length of the study. This qualitative,

grounded theory study, which occurred over a three month period, is one snapshot in time. As described in the study, relationships are very fluid and may change over time. A study over time, comparing relationships at different points, may yield quite different results.

Recommendations for Future Research

Different Population

Age. Since this study was completed with a very specific student population, sixth through 12th grade, it would be interesting to do a similar type study, focused on a different age group or a specific culture. For example, the attributes valued by elementary students, and the actions that teachers take to build positive relationships may look very different at an elementary level.

Culture. Furthermore, cultural values definitely play a role in the participants' perception. Therefore, it would be intriguing to sample certain subsets of the population, such as Asian or Hawaiian, to determine if the relationship building process would be the same in these cultures. Since both Bajaj (2009) and Noddings (1988) recognized the impact of cultural factors in building relationships, comparing specific cultures might illuminate characteristics that transcend cultural boundaries.

Religious beliefs. Although I attempted to select a diverse range of religious beliefs, many of the participants had at least a somewhat serious commitment to religious beliefs and stated that their religious beliefs impacted some areas of their lives. In seeking to further understand the role of positive teacher-student relationships in influencing the spiritual development of students, I would recommend a study that focuses solely on students who have or initially had very different religious beliefs from the teacher participants. Researchers could investigate whether students whose belief systems are in contrast to their Christian teachers, but

who have developed positive relationships with these teachers will provide the teachers with a fertile ground for helping students progress in their spiritual development.

Teacher participants. The majority of the teacher participants interviewed in this study were not living in their native home. Many of these teacher participants have a mission mindset, which may have influenced their decision to teach in that particular location. Another study could be conducted with teachers who are living in the same region where they grew up. Teacher participants that are native to a particular area may indicate a different philosophy and mindset than the teacher participants in this study, particularly in regards to mission and spiritual influence. Likewise, it would be interesting to conduct a similar study in another international geographical location open enrollment Christian school and compare the results with this particular study. Another avenue of study would be to survey Christian teachers teaching in a public school setting to determine the spiritual influence that can occur if the teachers' philosophy is similar, but the setting is a public, rather than a Christian school.

Family background. This study yielded some interesting results about the family background of both teachers and students who have positive teacher-student relationships. For example, many teacher and student participants had parents who were teachers. Many also indicated that they most look up to someone in their family, who has inspired them to develop positive relationships. A companion study might look more specifically at these characteristics to determine what other family factors influence, whether positively or negatively, the teacher-student relationship.

Negative relationships. The focus of this study is on those who have positive teacher-student relationships. On the flip side, a researcher could examine the process of forming negative relationships. Although perhaps not as uplifting to study the disenchanted and the

disengaged, this type of study would target different teacher and student participants and may yield interesting implications for those striving to form positive teacher-student relationships.

Different Setting

Type of school. The focus of this grounded theory study was open enrollment, or partial open-enrollment Christian schools. Closed enrollment Christian schools may have a different focus, and teachers may have the freedom to move more quickly through the process of building positive relationships, since students may already have a common value or belief system. Also conducting this study in a public school would allow researchers to investigate whether spiritual impact is happening in an environment that restricts, rather than promotes the discussion of Christian values.

Size of the school. The research locations for this study were quite different in size. The smallest research location (BFCS) was able to be much more focused on discipleship and mentoring. It would be interesting to study only small open-enrollment Christian schools, and see if this is characteristic of a smaller, more intimate environment, or whether this mentoring focus was specific to BFCS, perhaps due to the leadership, staff, or other factors. Likewise, research could be conducted exclusively in large (500 or more students) Christian schools.

Different Focus

Personality and emotional intelligence. Although teachers and students addressed aspects of emotional intelligence, such as moodiness, flexibility, and perceptions, the participants' discussion did not delve deeply into the issue of emotional intelligence. Similarly, this study did not go into detail about different aspects of personality, but was rather generalized, asking participants to describe themselves as either extroverted or introverted. A study solely focused on emotional intelligence and teaching teachers the process of evaluating and developing

higher emotional intelligence would dovetail nicely with this topic of building positive teacher-student relationships. Furthermore, a study of this kind would be invaluable in hiring teachers with high emotional intelligence who are most likely to build positive teacher-student relationships. Understanding the process of building emotional intelligence in teachers would also be invaluable in training current teachers who may be low in emotional intelligence.

Professional development. Also coinciding with the topic of emotional intelligence, it would be interesting to take the implications of this study, and implement them through professional development. A quantitative study would be nicely suited to examining the effectiveness of targeted professional development and its impact on improving positive teacher-student relationships. Another similar study could explore the effects of mentoring new and novice teachers, specifically in the area of building positive teacher-student relationships.

