

Fostering Positive Teacher-Student Relationships in the Classroom

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Abstract

The research in this qualitative study bases itself on the importance of positive teacher-student relationships in the classroom. Positive teacher-student relationships are critical in furthering students' growth in the school. Teachers can take the place of a parental role in a student's life, and positive relationships are essential to make a lasting impact on students. Teachers' attitudes affect how they understand and build relationships with the students in their classroom, and factors such as closeness, conflict, and dependency affect these relationships. Five elementary education professors were interviewed to gain insight into the specific strategies and attitudes elementary educators need to use to build these positive teacher-student relationships in the classroom. Results indicated that it is essential for elementary teachers to know the students, care deeply for them, and incorporate frequent personal interactions.

Fostering Positive Teacher-Student Relationships in the Classroom

Teachers are an essential aspect of the education process. They have an important role in facilitating academic learning and social progress. Teachers have an incredible amount of time with the students; in fact, many students spend more time with their teacher during the week than any other adult outside their primary caregivers (Baker, 2006). However, given how much time teachers spend with their students, teachers hold a lot of responsibility and influence over students. Teachers have the strenuous but rewarding task of teaching young students academically, socially, mentally, emotionally, and relationally. Research has alluded to the criticality of teachers helping students prosper by forming positive teacher-student relationships, but the nuances of how to implement these positive teacher-student relationships vary (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; McCartney et al., 2009; Pena, 2010; Rucinski et al., 2018). This study investigates the importance of teacher-student relationships and how educators can effectively foster these positive relationships with their students.

Positive Role Models

Children are shaped in many ways and glean information from their primary caregivers and role models. Researchers Hughes and Cavell (1999) and O'Connor and McCartney (2006) suggested connections in attachment theory between parental modeling in the home and teachers' role modeling in the classroom. Wentzl (2002) found that similar to how parents can create optimal contexts for their children to grow in, teachers have the ability to develop and sustain relationships with students to help them learn and grow into their potential. Paternal relationships are critical for children's development, according to many theorists such as Bowlby, Pianta, Erikson, and Noddings (Cook et al., 2018; Feeney et al., 2016; Noddings, 1992). Erikson's psychological development theory has significant ramifications for educators because of

educators' role with students during this critical time of elementary school, where the children are formed through their interactions with others (Feeney et al., 2016). Teachers having a positive interaction with students at this early stage is critical.

It is important to note that when looking at teacher-student relationships, this can look different depending on different age groups. This study is looking specifically at elementary students. Teachers must be aware of how younger students tend to place higher importance on teacher-student relationships. Due to the more youthful nature of a child, students in lower grades need a supportive teacher for their maturation (Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). According to McCormick et al. (2017), it is foundational that children establish relationships early on because they serve as a basis for forming exceptional relationships in the future. For students who may lack deep maternal attachment, strong teacher-student relationships amend that gap in the child's life (McCormick et al., 2017; Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). Students with a positive and close relationship with their teacher are more likely to feel better supported and engaged in school. Early caregivers' role in the home impacts how educators walk alongside and form relationships with their students.

Teachers are role models in the classroom and form positive relationships with their students daily. Suppose teachers can develop strong interpersonal relationships with students in their classroom, particularly those who may have come from hostile circumstances and home lives. In that case, nurturing the child can provide a buffer and safe space for the child to grow (Hughes & Cavell, 1999). In reference to the criticality of personal relations within care ethics, Noddings (2012) states, "good teachers, like good parents, hope that the personal relations formed will enhance the likelihood that their students will live in and promote a public climate in which caring relations will continue to flourish" (p. 779). Studies suggest that a high-quality

teacher-student relationship can predict later successes for the student (Baker, 2006; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Hughes & Cavell, 1999; O'Connor & McCartney, 2006). The teachers' ability to form strong relational connections with the students impacts their current grades, situation, and future.

Conflict And Gender in the Classroom

Conflict and gender can be major prohibitors to forming positive teacher-student relationships in the classroom. Conflict is critical because it can provide a disruption to the teacher-student relationship. Birch and Ladd (1997) defined conflictual relationships as "characterized by discordant interactions and a lack of rapport between teachers and children" (p. 63). Understanding the definition of conflictual relationships will be used in unpacking conflictual relationships between teachers and students. Some essential aspects when looking at conflict in teacher-student relationships are two main specific types: externalizing and internalizing behavior (Buyse, 2008; Henricsson & Rydell, 2004; Horn et al., 2020). Externalizing behavioral problems can be defined as children showing more aggression, making defiant remarks and actions, and unconstrained movement. Internalizing behavioral problems can be defined as children feeling fearful, lonely, stressed, and unhappy (Henricsson & Rydell, 2004). Understanding how conflict breaks trust in the teacher-student relationship and the various ways it is displayed will provide a framework for understanding its profound impact on teacher-student relationships.

Externalizing and internalizing behavior plays a significant role in unpacking conflict regarding teacher-student relationships. Henricsson and Rydell (2004) studied teacher-student relationships in the classroom by comparing three groups: children displaying externalizing problems, children with internalizing problems, and non-problematic children. Researchers

found that teacher-student relations were characterized by high conflict and dependency; both had more problematic groups and negative teacher-student relationships than the nonproblematic group (Henricsson & Rydell, 2004). Hamre and Pianta (2001) and Henricsson and Rydell (2004) suggested that high levels of conflict and dependency created even more negativity in the teacher-student relationship. Buyse et al. (2008) and Henricsson and Rydell (2004) observed strong correlations between externalizing problematic behaviors and distressed teacher-student relationships. Buyse et al. (2008) suggested that teachers need stronger sensitivity and emotional engagement to improve positive relationships with the more problematic students in their classrooms. Behavioral problems can negatively affect fostering positive teacher-student relationships.

Conflict can be a disruptive function in building positive teacher-student relationships. Students are aware when there is tension in a relationship with their teacher. Buckler (2015) suggested that lower teacher preference of students predicted higher conflict levels in the teacher-student relationship. Conflictual interactions between the teacher and the student can negatively affect the relationship and perpetuate a deeper dislike of school and learning (Buyse et al., 2009; Cook et al., 2018; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; McCartney et al., 2009). Negativity in teacher-student relationships often forecasted later problematic behavior even after accounting for other factors (Buyse et al., 2008; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Hughes & Cabell, 1999). However, Hughes and Cavell (1999) stated that positive teacher-student relationships could mend aggressive and problematic behavior. When faced with conflict, some teachers find that it is easier to ignore students classified as conflictual compared to putting in the effort to form positive relationships with them (Buyse et al., 2008). However, if the teacher and the student had a positive, high-quality relationship, the students would have less aggression and problematic

behavior the following year (Hughes & Cabell, 1999). It is critical to see the profound impact that students' conflictual relationships with their teachers have on the students, as it not only severely affects their current situation but also, if characterized by negativity, makes it harder for their future in school.

