TEACHER IMMEDIACY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TEACHERS WHO EDUCATE

AT-RISK STUDENTS IN A HIGH SCHOOL ALTERNATIVE SETTING:  A

TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY


by

Connie Oxendine Locklear

Liberty University



A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education



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**ABSTRACT**

TEACHER IMMEDIACY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TEACHERS WHO EDUCATE AT-RISK STUDENTS IN A HIGH SCHOOL ALTERNATIVE SETTING:  A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY STUDY  (under the direction of Dr. Austin) School of Education, Liberty University, 2015

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to gain a deeper, richer understanding of teacher immediacy from the perspective of teachers who educate at-risk students in an alternative setting. This study consisted of 12 teachers who educate high school students that have dropped out of school or were potential dropouts prior to entering the alternative program.  The study was designed to answer the following questions:  (a) What are the opinions of teachers who work in an alternative setting about teacher immediacy? (b) What do teachers state as obstacles to establishing teacher immediacy? (c) What additional resources do teachers state they need for establishing teacher immediacy? (d) Do teachers who teach in an alternative setting perceive that teacher immediacy positively impacts student success and why or why not?  Teachers completed the Nonverbal Immediacy Scale-Self Report (NIS-S) (Richmond, McCroskey, & Johnson, 2003), participated in an interview process, and a focus group meeting.  Moustakas' (1994) 7-Step modified version of van Kaam's method was used to analyze the data.  There were several identifiable themes in this study.  The themes were:  (a) students pay attention to immediacy behaviors, (b) positive student-teacher relationships are important to at-risk students, (c) trust is crucial for students, (d) students need to know teachers care, (e) educators should be compassionate, (f) teachers must be flexible, (g) educating the whole child, and (h) student performance is based on teacher immediacy behaviors.  There was

also an unexpected theme identified from the study, which was teachers feel they are making a difference in the lives of the students they work with.

**Dedication**

I would like to dedication this work to my wonderful husband, Chris, who has always been my biggest support.  Thank you for making my dreams your dreams.  Most importantly, thank you for praying for me when I felt I could not go another step, for cooking, cleaning, and for giving me the time and space I needed to achieve my goal.  I thank God every day for sending you in my life; I love you.

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To my daughter Kristin, son Johnathan, son-in-law Christopher, daughter-in-law Whitney, and granddaughter Isabella, I am so grateful for each of you and I love you more than you will ever know. More importantly, I am not only proud to call you son and daughter but brother and sister in Christ.

To my parents, Joe and Gladys Locklear, thank you for setting a Godly example before your children. You did not have a lot of monetary things but you gave each of us something that is more valuable than gold. You instilled in us to place God first, work hard, believe, and we could accomplish anything. I love you both.

To my in-laws, Charlie and Sara Locklear, thank you for Chris. You raised such a wonderful man and I am proud to call him my husband.

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To my church family, thank you for your prayers and your love.

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chair.  My first intensive class at Liberty University was with Dr. Austin.  It was during that time I became so impressed by her that I asked her if she would be my chair when I got to that point. I was truly blessed to have Dr. Austin as my chair.  She was quick to respond to all my questions and concerns and always provided an encouraging word that motivated me to keep going.  Thank you Dr. Austin for guiding me on this journey.

Next, I would like to thank Dr. Christopher Clark, my committee member.  Dr. Clark and I attended undergraduate school together and we have worked in the same school district since the beginning of our careers.  When Dr. Clark returned to Liberty University to complete his doctoral degree, he called me and inspired me to seek my degree as well.  It only seemed fitting that he would be part of this journey with me.  I am honored to not only call him colleague but friend.  I will be forever grateful to you for thoughts, prayers, and support.

Thirdly, a special thank you to my professional mentor and committee member, Dr. Zoe Locklear.  As an undergraduate student, Dr. Locklear took me under her wing.  She was one of those individuals who saw potential in me when I did not see it.  She provided me with so many great opportunities.  As a young woman seeking her undergraduate degree, I thought my bachelor's degree was all I needed.  However, Dr. Locklear gave me a desire to reach for bigger and better things; she made me believe that I could accomplish anything.  When I got to this process, she was the person I wanted to take this journey with me.  Thank you Dr. Locklear for believing in me.

I would like to thank my school district for supporting me during this long process and to the participants who gave their time by contributing to the data collection.  A special thank you to Dr. Etta Baldwin and Dr. Karen Stanley who served as peer reviewers and provided me with

excellent feedback.  I have truly been blessed with an abundance of support; thus, for all those whose names I did not call in this paper, thank you for the depths of my heart.

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**CHAPTER ONE:  INTRODUCTION**

Teachers all across the nation are feeling the effects of educational accountability and the stakes are higher than ever before (Glasman & Conley, 2008; Martin & Mottet, 2011; Santos, 2012).  In most states, teacher performance is connected to student performance (Glasman & Conley, 2008; Martin & Mottet, 2011; Santos, 2012) and educators are expected to prepare a diverse student population to be career and college ready (Sheehy, 2012).  Yet, due to significant budget cuts in education funding, school districts are now facing countless financial woes resulting from a lack of funding.  These cuts have resulted in fewer opportunities for professional development, increased class sizes, and reductions in personnel and resources that would provide teachers with the necessary tools they need to help their students achieve success (Santos, 2012).  According to a recent employment satisfaction survey, teacher morale is the lowest it has been in over a decade and many educators expressed plans to leave the profession within a few years (Santos, 2012).