Long-term impact. Another venue for research would be to examine relationships over time. This particular study studied relationships that have been in place for at least one school year. A study that followed participants over a longer stretch of time, perhaps including college graduates could yield beneficial insight into relationships that go beyond surface level relationships.

Mentoring. The bulk of the questions and the data collected dealt with characteristics, strategies, and hindrances to positive relationships. Further study on the process of spiritual transformation would be fascinating. This links with studies on Biblical worldview, but I would recommend a quantitative study that measures the influence of positive teacher-student relationships on spiritual transformation. This could entail examining specific steps taken by teachers and their effectiveness in affecting a change in students' beliefs or values.

Summary

Positive teacher-student relationships pervasively impact a student's academic, emotional, and spiritual development. Researchers concur on the value of positive teacher-student relationships, and have conducted a myriad of studies to support the benefits of positive relationships. However, few studies have studied the perceptions of both teachers and students regarding the process of building positive teacher-student relationships. Furthermore, there is a definitive gap in empirical research regarding the process of building positive teacher-student relationships within a Christian school context. The purpose of this systematic, grounded theory study was to build a theoretical model to describe the process of building positive teacher-student relationships in open enrollment Christian schools. The findings of this study buttress the claims of constructivism, that individual meaning heavily influences perception, which in turn dictates behaviors and attitudes. Similarly, the role of inner dialogue and self-efficacy were evident in the responses of teachers and students who have positive teacher-student relationships.

In analyzing the data, I coded the results from the online surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews. The initial coding provided a broad overview of the relationship building process. As I consolidated codes, and searched for themes and categories, I identified the core category of relational reciprocity. Within this core category, there were various stages or layers that were foundational for both teachers and students in the process of building positive teacher-student relationships. Research question one asked, "What teacher and student characteristics facilitate the development of positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools?" A number of themes were identified, such as helpfulness, caring, and being passionate. However, the baseline, reciprocal characteristic for both teachers and students is authenticity. Research question two asked, "What specific strategies do teachers and students describe as helpful in

building positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools?” Again, a variety of themes were identified, such as being enthusiastic about learning, taking responsibility, and pursuing excellence. However, the threads woven throughout the participants’ answers were interacting through regular communication and activities and investing time in order to get to know and understand the other individual. These actions led to a mutual respect between teachers and students. Research question three was, “What do teachers and students describe as hindrances to building positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools?” Participants had many thoughts regarding barriers to relationship, but poor communication, a lack of transparency, and shattered trust were common hindrances. If teachers were able to overcome such hindrances, they reached a turning point and transformation where teachers became like a family member, a friend, or a mentor. Consistency over time leads to solidified trust. Using a garden metaphor, these characteristics provide a “greenhouse environment” where relationships can flourish and teachers and students can collaborate on shared passions (Ruth, teacher individual personal communication, December, 2015). Research question four asked, “How do positive teacher-student relationships influence the spiritual development of students in Christian schools?” Teacher and student participants emphasized that spiritual development is intentional and it takes time. Unlike secular education, within a Christian school, educators have the opportunity to freely share Christ, and that “makes the difference” (teacher focus group participant personal communication, December, 2015). The final stage in the theoretical model, impact, occurs as those who have been discipled or mentored in turn begin to influence others. This relational cycle can be initiated by either teachers or students, but it must be reciprocal for relationships to deepen and impact others. How then do educators build positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools? They submit themselves to God’s call on their life, realizing that there are

areas that will need to grow, change, and develop. They humbly depend on God, through prayer and the influence of others, to cultivate His love and character in their lives. Rather than living for temporal gain, they pursue a higher calling, teaching always with “eternity in mind” (Jotham, teacher individual interview personal communication, December, 2015).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

October 20, 2015

Joy Stouffer

IRB Approval 2323.102015: A Grounded Theory Study on Building Positive Teacher-Student Relationships in Christian Schools

Dear Joy,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School



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Appendix B: Recruitment Script for Teachers

“During the next several weeks, our school administrators, teachers, and students will be participating in a research study on the process of building positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools. The study will be conducted by Miss Stouffer, a doctoral candidate at Liberty University, as a component of her dissertation process.

The research will begin with a confidential online survey of all full-time administrators, teachers, and students. This survey will take about 15 minutes to complete. While participation is voluntary, I encourage each of you to consider this opportunity to participate since the results will assist our teachers in building more positive teacher-student relationships.

Miss Stouffer will be serving as the school facilitator for the study. After Miss Stouffer reviews the confidential survey data, she will select several teachers and students who represent a broad range of characteristics for further study. Miss Stouffer will identify the teachers and students who have self-reported positive relationships and send them an Informed Consent Form. If you are selected for the second phase of the study, and agree to participate, there will be a focus group of teachers and a personal interview with Miss Stouffer. Your time commitment for the second phase will be about one hour.