Gender also plays a role in teacher-student relationships. The existing research is not entirely unified regarding students' gender impacting teacher-student relationships (Cook et al., 2018). This may be due to different teachers' perspectives on gender. It also may be due to the context-specific situation and teacher temperament that is affected by how they view their perspective on behavior management or the classroom culture (Horn et al., 2020). However, the majority of the research seems to place girls at a higher advantage compared to their male counterparts in terms of favorable teacher-student relationships (Baker, 2006; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Buyse et al., 2009; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Horn et al., 2020; Split et al., 2012). The difference in gender stereotypes is critical for educators to be aware of and how that can impact students and the classroom climate.

As previously noted, most research favors that girls tend to have an advantage in garnering positive teacher-student relationships more easily. It is essential to note the different biases that teachers may have with students. Teachers may interact differently with students based on gender, such as female teachers in how they relate to the boys and girls in the classroom (Corbin et al., 2020). According to a survey by the National Center for Education Statistics in 2017-2018 regarding public elementary school teachers, 89 percent were female, compared to only 11 percent of male educators (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). The plethora of female elementary education teachers can have ramifications for certain attitudes and implications within the teacher-student relationship that may be more biased based on

gender stereotypes. In teacher-student relationships ranging from kindergarten to fifth grade, the research study suggested that girls had less conflictual and higher levels of closeness in their relationship with their teacher than the other male students (Baker, 2006). Hamre and Pianta (2001) found this same result from their study, as well as Split et al. (2012).

Birch and Ladd's (1997) three aspects of teacher-student relationships: conflict, closeness, and dependency also come into play when unpacking the effects of gender within teacher-student relationships. Regarding closeness, researchers McCartney et al. (2009) found that even the students' personalities could affect teacher perceptions. The study suggested that higher levels of shyness in boys resulted in higher teacher-student relational closeness, contrasting the higher levels of shyness in girls resulted in lower teacher-student closeness (McCartney et al., 2009). Split and colleagues (2012) found that conflict in the teacher-student relationship was more damaging to girls, but the lack of closeness was more harmful to boys. It is important to note how even though studies had shown more negative conflictual relationships with boys, the more damaging aspect of the teacher-student relationship was when students operated outside of expected behavior. One reason for this may be that "teachers are prone to reinforce gender stereotypical behavior and are more likely to respond negative to conflict with girls than boys" (Split et al., 2012). Boys who were more dependent on the teacher had more conflictual behavioral problems and distant relationships with teachers, whereas girls in the study who were dependent had no change (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Teachers have an imperative role to play in their awareness of gender biases and how that can negatively affect teacher-student relationships.

Teacher Personality and Attitude

In order to foster positive teacher-student relationships in the classroom, it is important to

unpack what teachers' attitudes and personalities contribute to maintaining these relationships with the students. Attachment theory is essential to understanding teachers' attitudes, as security within the relationship is vital for students. Hughes and Cavell (1999) suggested secure attachments lead to higher sensitivity and less detached security in the teacher-student relationship. Security in teacher-student relationships correlated to teacher intentionality and engagement in the classroom (Hughes & Cavell, 1999). According to Noddings' (2012) theory of care, one of the primary responsibilities of the teacher, as the carer, is to have an attitude of interest and engagement with the student, as attentiveness is a high and central priority.

Observation and engagement are critical aspects of teachers' attitudes that help to build strong relationships with the students (Buyse et al., 2008; Pena, 2010; Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). How teachers engage with students is just as important as how they impact their students. When teachers respond through hyper-critical feedback or by elevating negative reinforcement, it diminishes the sensitivity and positivity in teacher-student relationships (Henricsson & Rydell, 2004; McCartney et al., 2009; Wentzel, 2002). The more frequent interactions between teachers and students were correlated to conflict in the teacher-student relationship, indicating the frequency of negativity over positive interactions with the student (McCartney et al., 2009). Teachers must engage with students, but their engagement must not lack sensitivity. Engagement is a crucial attitude for educators as they create positive relationships with their students through supportive intentionality and attentiveness.

Another critical attitude teachers must adopt in forming positive relationships is genuine care toward the students in the class. The theory of care heavily supports the importance of care in the classroom, as caring for students must be of utmost importance (Noddings, 1992; Noddings, 2012). Buckler (2015) and Rucinski et al. (2018) found that teachers need to show

support and care toward the students. Pena (2010) suggested that an effective way for teachers to implement care in the classroom was through precise additional educational instruction, lightheartedness, and supportive affirmation. Teachers displayed care by building rapport in the classroom and through sensitivity to students' needs (Buyse et al., 2008; O'Connor & McCartney, 2006; Pena, 2010; Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). Noddings (2012) stated that "time spent on building a relation of care and trust is not time wasted" (p. 774). By building trust with students, the teacher demonstrates care by proving reliable and personally authentic with the student.

One of the teachers in Pena's (2010) study, when asked how to explain a positive relationship with her students, describes how students need to know that their teacher cares and wants the best for them every day. An important summarizing statement regarding the importance of care from a teacher in the study explained that "teachers needed to get to their students' hearts before their head" (Pena, 2010, pp. 276-277). Teachers must have a personal, caring attitude to foster positive teacher-student relationships.

When unpacking certain attitudes and personalities that are important for teachers to display when looking at the formation of positive teacher-student relationships, one of the frequent personality traits that populated was humor. In Pena's (2010) dissertation study of teachers, she found that humor was a key component for teachers in building positive relationships with their students. The study suggested that humor helped break tension, promote advanced learning, find commonalities between the teacher and students, and help foster a high-quality teacher-student relationship (Pena, 2010). Buckler (2015) also found that students associated funniness with positive teacher-student relationships. Humor can make the class more enjoyable and minimize anxiety or stress for students, and "the 'ha-ha' of humor in the

classroom may indeed contribute to the ‘aha!’ of learning” (Pena, 2010, p. 91). When teachers engage students supportively through listening, authenticity, caring, building rapport, and weaving humor into their conversations, they form strong, positive teacher-student relationships.

Already Existing Research Strategies

There are multiple suggestions for ways to form positive teacher-student relationships. These relationships are essential to teachers and students, and it is important to learn more about what ways may be beneficial to implement them. Some main strategies suggested for fostering positive teacher-student relationships are communication, teacher mentorship, and professional development programs.