Miss Stouffer has asked me to assure you that all personal data will remain confidential and every effort will be made to protect your privacy throughout the process. Pseudonyms will be used for the school name and for teachers’ names in any published reports. On <date>, Miss Stouffer will send you a letter and consent form via e-mail. Please make every effort to complete it by <date> and return the consent form to Miss Stouffer via e-mail. I will be participating in this study with you and expect it to be a very enriching experience for all of us.”

Appendix C: Recruitment Script for Students

“During the next several weeks, our school administrators, teachers, and students will be participating in a research study on the process of building positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools. The study will be conducted by Miss Stouffer, a doctoral candidate at Liberty University, as a component of her dissertation process.

The research will begin with a confidential online survey of all students in sixth to 12th grade. This survey will take about 15 minutes to complete. While participation is voluntary, I encourage each of you to consider this opportunity to participate since the results will assist our teachers in building more positive teacher-student relationships.

Miss Stouffer will be serving as the school facilitator for the study. After Miss Stouffer reviews the confidential survey data, she will select several students that represent a broad range of characteristics for further study. Miss Stouffer will identify the students who have self-reported positive relationships and send their parents additional information and a Parent’s Informed Consent Form and the students an Assent Form. If you are selected for the second phase of the study, and agree to participate, there will be a focus group with other students and a personal interview with Miss Stouffer. Your time commitment for the second phase will be about one hour.

Miss Stouffer has asked me to assure you that all personal data will remain confidential and every effort will be made to protect your privacy throughout the process. Pseudonyms will be used for the school name and for teachers’ names in any published reports. On <date>, Miss Stouffer will send your parents an explanation letter, a consent form, and an assent form for you to fill out via e-mail. Please make every effort to complete it by <date> and return the consent and assent forms to Miss Stouffer via e-mail. I will be participating in this study with you and expect it to be a very enriching experience for all of us.”

Appendix D: Consent Form for Administrators Participation

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved this
document for use from
10/20/15 to 10/19/16
Protocol # 2323.102015

A Grounded Theory Study on Building Positive Teacher-Student Relationships in Christian Schools

Miss Joy Stouffer
Liberty University
School of Education Department

You have been invited to be in a research study exploring the process of building positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools. You have been selected as a possible participant because you are a current administrator at an open enrollment Christian school, which has agreed to take part in this research study. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Miss Joy Stouffer, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to provide a roadmap for educators who wish to build positive teacher-student relationships. This study will hopefully provide valuable insight for professional development for our teachers who wish to be intentional about cultivating positive relationships with students.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you would do the following:

- 1) Fill out an online survey. (15 minutes)

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The risks in this study are minimal and no more than a participant would encounter in everyday life. There are no direct benefits to participating in this online survey.

Compensation:

Participants will not receive compensation for participation.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

All data collected will be kept secure, on password protected computers, and all paper files kept in a locked and secure office location.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or your place of employment. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

If you wish to withdraw from the study please e-mail joy.stouffer@hbcguam.net. Should you decide to withdraw from the study, no part of any collected data from you will be used in the study; this data will be destroyed immediately upon your withdrawal.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Miss Joy Stouffer. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at jstouffer@liberty.edu. You may also contact her advisor Dr. Gail Collins at glcollins2@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Carter 134, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu. ***Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.***

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____

Appendix E: Recruitment Letter for Online Teacher Survey

October, 2015

Dear Teachers:

As a graduate student in the College of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research to better understand the process of building positive teacher-student relationships as part of the requirements for an Ed.D. The purpose of my research is to build a model to assist educators in developing positive teacher-student relationships, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

Teachers who have at least three years of teaching experience and who are current teachers at an open enrollment Christian school are eligible to participate. If you are willing to participate, you will be asked to go to www.surveymonkey.com and complete an online survey, which will take approximately 15 minutes. Your name and other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation. However, you will be assigned a pseudonym for the entire study to protect your confidentiality. After completing the survey, you may be invited to participate in the second phase of the study, which would include a focus group of teachers (30 minutes) and an individual interview (30-45 minutes).

A consent document is attached to the survey link. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document electronically before completing the survey. Please complete the survey by October 20, 2015.