Communication is a significant strategy used in forming positive teacher-student relationships. Teachers' interaction with their students is critical to creating a positive relationship. Research suggests that early positive interactions at the start of a school year can lay an essential foundation for forming robust teacher-student relationships (Corbin et al., 2020). A positive interaction between the teacher and student may look like a teacher’s display of enthusiasm. One teacher explains this by saying, “you have to be positive and energetic. If you are up there trying to give a lesson and you don't really want to give it, they are going to know it and not listen to you” (Pena, 2010, p. 88). Engaging in communication with the student is paramount to forming a positive relationship.

Dialogue is another critical aspect of communication in forming strong teacher-student relationships. Noddings (1992) perpetuated the importance of dialogue in establishing positive relations and an atmosphere of care and trust between the teacher and student. Pena (2010) explained that “dialogue in the perspective of caring that creates connections with others and helps maintain caring relations” (p. 171). Conversations with students communicate genuine care

and can contribute to forming positive teacher-student relationships. Verbal dialogue between teachers and students, particularly about topics or activities outside the specific classroom context, was foundational in gaining personal connections and trust in the teacher-student relationship (Corbin et al., 2020; Pena, 2010; Rucinski et al., 2018). Communication is not limited to verbal dialogue but includes the importance of nonverbal cues. Nonverbal communication included maintaining eye contact and teachers using hand gestures such as hugs and handshakes with the students (Pena, 2010). A continuing honest and caring conversation is necessary for building positive teacher-student relationships, whether in a verbal or nonverbal discussion.

Teacher mentorship and professional development were both found to be essential strategies to implement to help foster positive teacher-student relationships. Implementing mentor-teacher programs helps teachers be further observed and instructed in developing positive teacher-student relationships (McCartney et al., 2009). Rucinski and colleagues (2018) suggested coaching teachers to help them have stronger teacher-student relationships. Teacher mentorship programs would be an effective strategy in helping to increase teachers' self-awareness and observational skills toward students in the classroom. Professional development programs also increase teachers' self-awareness to better support the growth of positive teacher-student relationships (Cook et al., 2018; McCartney et al., 2009). Pena (2010) promoted using a professional development program to teach educators how to establish positive teacher-student relationships through caring for students by utilizing dialogue to communicate effectively. Professional development programs are suggested as practical strategies to foster positive teacher-student relations.

A professional development strategy called establish-maintain-restore (EMR) focuses on

helping teachers find practical ways to foster positive teacher-student relationships by explicitly looking to establish, maintain, and restore these relationships (Cook et al., 2018). During the establish phase, the goal is for students to feel like their relationship with their teacher is trustworthy and creates a safe space for them to belong. The primary practice emphasized throughout this part of the method is a strategy called “banking time,” which is where a teacher has individual time to listen to students talk about their interests, and the teacher can respond with enthusiasm and validation to their experiences (Cook et al., 2018). This strategy is tantamount to helping create a space where a positive teacher-student relationship can flourish as students feel accepted and heard. During the maintain phase described in this study, the central strategy utilized is the 5-to-1 ratio. The 5-to-1 ratio is a practice that reinforces positive behavior and interactions to strengthen teacher-student relations. The practice emphasizes that for every negative remark a teacher makes to a student, five more are necessary to maintain a trusting relationship (Cook et al., 2018). Henricsson and Rydell (2004) also emphasized the need to turn away from negative reinforcement and instead focus on positive reinforcement with the students. During the restore phase, the focus is on restoring a damaged or negative interaction in a teacher-student relationship. Communication during this phase is key, as communicating by identifying feelings, taking responsibility, and finding compromise are essential to restoring the relationship. The teachers who participated in this study found it practical and helpful in their relationships with their students (Cook et al., 2018). The strategies suggested through this method were found beneficial by the teachers and add to the importance of communication, teacher mentorship, and professional development programs as a practical way to engage teachers in fostering positive relationships with the students in their class.

Theoretical Framework

Noddings' (1992) theory of care is a critical theoretical framework that displays how teacher-student relationships are related. The theory of care and the development of care ethics did not occur until the 1980s (Noddings, 2012). The theory of care, according to Noddings (2012), is based on this premise, "every human life starts in relation, and it is through relations that a human individual emerges" (p. 771). Caring relationships are crucial to how people function at the core of humanity. Noddings (1992) elucidated that the way to show children care is through nurturing positive relationships, which informs how teacher-student relationships can evolve and impact the students. Care has a profound impact on how teachers build relationships with their students.

In this paper, the practical applications of what care looks like in the classroom regarding teacher-student relationships will be divulged and discussed. Noddings emphasized that schools should be where teachers help their students succeed and make caring relationships essential with their students (Noddings, 1992). The theory of care impacts teacher-student relationships because it is the undercurrent that guides the relationship. Teaching out of a place of care helps to grow and flourish children's knowledge and abilities (Pena, 2010). Noddings' theory of care provides a framework for unpacking teacher-student relationships and how teachers can establish a climate of care in the classroom.

Attachment theory impacts teacher-student relationships as it suggests that individuals view significant relationships in their lives as a lens through how they view the world and their interactions with others (Baker, 2006; Cook et al., 2018; McCartney et al., 2009). Attachment theory speculated connections to teacher-student relationships, particularly in how the child perceives safety and emotional support (Cook et al., 2018). John Bowlby worked with youth who experienced problems due to troubling caregiver relationships, which led to his postulation about

the importance of secure attachments with positive adult caregivers (Mooney, 2010). He saw the lack of support for some children and theorized about how secure adult relationships could restore these children.

Attachment theory connects associations between primary caregiver relationships and teacher-student relationships, particularly looking at how the primary caregiver relationships in the home bleed over into the relationships with a child and how that provides a framework that will guide how students interact with their relationships with their teachers (McCartney et al., 2009; O'Connor & McCartney, 2006). Hamre and Pianta (2001) discussed the importance of secure attachment between children and their caregivers. Particularly in stimulating positive peer-to-peer connections, greater self-awareness, building formative friendships, and limiting negative behaviors compared to insecurely attached children (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Thus, according to attachment theory, teachers have a critical relational role in their interactions with the students in their classroom by securing positive, secure attachment relationships with each child.

Verschueren and Koomen (2012) suggested that attachment theory is a central aspect of teacher-student relationships and contributes to a deeper level of understanding within the teacher-child dynamic. An essential theme discussed throughout this research on teacher-student relationships revolves around defining three aspects of the teacher-student relationship (Birch & Ladd, 1997). Birch and Ladd (1997) expressed their framework through closeness, dependency, and conflict lenses. Attachment theory connects to Birch and Ladd's (1997) framework when looking at the teacher-student relationship through the connections of secure and insecure attachments. When children feel safe in their relationships, they feel better equipped to know

themselves and have healthy relationships with adult figures and peer interactions (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Hughes & Cavell, 1999).