Sincerely,

Miss Joy Stouffer

Elementary Principal

Appendix F: Consent Form for Teachers

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved this
document for use from
10/20/15 to 10/19/16
Protocol # 2323.102015

A Grounded Theory Study on Building Positive Teacher-Student Relationships in Christian Schools

Miss Joy Stouffer
Liberty University
School of Education

You have been invited to be in a research study exploring the process of building positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools. You have been selected as a possible participant because you are a current teacher at an open-enrollment Christian school which has agreed to take part in this research study. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Miss Joy Stouffer, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to provide a roadmap for educators who wish to build positive teacher student relationships. This study will hopefully provide valuable insight for professional development for our teachers who wish to be intentional about cultivating positive relationships with students.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you would do the following:

- 1) Fill out an online survey. (15 minutes)
- 2) Then, if you agree and are selected to continue in the second phase of the study, based on your survey results, I would request to set up a time that would be convenient to you for participation in a focus group (30 minutes) and an individual interview (30 minutes).

If you agree to be in this second phase of the study, you would do the following things:

- 1) Participate in a focus group and individual interview.
- 2) Participate in one small focus group with two to six other teachers. (30 minutes)
- 3) Participate in one individual interview. (30-45 minutes)

The focus group and individual interviews will be audio recorded for later analysis. You would also be asked later to review a transcription of your contributions to ensure that my interpretation of your responses is accurate.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The risks in this study are minimal and no more than a participant would encounter in everyday life.

There are no direct benefits to participating in this online survey.

Compensation:

Participants will not receive compensation for participation.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

All data collected will be kept secure, on password protected computers, and all paper files kept in a secure office location. Audio recordings will be maintained on the computer for a maximum of three years, and only a paid transcriptionist, the principal researcher, and those with a direct connection to data analysis will have access. In the focus groups, however, there are limits of confidentiality. Since there are multiple teachers involved, I cannot assure that the other participants will maintain your privacy and confidentiality.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or your place of employment. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

If you wish to withdraw from the study please e-mail joy.stouffer@hbcguam.net. Should you decide to withdraw from the study, no part of any collected data from you will be used in the study; this data will be destroyed immediately upon your withdrawal.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Miss Joy Stouffer. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at jstouffer@liberty.edu. You may also contact her advisor Dr. Gail Collins at glcollins2@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Carter 134, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu. ***Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.***

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____

Appendix G: Recruitment Letter for Child Participation

October, 2015

Dear Parents:

As a graduate student in the College of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research to better understand the process of building positive teacher-student relationships as part of the requirements for an Ed.D. The purpose of my research is to build a model to assist educators in developing positive teacher-student relationships, and I am writing to invite your child to participate in my study.

Current students who are in sixth through twelfth grade are eligible to participate. If you are willing to allow your child to participate, they will be asked to complete an online survey in computer class, which will take approximately fifteen minutes. Your child's name and other identifying information will be requested as part of his or her participation. However, your child will be assigned a pseudonym for the entire study to protect his/her confidentiality. After completing the survey, your student may be invited to participate in the second phase of the study, which would include a focus group of students (30 minutes) and an individual interview (30-45 minutes).

A consent document is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to your child's teacher or the main office by [date].

Sincerely,

Miss Joy Stouffer
Elementary Principal

Appendix H: Informed Consent for Child Participation

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved this
document for use from
10/20/15 to 10/19/16
Protocol # 2323.102015

Consent Form for Parents

A Grounded Theory Study on Building Positive Teacher-Student Relationships in Christian Schools

Miss Joy Stouffer
Liberty University
School of Education

Your child is invited to be in a research study exploring the process of building positive teacher-student relationships in Christian schools. Your child was selected as a possible participant because he/she is enrolled in sixth through twelfth grade in an open enrollment Christian school that has agreed to take part in this research study. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing for your child to be in the study.

Miss Joy Stouffer, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to provide a roadmap for educators who wish to build positive teacher student relationships. This study will hopefully provide valuable insight for professional development for our teachers who wish to be intentional about cultivating positive relationships with students.

Procedures:

If you agree for your child to be in this study, your child would do the following:

1. Fill out an online survey in computer class. (15 minutes)
2. Then, if your child agrees and is selected to continue, based on the survey results, I would contact you and your child to set up a time for further participation in the second phase of the study that will include a focus group conversation (30 minutes) with other students and then an individual interview (about 30 minutes).

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The risks in this study are minimal and no more than a participant would encounter in everyday life. If any information is disclosed from participants regarding abuse or the intent to harm self or others, this would fall under mandatory reporting laws and must be reported to the appropriate authorities.

There are no direct benefits to participating in this online survey.

Compensation:

Participants will not receive compensation for participation.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

All data collected will be kept secure, on password protected computers, and all paper files kept in a locked and secure office location. Audio recordings will be maintained on the computer for a maximum of three years, and only a paid transcriptionist and the principal researcher will have access. In the focus groups, however, there are limits of confidentiality. Since there are multiple students involved, I cannot assure that the other participants will maintain your student's confidentiality.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to have your child participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or the Christian school. If you decide to have your child participate, your student is free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. . If your child decides to withdraw from the study, simply email me at joy.stouffer@hbcguam.net. Should your child decide to withdraw from the study, no part of any collected data from your child will be used in the study; such data will be destroyed (deleted electronically and any paper information shredded) immediately upon your child's withdrawal.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

If you wish to withdraw from the study please e-mail joy.stouffer@hbcguam.net. Should you decide to withdraw from the study, no part of any collected data from you will be used in the study; this data will be destroyed immediately upon your withdrawal.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Miss Joy Stouffer. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at jstouffer@liberty.edu. You may also contact her advisor Dr. Gail Collins at glcollins2@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Carter 134, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu. ***Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.***

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Signature of parent or guardian: _____
(If minors are involved)

Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____

Date: _____

Appendix I: Assent Form for Child Participation

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved this
document for use from
10/20/15 to 10/19/16
Protocol # 2323.102015

Assent of Child to Participate in a Research Study

You are receiving this survey because your parent gave me permission for you to complete a survey to be included in a research study about your relationships with teachers. Please read and sign this Assent Form if you also agree to participate in this study. If you prefer not be in the study, you do not need to participate in this study and may return the Assent Form unsigned to your teacher.

What is the name of the study and who is doing the study?

The name of the study is A Grounded Theory Study on Building Positive Teacher-Student Relationships in Christian Schools. This study is being conducted by Miss Joy Stouffer.

Why are we doing this study?

We are interested in studying how teachers and students build positive relationships and the effects that it has on students.

Why are we asking you to be in this study?

You are being asked to be in this research study because we want to find out which strategies you think work best when teachers and students are developing relationships.

If you agree, what will happen?

If you are in this study you will fill out a brief online survey (10-15 minutes). Then if you are selected to participate further and agree to participate, I will contact you and discuss the second phase of the study. This will include a focus group conversation (30 minutes) with other students and then an individual interview (about 30 minutes).

Do you have to be in this study?

No, you do not have to be in this study. If you want to be in this study, then tell the researcher. If you don't want to, it's OK to say no. The researcher will not be angry. You can say yes now and change your mind later. It's up to you. If you want to withdraw, e-mail the researcher at joy.stouffer@hbcguam.net. None of the data collected from you will be used in the study; this data will be destroyed if you withdraw from the study.

Do you have any questions?

You can ask questions any time. You can ask now. You can ask later. You can talk to the researcher. If you do not understand something, please ask the researcher to explain it to you again. Signing your name below means that you want to be in the study.

Signature of Child

Date

Miss Joy Stouffer, Principal Researcher
P.O. Box 23158, Barrigada, GU 96921
jstouffer@liberty.edu
Dr. Gail Collins, Dissertation Chair glcollins2@liberty.edu
Liberty University Institutional Review Board,
1971 University Blvd, Carter 134, Lynchburg, VA 24515
Or email at irb@liberty.edu

Appendix J: Online Survey for Administrators

1. In general, how would you describe the teacher-student relationships at your school?
2. How do you encourage teachers in building positive relationships with their students?
3. Please identify three teachers whom you believe have positive relationships with their students.
4. Please indicate why you chose the first teacher. More than one category may apply.
 - Personal observation
 - Parent feedback
 - Student feedback
 - Teacher feedback
 - Other (please list)
5. Please indicate why you chose the second teacher. More than one category may apply.
 - Personal observation
 - Parent feedback
 - Student feedback
 - Teacher feedback
 - Other (please list)
6. Please indicate why you chose the third teacher. More than one category may apply.
 - Personal observation
 - Parent feedback
 - Student feedback
 - Teacher feedback
 - Other (please list)
7. Please identify three students with whom you have observed strong, positive relationships with their teachers.
8. Please indicate why you chose the first student. More than one category may apply.
 - Personal observation
 - Parent feedback
 - Student feedback
 - Teacher feedback
 - Other (please list)
9. Please indicate why you chose the second student. More than one category may apply.
 - Personal observation
 - Parent feedback
 - Student feedback
 - Teacher feedback
 - Other (please list)
10. Please indicate why you chose the third student. More than one category may apply.
 - Personal observation
 - Parent feedback
 - Student feedback
 - Teacher feedback
 - Other (please list)

Appendix K: Online Survey for Teachers

1. What is your name?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. What grade level do you teach?
5. How would you describe yourself?
 - Extroverted
 - Introverted
6. How long have you taught at this school?
7. How long have you been teaching?
8. Which choice most accurately describes your relationships with students?
 - I have positive relationships with most or all of my students.
 - I have positive relationships with some of my students.
 - I have neither a positive or negative relationship with most of my students.
 - I have negative relationships with most of my students.
9. List four or five words that describe the ideal student.
10. In thinking about your students, whom you taught for at least a year, who are now current students in sixth to 12th grades at your school, name up to five students with whom you have the most positive relationship.
11. What year did you begin a relationship with each individual you named in question 10?
12. Briefly describe the characteristics of each positive relationship mentioned in question 10.
13. Would you be willing to participate in a focus group with other teachers and an individual interview with the researcher to discuss more about how you developed your positive relationship(s)?