Similarly, attachment theorists proposed that students with high levels of closeness and low levels of conflict can depend on teachers as their secure attachment as they grow in the school environment (McCormick et al., 2017). Through understanding attachment theory, there is greater depth in accepting students' importance in developing secure relationships. Teachers can better understand the profound impact of a close relationship with their students.

Attachment theory and Noddings's theory contributed to the current study's design by linking the importance of care and security in the teacher-student relationship (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Noddings, 2012). Since attachment theory connects how students developmentally attribute significant growth, whether positive or negative, concerning their relationships with significant adult figures in their lives, it is essential to see how this theory shapes the role of educators regarding their students (Baker, 2006). It is critical to understand how much weight a teacher has in their relationship with the student. Understanding the weight of relational impact guides the search for practical strategies, and attitudes teachers need to have to create positive relationships with the students in the classroom. Noddings' (2012) theory of care contributed heavily to researching the importance of positive teacher-student relationships. Noddings (1992) stated that a critical way a carer cares for the cared-for is through showing them respect. Regarding teacher-student relationships, the carer is the educator, and the cared-for is defined as the student in the educator's class. A deeper understanding of how attachment theory highlights the importance of children having positive teachers and adult figures in their lives and Noddings' approach of demonstrating care in relationships with students strongly emphasize the study's framework.

Research Purpose

The topic of positive teacher-student relationships encompasses a wide range of aspects. This paper has already divulged how to learn about fostering teacher-student relationships through a theoretical perspective, how vital positive teacher-student relationships are, their importance as role models, awareness of conflict and gender biases, and in teacher attitudes and perceptions. While multiple facets make up formulating positive teacher-student relationships, there are no clear strategies that educators unanimously agree are the best way to implement forming these foundational relationships. This study aims to analyze the best techniques and attitudes for educators to implement through qualitative research on what current elementary education professors are teaching educators regarding this topic. The study also examines the extent to which the themes from the data confirm or contradict previously suggested research strategies. The leading research questions surrounding this premise are, what are relational best practices recommended by education professors to build positive teacher-student relations in the classroom? What are the most effective attitudes teachers need to have to foster positive teacher-student relationships in the classroom? These two questions will shape the direction of the study in unpacking the importance of positive teacher-student relationships.

Methodology

Participants

There were five participants in this research. The researcher protected the participants' confidentiality by utilizing pseudonyms for the professors to conceal the participants' identities (Patton, 2002). The pseudonyms of the five professors are Kim, Maria, Susan, Charles, and Janice. All participants are professors at a private university. Each candidate has previously taught in an elementary school and is currently a professor. The range of how long these

professors have taught elementary varies, the minimum being seven years and the maximum eighteen years. These participants are all teaching or have taught elementary education courses in higher education within the past five years. The sample consists of four female participants: Kim, Maria, Susan, and Janice, and one male participant: Charles. Generally, in qualitative research, sample sizes tend to be smaller. Particularly in this study, convenience sampling was used due to time restraints and the implausibility of gathering a high volume of participants.

Procedures

The Institutional Review Board approved this research study. The researcher sent all elementary education professors at a large, private Christian university an email asking for volunteers to participate in the study. The email outlined the fundamental purpose of the study in investigating positive teacher-student relationships and outlined the qualifications of the participants. The researcher sent a follow-up email the following week to reach out to more participants. The professors were screened through a survey to ensure their capability for the study. Five professors were approved through the screening to participate in the survey. All participants gave their consent through electronic signatures, and the interview parameters were fully explained.

Data Collection

The data collection occurred through a several-step process. First, the professors agreed upon a mutually acceptable time to schedule a Zoom interview for the research. Zoom was utilized to make the participants feel comfortable in the interview wherever it was more convenient. It allowed for easy accessibility to recording the interview. Recorded interviews of the participants ensure the data is more easily understood and eliminates the margin for error

within the transcription process (Fontana & Frey, 1994). These semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed through a digitalized video processor.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted for the study as they allowed for guided yet natural conversations between the researcher and participants (Yin, 2003). The purpose of the discussion was to enable the participants to share their profound experiences and knowledge regarding teacher-student relationships (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The first half of the interviews started with general questions about the nature of positive teacher-student relationships in elementary, strategies to incorporate to build those relationships, challenging factors, and, more specifically, the best relational practice to grow the relationships. The second half of the interviews honed in on certain attitudes that teachers hold that contribute to fostering either positive or negative relationships and which attitudes participants recommend are most effective in building positive teacher-student relationships.

The interviews for the current study were semi-structured. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews, as they held parameters regarding specificity in questions about fostering a positive teacher-student relationship. Still, they were nuanced to allow for a natural conversation flow and further questioning of the participants' responses. Merriam (1998) explains that semi-structured interviews are when "either all of the questions more flexibly worded, or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions" (p. 74). The structure of this interview format allowed for wording the questions more flexibility for the participants, follow-up questions throughout the interviews, and further questioning for clarification on responses.

Data Analysis

Once the transcriptions were complete, the researcher digitally coded through a thematic analysis approach. There are two broad types of coding, often defined as structured or emergent coding. Emergent coding is when no preconceived codes go into the data analysis, whereas structured coding has set codes in place of specific data to find within the research (Quirkos - Simple Qualitative Analysis Software, 2019). The current study incorporated both styles, but to a certain extent. Structured coding was only used to separate question types in the data by organizing professors' responses to the questions. Emergent coding was utilized more frequently to highlight and break apart themes in the data within each question type and as a broad overview of the participants' insights.

The researcher digitally coded the data through several steps to organize and analyze the recurring themes. Data saturation was achieved as even though there was a low number of participants in the study, uniformity in the reoccurrence of themes, even throughout varying questions, was apparent. The first part of the coding process began by utilizing an open coding system, which can be defined as "breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 198). The researcher organized each professor's interview transcriptions into one document. Each research question type had a specific color assigned to it. Then the transcriptions were coded according to the color of the interview questions, which helped organize the data by research questions. The researcher digitally cut the transcripts according to the color-coded question segments into specific categories in separate documents. All the participants' responses to the same question were coded into the same place. The data began to be read through and analyzed for meaning and purpose from the participants'

point of view. The researcher read through the transcript multiple times, and memos were written through comments to record the researcher's analysis of the participants' responses.

Then the data were coded according to axial coding. Axial coding can be described as the "act of relating concepts/categories to each other," as it focuses on integrating the data thematically to form categories from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 198). In this part of the analyzing process, the data was coded as the main ideas pinpointed in the participants' responses were now transferred to a digital whiteboard of sticky notes on Clickup. Each question held a specific sticky note color corresponding to its color coding. Then the main perspectives and responses from the professors were summarized for each question category.