Appendix L: Online Survey for Students

1. What is your name?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. What is your grade level?
5. How long have you been at this school?
6. Do you consider yourself an
 - Extrovert
 - Introvert
7. How many church services do you attend in one month? Check the one that best applies to you.
 - I do not attend
 - 1-2
 - 3-5
 - 6-10
 - 10 +
8. Which choice most accurately describes your religious beliefs?
 - I am serious about my religious beliefs.
 - I am somewhat serious about my religious beliefs.
 - My religious beliefs are not important to me.
 - I do not claim any religious beliefs.
9. Which choice most accurately describes the influence of your religious beliefs?
 - I do not claim any religious beliefs and so religious beliefs do not impact my life.
 - My religious beliefs impact some areas of my life.
 - My religious beliefs impact most areas of my life.
 - My religious beliefs impact every area of my life.
10. Which choice most accurately describes your relationships with teachers?
 - I have positive relationships with most or all of my teachers.
 - I have positive relationships with some of my teachers.
 - I have neither a positive or negative relationship with most of my teachers.
 - I have negative relationships with most of my teachers.
11. List four or five words that describe the ideal teacher.
12. In thinking about all of your former teachers, name one or two with whom you have the most positive relationship.
13. How long have you had a relationship with each teacher you identified?
 - Teacher one:
 - Teacher two:
14. If someone had never met your teacher(s), with whom you have the most positive relationship(s), how would you describe him/her and your relationship?
 - Teacher one:

○ Teacher two:

15. Would you be willing to participate in a focus group with other students and an individual interview with the researcher to discuss more about how you developed your positive relationship?

Appendix M: Personal Biography

Relationships are personal and will look very different with each individual. In 10 years of teaching, I have learned some strategies that work well with my personality and teaching style. In unpacking these ideas, my goal is to clearly articulate my own assumptions and beliefs. My biblical worldview and even my theoretical paradigm does not allow me to present myself as unbiased and neutral, but hopefully this exercise clarifies my own philosophy regarding teacher characteristics, effective strategies, hindrances to relationship building, and ways I believe teachers can impact students spiritually through positive relationships.

First and foremost, in my mind, is that an educator must have a personal, growing relationship with Jesus Christ. John 15:5 clearly articulates the vine and branches metaphor and aptly states “without me, you can do nothing.” Teaching is difficult, emotional, and draining, and I personally do not know how to face and meet the challenges apart from my relationship with Christ. To love and to pour out for another is not sustainable long-term without the love of Christ pouring in. Do unbelieving educators love and sacrifice for their students? In common grace they can and do, yet ultimately I do not believe one can fulfill the true biblical mandate to love as Christ loves apart from a steadfast reliance on Christ. A confession of faith alone is insufficient, though. Each day requires time in the Word, a daily seeking of God’s wisdom, and a humble dependence on the working of His Spirit. Allowing the work of the Holy Spirit through individual personality provides a consistency of character and a stability of emotion that I believe is essential in an effective educator. I also believe that humility and transparent authenticity are essential for educators. Students need to know that teachers mess up and see that they can laugh about it and grow from it. Students already know their teachers are not perfect, but they do need to see how teachers handle and learn from their weaknesses. Another critical characteristic of a teacher is a positive demeanor that is cheerful and truly enjoys learning and the company of students. Training and competence in instructional strategies and classroom management are essential, but ineffective apart from a joyful heart. I have learned that a smile can turn the heart of a child and go a long way to building relationships.

Perhaps closely twined with teacher characteristics are intentional strategies that teachers can use to build relationships. At the heart of these strategies is love for the student and a desire to help them grown in Christ-likeness. Some might say loving students is trite and overused, but, in my opinion, there is no such thing as an effective educator who does not love his/her students. Love, then, prompts teachers to get to know their students. They must discover what drives them, where their interests lie, and how they learn. Connecting with families and parents greatly assists in this endeavor. As much as possible, teachers must be interested in the whole child, and not just their academics. This might mean going to a soccer game, or a birthday party, or just eating dinner with the family. Although time is a teacher’s most valuable and often most scarce resource, teachers must make time to connect with students. Teachers must also seek to maximize relationship building time even within the school day. Teachers can eat lunch with students, talk with them at carline, and play with them at recess. Obviously, relationship building will look very different based on the age level of the student. Again, often teachers use non-instructional time to catch up on paperwork, but these are invaluable opportunities to connect, be available, and really get to know students. Once teachers begin to know their students, they need to engage them every day and check on how they are really doing. This can be done by setting business aside to greet them in the morning, or let them share good news. When they have problems, teachers must listen, take them seriously, and follow through to make

sure that the students feel heard. A final strategy that has proven helpful in my own teaching is to praise students, and look for the good in them. A little encouragement, whether verbal or written, goes a long way to building the relationship.

Although there are many different strategies that can build the teacher-student relationship, there are definite obstacles or hindrances to the relationship, as well. Teachers who are driven by their own emotions can quickly sabotage a relationship. Perhaps the best advice I received as a student teacher was that my students should never know when I am having a bad day. This, of course, must be balanced with authenticity, and it is acceptable to let students know when you are not feeling well or sad because of a loss. Students, though, should not have to deal with moodiness or never knowing how their teacher will respond. A student focus group (NLCS) commented, “It’s the mood that you’re teacher’s in...that’s really it. There is not too much to it...what mood they’re in-how their day went, that can really depend whether you talk to them that day or not.” One teacher, Charles, admitted that at times “I get into mopey, down on myself.” These emotional mood swings greatly impact the teacher-student relationship. Lashing out in anger or frustration is a known hindrance to relationships, but sadly occurs all too often in the classroom. A lack of consistency also quickly destroys trust. Teachers will deal with different students in different ways; however, there must be a basic baseline and equality in discipline so that students are held accountable to the same standard. Sarcasm is also another hindrance to close relationships. Some teachers employ sarcasm freely in their style of teaching, but I personally believe that the liabilities far outweigh any perceived benefit. My view of how God commands me to speak and love others precludes treating students with a cutting demeanor. Another relationship hindrance is disciplining publicly or embarrassing students in front of their classmates. Teachers who fail to follow through and keep their commitments even in small areas lose the trust and respect of their students. Teachers who refuse to forgive and move on also damage relationships. Infractions, no matter how serious, should not change the love and concern that teachers have for their student. When discipline and correction are necessary, teachers must employ it and move on to restore the relationship.

My personal opinion is that the characteristics and strategies mentioned set the framework for influencing spiritual development in students. Having a solid, positive relationship in place gives teachers the freedom to speak into their lives. When they know that I love them and they enjoy being in my classroom, students begin to ask questions. Perhaps the most common question that I have received in my 10 years of teaching, is “Why are you so happy/joyful/smiling?” They know that I love them and they see the difference that Christ makes in how I live out my day. This provides me an opportunity to share Christ with them. With positive relationships, I can speak into their lives and share Scripture and how God has helped me through various trials in my life. My desire, ultimately, in building relationships is to intentionally leave a mark for Christ. Not every student will trust Christ or go on to spiritual heights, but I have always desired to have relationships that point to Christ and the difference He can make in a life.

As much as I might wish for exhaustive answers and wisdom regarding positive teacher-student relationships, I do not possess them, and that provides part of the motivation for this study. I can only speak experientially and say that positive relationships with my students are the reason for many academic, emotional, social, and spiritual victories. Different educators, though, may have different strategies and a completely different perspective. I desire to hear their voices, understand the empirical research, and provide a helpful model for other Christian educators to share the love of Christ with their students.

Appendix N: Focus Group Questions for Teachers

1. You described your relationship with students as positive. What does it mean to have a positive teacher-student relationship?
2. How is your relationship to students different than other teachers' relationships with students? Why?
3. What purposeful steps do you take to build positive relationships with students?
4. What have you seen other teachers do to effectively build positive relationships with students?
5. If you had unlimited time and resources, what would you do to build positive teacher-student relationships?
6. What student actions build positive teacher-student relationships?
7. What student actions interfere with positive teacher-student relationships?

Appendix O: Focus Group Questions for Students

1. You described your relationship as positive. What does it mean to have a positive teacher-student relationship?
2. How is your positive relationship with this teacher different than with other teachers?
3. Why do you think you get along well with this particular teacher?
4. What can students do to build positive relationships with teachers?
5. What do teachers do that help to build positive relationships with students?
6. What student actions prevent positive teacher-student relationships?
7. What teacher actions interfere with positive teacher-student relationships?

Appendix P: Individual Interview Guide for Teachers

1. Tell me about your hobbies and interests. What are you passionate about?
2. What three words would best describe your personality?
3. Who are you when you are at your best?
4. What is your family background?
5. Who has had the most impact on you spiritually?
6. Tell me about your educational background. Where have you attended school?
7. What impact did your teachers have on you?
8. Why did you choose to teach in Christian education?
9. What are your top goals as a teacher?
10. If you could describe the best possible student, what would he/she be like?
11. What value do teacher-student relationships have in your culture?
12. How would you define a positive relationship?
13. Describe a student with whom you have had a positive relationship.
14. What helped to build your positive relationship?
15. Can you identify key moments, or turning points in your relationship?
16. Describe the challenges in your relationship.
17. Has this relationship influenced you spiritually? If so, how?
18. Is there any advice that you would give to other teachers regarding building positive relationships?