The researcher used axial coding to study the data in each question group for each participant and then gathered the themes per question and across the entire data set. Written responses to the data were recorded in a separate document. The themes were analyzed by writing out what was noticed in the data and the similarities and differences. There was no set system for strategizing how to connect themes, but as Corbin and Strauss (2008) explain, procedures are simply tools, and at the end of the day, the best tools researchers have is to work with their minds and gut feelings. They believe "the best approach to coding is to relax and let your mind and intuition work for you" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 160). The themes emerged seamlessly from the data through similar phrases and meanings.

Results

The focus of the current study revolved around how to foster positive teacher-student relationships and how current educators teach future elementary school teachers how to do this in their future classrooms. The study seeks to answer the identified gap in the literature review of the lack of consistent unified strategies and attitudes that educators need to have to foster

positive teacher-student relationships in the classroom. The study results are broken into two main research questions incorporated into the interviews conducted with the participants.

In order to analyze the gap in the literature, I asked these research questions:

RQ₁: What are relational best practices recommended by education professors to build positive teacher-student relations in the classroom?

RQ₂: What are the most effective attitudes teachers need to have to foster positive teacher-student relationships in the classroom?

Themes

Theme 1: Knowing the Students

Across the board, all the professors indicated the criticality of really knowing your students. Throughout the research, it became clear that while there may be different strategies to show students that they are known, knowing students is a foundational concept that must be the backbone of relationships. Professors explained that teachers who knew their students would invest more and help them feel more supported. Professor Charles and Professor Kim explained that students who felt known would feel welcomed and have a sense of belonging in the classroom. Susan shared how “relationships are the gateway to everything school related.” There is an undercurrent of importance in knowing the students. Maria succinctly summarized this by saying, “so that’s your biggest piece, knowing them.” She indicated that knowing the students was the most significant piece because when educators understand who the students are, knowing what is happening in their lives creates a relationship. Janice echoed these sentiments by saying that, first and foremost, educators need to have a heart for knowing kids. Maria shares,

It all starts with that piece of it, is understanding who the students are, and you take that strategy, the strategies that you have because you know the students, you can then apply them for the best teaching overall.

When understanding strategies for fostering positive teacher-student relationships, the professors assert that knowing students was the basis for the suggested approaches. Maria's thoughts demonstrate her idea that the foundation for implementing strategies starts with understanding the students and utilizing strategies because you know your students so that you can apply those strategies to enhance learning and have the best teaching. Kim explains that knowing your students allows for differentiation in how to meet each student best. She said,

You have to make sure that every child in your classroom achieves success every day, from your strongest to your weakest. If the children feel successful, they're going to want to come back tomorrow. If you've got a kid, might be one of your special education students who is really struggling academically, you've got to create opportunities for success for that kid. And you would be amazed how that can turn them around; they have to feel successful every day, even if it's just the smallest, you know, success and make a huge deal out of it, then that kid's going to want to come back tomorrow because they feel successful and they feel valued.

Kim indicated that by knowing the student, the educator could help students achieve success by differentiating the opportunities for success. That showed the students that their teacher knows and values them. In addition to this, Maria explains that the role of the educator is,

Not being their best friend or anything, but understanding enough about them to be able to design lessons that meet their needs and be able to foster learning in a good way.

Maria's perspective shows that knowing the student allows for a deeper relationship between the teacher and the student and better-designed lessons to enhance students' education.

In the interviews with the professors, they brought up specific practical strategies for knowing students. Janice indicated that a way to understand and know students better is to incorporate get-to-know-you activities. These activities, she suggests, will help build the relationship between teachers and students. Charles suggested utilizing humor as a tool to know students better. He also encouraged educators to acknowledge students' gifts and to "hold students up with their abilities and what they can do." His point centers around the criticality of knowing students, and to do so means having an awareness of their giftings to encourage stronger self-efficacy. Maria also discusses the importance of lightheartedness from the teacher in understanding students' backgrounds. Susan suggests that educators need an attitude of flexibility to get to know each student and utilize wisdom in adapting learning through that perspective. She shares,

I think getting to know the students is a big strategy. Just knowing their audience, knowing about the student, knowing about them as a learner, and then using. And then the next strategy, I would say, is to use that information to try to create the academic environment. You know if you have students that you know are very, very shy, you know, then that changes the way that you do group work and sometimes it doesn't mean that you don't do it or that you just avoid it, but maybe you set it up a little bit differently, you know, and maybe you just do things different. So, I think using that information, getting to know your students and then being able to use that and translate that into, you know, you can't really change the content, but you can change the delivery and the environment.

At the core of each participant's response, strategies were suggested based on the importance of knowing students. However, this was not the only interview part where knowing students was highlighted as critical. Knowing the students was a central theme when it came to unpacking the challenges that teachers face and what attitudes educators need to have to foster positive teacher-student relationships. One of the challenges presented in this study is the disconnect between the teacher and the student's world. The professors discuss how today's world is different and the growing disconnect between teachers and students, as teachers may struggle with relatability in their relationship with students. Charles specifies how teaching and "life in the eighties and nineties was very different than life now in 2022." Kim echoes these sentiments by explaining some of the disconnects even with technology in culture. She says, "you're competing with video games and fast-paced world and cell phones and, you know, texting. They expect an instant response. So it's really a different world." There was a unified agreement among the participants to combat the lack of relatability and gaps that may be present in teachers' experiences with their students. Professors indicated that awareness is the solution. Teachers need to have the realization and self-awareness to know students well.

Professors also indicated the challenge of limited time to know students well. Susan said, "I think time is a big one. It does take time to get to know students. It takes time to ask questions. It takes time to notice things about them. All of that. I think time is certainly a challenge for all teachers and every aspect of their job."

The amount of time and effort it takes to know students can be a challenge that professors argue educators must consider. Janice said, "our time is limited, you know, just trying to go for the one can take a lot of time." There is an emphasis on the immense effort required, but all professors agree that knowing the students is worth it!

The professors all identified knowing students and understanding them in a way that makes them feel welcomed and at home in the classroom as one of the best practices for fostering positive teacher-student relationships. Susan said this in her remark about the best practices for building positive teacher-student relationships. She said, “number one is to smile, and then number two is to get to know them.” Knowing the students is key to fostering positive teacher-student relationships with them.

Theme 2: Personal Interactions

Personal interactions tie together the relationship between teachers and students. Each professor heavily discussed the importance of personal interactions marking positive teacher-student relations. Personal connections include personal communication, specifically personal dialogue with the student, and personal outside-of-school-context interactions that demonstrate trust and foster positive relationships with the students.