Appendix Q: Individual Interview Guide for Students

1. Tell me about your hobbies and interests. What do you like to do?
2. Pick three words that describe you.
3. Who do you most look up to?
4. Tell me about your educational background. Where have you attended school?
5. What positive influence have your teachers had on you?
6. Why did your parents pick a Christian school?
7. What are your top goals as a student right now? What are your long term goals?
8. If you could describe the best possible teacher, what would he/she be like?
9. What value does your family place on teacher-student relationships?
10. How would you define a positive relationship?
11. Describe a specific teacher with whom you have had a positive relationship.
12. What helped to build your positive relationship?
13. Can you identify important events or turning points in your relationship?
14. Describe any time you did not agree or get along with your teacher(s) with whom you described having a positive relationship.
15. Has this relationship influenced you spiritually? If so, how?
16. Is there any advice that you would give to teachers or other students regarding the best way to build positive relationships?

Appendix R: Audit Trail

Date	Task	Reflective Notes
July-August, 2015	Received approval from the three research locations	The three research locations are similar in mission and philosophy and willing to participate in my study.
October 6, 2015	Successfully defended proposal	I received good feedback and suggestions for minor revisions before submitting my application to IRB.
October 25, 2015	Received IRB approval	The process for approval took about two and a half weeks, with some minor revisions.
October 26-December 1, 2015	Sent out recruitment forms and consent forms via e-mail (paper copies for parental consent) for parents, administrators, students, and teachers	I had immediate feedback from one research location, but waited about a month to hear back from the other two research locations.
October 29-30, 2015	Conducted pilot study	I conducted two focus groups (teachers and students) and four individual interviews (teachers and students). This allowed me to revise some of my questions for clarity.
November 2, 2015	Conducted my first teacher focus group and began individual teacher interviews.	I received quick responses from the teachers and was able to schedule all my teacher interviews at the first research location within a week.
November 2-December 4, 2015	Conducted interviews and focus groups with teachers and students. Transcribed interviews and analyzed data simultaneously.	The online surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews went smoothly at the first research location. I had trouble getting in contact with the administrators at the other two research locations.
November 30-December 4, 2015	Completed focus groups and individual interviews at the final two research locations.	Although it was initially difficult to elicit participation, once I was on site, the data collection went very smoothly. The students and teachers provided good

		information. When similar themes emerged, I knew I had reached data saturation.
December 4-18, 2015	Finished transcribing focus groups and individual interviews and analyzed data.	I found the process of transcribing my own interviews very helpful as I reviewed the data and saw emerging themes.
December 14-January 3, 2015	Utilized Atlas.ti for data analysis	Atlas.ti was very helpful for organizing my data, coding, and analyzing the quotations.
January 4, 2015	Completed initial data analysis.	The initial amount of codes was overwhelming, but Atlas.ti was very helpful in consolidating codes and establishing categories and themes.
January 4-20, 2016	Wrote and revised chapters four and five.	I ended up taking an entirely different approach with the core category, and the theoretical model.

Appendix S: Enumeration of Codes

Open-Codes	Enumeration of open-code appearance across data sets	Themes
Attributes	58	Authenticity Interaction Time Investment
Attitudes	23	
Actions	54	
Hindrances	11	
Communication	8	Insight Mutual Respect Turning Point
Conflict	23	
Consistency	6	
Common Experiences	12	Trust Solidified Collaboration Impact
Love	14	
Passion	22	
Honest	15	
Comfortable	9	
Spiritual Influence	49	
Reciprocal	2	
Family	12	
Friendship	4	
Mentor/Discipleship	14	

Appendix T: Permission to Use Graphic

April 25, 2016

Dear Miss Carruthers,

I am contacting you because I would like to ask permission to reproduce your graphic in my Dissertation. After defending my Dissertation, my program requires me to submit it for publication in the Liberty University open-access institutional repository, the Digital Commons, and in the Proquest thesis and dissertation subscription research database. If you allow this, I will provide a citation of your work as follows: (Carruthers, 2016).

Thank you for your consideration in this matter!

Dr. Joy Stouffer

April 25, 2016

Dear Dr. Stouffer,

I am giving permission for you to reproduce my graphic in your dissertation, Eternity in Mind: A Grounded Theory Study on Building Positive Teacher-Student Relationships in Christian Schools. The citation (Carruthers, 2016) will be acceptable.

Sincerely,

Miss Kristen Carruthers