One of the most valuable points that all the professors pointed out was how much trust influences building positive teacher-student relationships. Professor Susan explained how personal communication showed students that teachers support them through teachers speaking kindly, their tone of voice, facial expressions, hugs, and affection. All of these gestures, she explained, communicated a personal interest and intentionality to build trust between the teacher and students. Janice also discussed the importance of personal interactions with students and communicating with them, such as greeting them in the hallways or as they walk into class in the morning. Professor Janice explained that teachers could maintain excellent personal communication with students by being consistent. She suggests that teachers can do this by consistently “showing up for bus duty and having a smile and like interacting with them in creative ways when they first come in, like playing music.”

Professor Kim maintained that personal interactions were critical to focus on engaging students and building positive relationships with them. While Kim mentions positive reinforcement as a strategy to do this, she also makes an important distinction when asked about positive reinforcement as the primary strategy in building positive teacher-student relations. Kim said, “it’s a part of it. But certainly, that personal connection has to be made. You have to make an effort.” Kim recognizes that strategies such as positive reinforcement help foster positive teacher-student relationships but must not be separate from creating personal connections with the students.

In every interview, each participant was abundantly clear about the profound importance of educators having personal dialogue to foster positive teacher-student relations in the classroom. Susan relates the criticality of personal conversation to the foundation of trust that each professor said was so critical. She said,

And I think that that is what kind of extends an invitation of trust from a teacher to a student. And then I think the student responds in, you know, by, you know, asking questions. That’s where they feel like they can ask questions or telling teachers about their lives. I think that is another way that it goes from the student to the teacher that trust does, especially in elementary school. You know, my dog... and they tell you about their dog and their cat and their grandma and their brother and, you know, all of the things. Susan explains how this personal dialogue with elementary students is critical for building a positive relationship with the students. She makes a distinction when modeling how to foster positive relationships by scaling the discussion to fit collegiate students more accurately. She shared,

They're not telling me about their cat necessarily, but I can tell the difference, you know? Hey, you know, something seems a little bit different from this week to last week, you know. Are you doing okay? Are you stressed or overwhelmed? You know, I can kind of talk through some of those.

Professor Charles adds to this idea by discussing the importance of authenticity and transparency in personal dialogue with students. Charles was one of the professors who included several personal stories of how he could form positive teacher-student relationships through personal conversations. He gives an example of how he would read with his students during silent reading and then ask what they were reading. Charles shared this story of what happened one day during this time,

One day a student asked me, “well, Mr. Charles, you never tell us about what you're reading. What are you reading?” I thought, oh, wow, because I was reading a pretty heavy book. I mean, it was heavy, not physically heavy, but difficult, challenging concepts. And it was more in the history philosophical realm. And I thought, how am I going to explain this to sixth graders, what I'm reading? And so I told them, and they were intrigued. And so the next day, they said, “well, what else did your book say?” I say that to say that had I not been modeling for them growth mindset, “I'm going to read too, I need to read,” then I don't think it would have been as successful.

Personal dialogue helps students see that their teacher wants to communicate with them about things they are thinking about and helps form a positive relationship between them. The participants all discussed how important honesty and transparency are between teachers and students.

All the participants expressed the importance of personal dialogue with the students. Many professors indicated the immense effort necessary to make the time for personal conversations with the students. Maria suggests this strategy to help teachers form positive, relatable connections with the students. She says,

So getting to know them, um, being open to just having those extra discussions, I feel like that's part of the key. So even maybe taking the time some ways to combat that instead of sitting in the teacher's lounge, having an incentive where you're going to bring in two or three kids for a lunchtime, and you're going to chat and just have a time to get to know them and what their interests are. Allow them to talk to you about things with no agenda, no education, no educational type agenda, except for building a relationship that will create an environment that's better for teaching.

When sharing challenges for fostering positive teacher-student relationships, Susan added a specific suggestion to help connect with challenging students whom the teachers feel are strained. Susan said,

I think another thing is that you can usually find one connection point with the student, you know, whether that is a sport or whether it's an interest that they have, there's usually always something that you can connect on. And I think finding that and then just kind of starting with that and then extending it to other connection points.

It is critical to understand that teachers can dialogue with students about a personal connection that can spark the relationship to grow and be beneficial to both parties.

One of the prominent points that all the participants touched on when it came to the theme of personal interactions was the occurrence of these in non-school related contexts. Janice and Kim suggested attending students' extracurricular activities and going the extra mile to

support them. Maria acknowledges the challenge and sacrifice of going the extra mile. She states the importance of “getting into their lives as much as they can. And this is a stretch.” However, she notes the impact on students of educators going to extracurricular activities and her personal experience seeing this. She shared,

And I have had my own children, I've had a few teachers that attempt to attend one outside event for everybody in their class. And you grab those ones, okay, there's five people that play baseball, so I'm going to hit the ballfield, and I'm just going to spend that Saturday, and I'm going to hit five of my kids, and I'm going to be able to come back and talk about baseball and that just that floats their boat for months.

Maria has seen how teachers can utilize these personal interactions with students' interests to create positive teacher-student relationships.

Professor Charles also strongly supports interacting with students outside of school. He explained his experience with home visits with his wife, who also taught elementary, and they would have students over to their house and enjoy time together outside of the classroom, getting to know and invest in the student. Charles recognizes that this suggestion may not be a feasible option anymore. Instead, he recommends

being conscientious about your students or aware of their extracurricular outside interests. To give you a quick example, I would go to students games or performances. I had a student once who was involved in dance, and she was performing at the mall, actually. And so my wife and I went to the mall to watch her dance, and that just meant a lot to her. And from then on out, it improved our relationship for the rest of the semester. So I did that with sporting events, theater events, and I think teachers should do that.

He and all the other participants indicate the importance of being involved with students' interests outside of school.

Charles continues to deliberate on personal interactions with students by acknowledging some difficulties with relatability and gender. He touches on how few men are in the elementary teaching profession and his perspective on personal interactions to foster positive teacher-student relationships. He said,

Not to show favoritism because I do think all of us are tempted to show favoritism. And so I think being a male teacher, you might be tempted to show favoritism to your boys in your class, especially if you're trying to be a father figure. And there may be just more connections there. So I would just say, be careful not to show favoritism either to boys or girls or to athletes and non-athletes or, you know, those are all issues if you begin to show favoritism, let's say, to athletes, and then the non-athletes begin to see that. Students are very perceptive, and they can see when you're showing that favoritism. So I would just say mindfulness, mindfulness of your own biases.

Teachers need to be self-aware and see the profound impact of personal connections and how to foster those positive relationships with each student in the class.

Theme 3: Caring Deeply for the Students

All the participants strongly promoted care and value as an essential strategy and attitude in fostering positive teacher-student relationships. The professors often intertwine rapport or value as the result of students receiving care from their teachers. Kim demonstrates this early on in her interview when answering about what is necessary for building positive teacher-student relationships. She stated, "I think it's the rapport that you build with students, really letting your students know that you really care about them." Maria echoes these sentiments saying,

“everything centers around valuing the student,” thus emphasizing the importance of teachers’ care toward students. Susan also attributed a lot of weight to educators regarding how their conveyance of care affects students. She explained if students “can feel comfortable in your classroom and if they can feel, you know, valued and if they feel important, then they are.”

Educators must show care to their students, and the professors suggest varying strategies for demonstrating care in teachers’ relationships with students. Some professors mention positive reinforcement as a practical way to show care to students. Maria explained how important it is for students to receive affirmation for doing something right, as “that creates a learning environment where they can feel free to fail.” Maria expresses the importance of teachers’ demonstrating care to students. Janice also suggests listening as a way to show students’ care. Several participants mentioned the criticality of listening to students to understand the root issues or problems further when fostering positive relations with challenging students. Kim explains how to care for students and look for the more pervasive issue. She says,

Is it because they are, you know, not getting the attention at home? Maybe they feel, you know, unloved. Is it because they're angry, you know, because of their home situation? Or you know, is there somebody on the bus that's bullying them, and they come to school angry? So you really have to try to, you know, identify why the child is being challenging, you know, what are the background issues? And if you can kind of understand where the child is coming from and where they're at. Then you can kind of address those issues and, you know, let the child know that you're there for them and that you're on their side.

Kim asserts how a teacher must look at background issues of what a child may be experiencing and demonstrate care and love toward the student by working through the challenge together.

While not many professors linked paternal attachment with educators, Professor Charles made it a point to suggest this similarity. Charles states that parent-like presence is critical to fostering positive teacher-student relationships. He said,

Especially in elementary, a teacher is very much like a parent because they spend so much time with them. And that Latin term in loco parentis in place of the parent is a legal term that applies to teachers that they're in place of the parent. So I think we have to be very much like parents.

In this way, teachers' care for students is suggested to run as deep as a parental attachment is for students. Similar to how students crave a safe and welcome place in their home environment, Janice expresses how teachers have a critical role in constructing an environment of care where students feel safe and can belong in the classroom.

Professors are unanimous that attitudes of care, respect, and valuing students are imperative to fostering positive teacher-student relationships. Professor Susan said an attitude of respect is highly pertinent in promoting positive teacher student-relations. She said,

You see them as a person. That you care about them as a person. That they have value and worth and dignity just because they are a person in your classroom. And then, from a biblical perspective, if you see every student as made in the image of God, and that is how you if that's your attitude towards them, then they're going to feel valued. And you're going to be able to create a positive relationship.

Kim agrees with the importance of children feeling cared for and respected by teachers. She states that it is crucial that teachers “make each and every child feel like, you know, this is the best place on earth and that my teacher really likes me. They really want me in their classroom.”

Many professors noted that a challenge in fostering positive teacher-student relationships is that children may resist receiving care and love from the teacher. Participants' suggestion to solve this difficulty is an attitude of care marked by persistence. Professor Maria and Charles note the importance of grit and determination, especially when caring for students who are more challenging and defiant to receiving care from the educator. Regarding this problem, Professor Susan shared,

I think that of the biggest things is to keep trying and to not get frustrated. I think a lot of times when teachers meet that initial resistance, it can be easy to give up, or well, if they don't want it, then I'm not going to keep doing that. But I think you keep trying.

Perseverance in caring for students, as highlighted by the professors, is a crucial attitude to help create positive teacher-student relationships.

Kim expresses the importance of care in teachers' attitudes toward students by saying, "the students can tell, you know, quickly, who is here for me and who wants me to be loved." She discusses how perceptive students are and how they can quickly tell which teachers display genuine care compared to teachers who are ready to leave. All the professors explicitly mention how teachers' attitudes play an immense role in student relationships and affect everything. Maria succinctly summarizes the professors' thoughts by saying, "the teacher attitude drives what happens in the classroom, 100%." It was abundantly clear that all professors expressed the criticality of care to foster positive teacher-student relationships in the classroom and encouraged future educators to utilize strategies and have an attitude that displays this care to the students.

Discussion

Positive teacher-student relationships are essential for elementary education. Yet, the literature is unclear on the most effective strategies and attitudes that educators need to foster

positive relations with the students in their classes. The current study aimed to address the lack of consistent unified strategies and attitudes that educators need to promote positive teacher-student relationships in the classroom. This study aimed to analyze the best techniques and attitudes for educators to implement through qualitative research on what current elementary education professors are teaching educators regarding this topic.

Since the literature review has made abundantly clear the importance of positive teacher-student relationships, this study is essential in figuring out specific strategies and attitudes that educators need to have to implement these positive relations in the classroom. The participants in the study emphasized the criticality of positive relationships with the students, thus supporting the literature review's claim of the importance of positive teacher-student relations. The findings from the study indicate how elementary professors are engaged in their learning of how to equip future teachers, as they openly acknowledge differences from when they taught elementary to today's society. They recognize how to teach their collegiate students the importance of forming relationships with students in culture today. The study fills the gap indicated by the literature by offering three main themes that encompass the strategies and attitudes that are most effective in fostering positive teacher-student relationships.

The central themes that evolved from the data findings are knowing the students, personal interactions, and caring deeply for the students. These three themes were populated throughout the qualitative study as effective strategies and attitudes beneficial in fostering positive teacher-student relations. There are several critical implications given the thematic findings from the study. First, educators must pay attention to knowing each of the students in their class to build positive relationships with each student. Through dialogue, activities, and humor, teachers can

engage with their students and help them to feel known and welcomed in school. All participants agreed on the criticality of knowing the students.

Another implication of the study was for educators to enter into personal interactions with the students. Positive teacher-student relationships are formed through educators having personal conversations, going to extracurricular activities, and tailoring learning to fit students' interests. Educators must make time to personally engage with each student to form positive relationships with them. Finally, the most crucial attitude specified by the education professors was the importance of care, specifically teachers caring deeply for the students. Positive relationships are formed when educators show students they are valuable, loved, and seen through displaying an attitude of care towards each student. Participants emphasized that students can tell if teachers are authentic, and when students see genuine care from their teacher, it profoundly impacts them. The implications from these findings indicate that more teachers need to implement these strategies and attitudes of knowing the students, creating personal interactions, and caring deeply for the students in their care.

Limitations

The researcher noted several limitations of the study. First, the participants were all from a university in the southeastern part of the United States. Therefore, a widespread generalization cannot be obtained from the data. Secondly, all the participants were from the same private university, so there was little variation from different universities in the data. Perceptions from the professors may be more specific to the university. Another limitation is the sample size; there were only five participants due to time constraints.

There is diversity among the participants, in how there was one male participant and four female participants. All the participants have taught in elementary education for at least five

years, and there is diversity in the number of years in higher education, as many of the professors have taught higher education for almost two decades. The other half have taught for less than a decade. Most of the data was gathered from the researcher's understanding and analysis of the participants' interview responses. Each participant offered profound insight into fostering teacher-student relationships and how their role as collegiate professors provides insight to future elementary educators. However, a limitation is the participants speak out of their own experiences, and the responses are subjective due to each person's perceptions.

Future Research

The study examined the importance of strategies and attitudes educators need to foster positive teacher-student relationships in the classroom. Through the interview process of the study, each participant contributed to the discussion attitudes focused on knowing and caring deeply for the students, as well as strategies focusing on the need for personal interactions between the teacher and students to build positive relations in the classroom. Through the data analysis, while there wasn't often one singular attitude or strategy that was hands-down the best for elementary educators to implement, it was clear that caring for and knowing the students and personal conversations and interactions were essential for these relationships. The beauty of individuality is that each professor acknowledges slightly different strategies with the same goal: to know, care for, and have personal interactions with all students. Even though there is variation in the direct application of specific strategies, it doesn't mean that the professors disagreed on loving the students. Instead, it represents the variety of personalities in the best way to reach students in fostering positive teacher-student relationships.

Future research would be helpful regarding interviewing specific elementary education teachers. In this study, interviewing professors filled the literature gap of what future elementary

educators are learning about fostering positive teacher-student relationships. A qualitative research study examining specific strategy interventions for elementary educators to utilize during a school year would add additional insight to the research on fostering positive relations in the classroom. Similar to the study, deeper connections could be found through future qualitative research involving both perspectives of elementary education professors and the prospective elementary education students under them.

Conclusion

The researcher's interest as a future educator and experience in the classroom with students led to questions regarding the importance of fostering positive teacher-student relationships in elementary questions. The researcher questioned how future educators taught by elementary education professors hoped to examine practical strategies or attitudes suggested by elementary education professors to build positive teacher-student relations. The study fills in the literature gap by making broad connections at the underlying values essential to implement strategies and attitudes for teachers to foster positive relationships with the students in their classrooms. The themes found in the study strongly correlate to existing research about the importance of teachers knowing students, caring for them, and maintaining personal interactions to foster positive teacher-student relations.

School systems need to understand the criticality of positive teacher-student relationships and must implement teaching seminars so that educators may be educated on how to practically show their students the care and personal interactions that are so necessary. The administration could implement mandatory training in fostering relationships marked by care to students based on Noddings' (1992, 2012) theory of care and how to integrate personal interactions into the teachers' jobs. Positive teacher-student relationships profoundly impact educators and students.

Implementing strategies based on care, knowing the students, and incorporating personal interactions are essential for elementary educators to practice in their relationships with students.

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Appendix A- Interview Questions

1. In general, how would you describe what positive teacher-student relations look like in an elementary school setting?
2. How does your experience with fostering positive teacher-student relationships affect the way you teach future educators?
3. As you are instructing future elementary education students in your classroom, what are some necessary strategies that these future educators should implement to build positive teacher-student relations with their future students?
4. What factors create challenges for teachers as they strive to form positive teacher-student relations in the classroom? How can future educators navigate these difficulties to nurture positive and beneficial relationships with the students in their classrooms?
5. What is the best relational practice necessary for future educators to utilize in building positive teacher-student relations in the classroom?
6. Based off your experience, what attitudes have you or other elementary teachers displayed, that contributed to developing positive relationships with the students?
7. How do teachers' attitudes affect the way they either build or neglect building positive teacher-student relations in the classroom?
8. What are the most effective attitudes that teachers need to have to foster positive teacher-student relationships in the classroom?

Appendix B- Recruitment Email

Dear Professor:

As a student in the School of Education at XXXXXXXX University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for my Senior Honors Thesis. The purpose of my study is to investigate the relational best practices recommended by education professors to build positive teacher-student relations in an elementary education setting. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must have previously taught at an elementary school, be currently employed as education professors at XXXXXXXX University, and they must currently teach or have taught an elementary education class at the collegiate level in the past 5 years. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in virtual, video-recorded interview with me (30-40 minutes) through Zoom. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please click [here](#) to complete a screening survey. Once the screening survey is completed, I will review the surveys and contact eligible participants to schedule an interview.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you are determined to be eligible and choose to participate, you will need to read through the consent document, electronically sign the document, and email it back to me before the interview.

Thank you for your time, and do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions!

Sincerely,

Mandi Lehman

Appendix C- Screening Survey

Screening Questions

1. What is your first name?
2. What is your last name?
3. What is your email?
4. Are you employed as a professor at XXXXXXXX University?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
5. Are you employed under the School of Education at XXXXXXXX University?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
6. Do you currently teach, or have you taught an elementary education class at the collegiate level in the past 5 years?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
7. In your previous teaching experience, have you previously taught at an elementary school?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Appendix D- Consent Document

Title of the Project: Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

Principal Investigator: Mandi Lehman, Elementary Education Student at Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, participants must have previously taught at an elementary school, be currently employed as education professors at XXXXXXXX University, and they must currently teach or have taught an elementary education class at the collegiate level in the past 5 years. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to investigate the most effective strategies used to foster positive teacher-student relations in elementary school. The study aims to understand the attitudes, beliefs, and practices that are most effective for future educators to utilize in building positive relationships with the students in their classroom.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a 30- to 40-minute, video-recorded, virtual interview with me through Zoom.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include equipping future educators with the most effective strategies in fostering positive and beneficial relationships with the students in their classroom. It will also benefit society by equipping the next generation of teachers and elevating the level of excellence for future students due to positive relationships with their teachers.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer, and only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Mandi Lehman. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED]

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

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., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix E- IRB Approval Email



- Dashboard
- Studies
- Submissions
- Tasks

The IRB is currently reviewing a large number of studies, so review times may be extended. We appreciate your patience

Study Details

Approved

IRB-FY21-22-623 Fostering Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

PDF

Delete

Approval Date: 03-30-2022	Expiration Date: N/A	Organization: Teacher Education	Active Submissions: N/A
Admin Check-In Date: N/A	Closed Date: N/A	Current Policy Post-2018 Rule	Sponsors: N/A

Appendix F- CITI Training Certificate



Completion Date 10-Jan-2022
Expiration Date 09-Jan-2025
Record ID 45927998

This is to certify that:

Mandi Lehman

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of
certification through CME.

Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher
(Curriculum Group)
Social & Behavioral Researchers
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Liberty University



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wc1a6c594-5562-4d5e-baff-4da4424f5abb-45927998