Since the national economy is in a state of high unemployment and uncertainty, an increasing number of students are becoming at-risk and could become potential dropouts.  Public education officials have also come to realize that with so many negative social factors facing high school students (Parkay, Hass, & Anctil, 2010), traditional school settings may not be the most suitable environment for some students (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009).  Therefore, an increasing number of districts are developing and implementing alternative settings to help at-risk students achieve academic success.  Educators who teach in alternative settings often recognize that many of the students they work with have not had supportive and encouraging school experiences that included positive student-teacher relationship (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009).  Teacher immediacy behaviors can help develop such caring student-teacher relationships

(Andersen, 1979; Martin & Mottet, 2011; Sibii, 2010); therefore, everyone who works in alternative settings must understand the importance of displaying teacher immediacy behaviors (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009).

## Background

Policy makers have found it difficult to adequately define at-risk students. At-risk is a generic term that is used to identify a variety of student problems (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007; Parkay et al., 2010). Typically, at-risk students face a myriad of negative social factors such as living in poverty, are victims of crime and violence, lack adult supervision, and experience extreme stress (Parkay et al., 2010). At-risk students come from various backgrounds and socioeconomic levels yet, children who live in poverty and single parent homes are more likely to drop out of school (Ormrod, 2008). African American, Hispanic, and Native American students are more likely to withdraw from school before high school graduation than their European American and Asian American counterparts with the dropout rate higher with males than females (Ormrod, 2008). Many at-risk students who have not experienced success at school have the potential to become high school dropouts (US Legal, Inc., 2013). Those who work with at-risk students state that dropping out of school is not a single event, but a process (Kronholz, 2012). "Schools can now predict with better than 80% accuracy students in the third grade who will later drop out of school" (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007, p. 53). Researchers and policy makers ask what can be done to deter at-risk students from withdrawing from school when they are academically behind their peers and see dropping out as their only option (Kronholz, 2012)?

Many school districts are looking at alternative school settings as a way to meet the needs of at-risk students. School officials understand that traditional settings may not be the appropriate environment for some students and that an alternative setting may prevent at-risk

students from dropping out of school (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009). According to Devadoss and Foltz (1996), when students do not feel supported and encouraged by their teachers, they are less likely to attend school or class which will result in academic failure. Many at-risk students who participate in alternative school settings have not had an overall positive school experience; often lack supportive student-teacher relationships (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009). However, a significant amount of research implies that student-teacher relationships can be vitally important for at-risk students success (Decker, Dona, & Christenson, 2007; Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008; Lagana-Riordan, Aguilar, Franklin, Streeter, Kim, Tripodi, & Hopson, 2011; Murray & Zvoch, 2011; Peguero & Bondy, 2011). "Close positive teacher–child relationships have been viewed as a source of security and emotional support for children as they negotiate demands in school and explore their school environment" (Doumen, Koomen, Buyse, Wouters, & Vershueren, 2012, p. 62). This is especially true for the at-risk student; therefore, those who work in alternative settings must understand how crucial relationships are to student success and work to display teacher immediacy behaviors (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009).

Mehrabian (1969) first introduced the concept of immediacy and defined immediacy "as the extent to which communication behaviors enhance closeness to and nonverbal interaction with another" (p. 203). He concluded that nonverbal immediacy could have a greater impact than verbal immediacy behaviors (1969); suggesting actions can have more influence than words. According to Mehrabian (1971), people connect with things and individuals they like or prefer and ignore items and individuals they dislike or view negatively.

Teacher immediacy has been researched a great deal over the past two decades and various studies have shown that teacher immediacy can positively impact student attendance, students' perceptions of their instructors, and student cognitive learning (Henning, 2012;

Richmond, Lane, & McCroskey, 2006; Rocca & McCroskey, 1999; Rocca, 2004).  According to Andersen, (1979) immediacy behaviors have the potential to lead to supportive student-teacher relationships.  Witt, Wheeless, and Allen (2004) in their meta-analytical review stated, "a positive and substantial relationship was found between overall teacher immediacy and overall student learning" (p. 195).

Two types of immediacy behaviors exist: Verbal and nonverbal (Henning, 2012; Richmond et al., 2006).  Verbal immediacy behaviors are comprised of praise, humor, feedback and self-disclosure, while nonverbal immediacy behaviors consist of movement, smiling, eye contact, tone of voice, forward leaning, and other body language (Henning, 2012; Mehrabian, 1972; Richmond et al., 2006; Sibii, 2010; Santilli, Miller, & Katt, 2011; Velez & Cano, 2008).  Teacher immediacy has often been addressed in the higher education settings but there is little research at the K-12 level and even less with students who attend alternative settings.

## Problem Statement

The problem in this study is that many at-risk students who attend alternative settings have experienced academic failure and have had a lack of exposure to positive teacher immediacy behaviors that can result in supportive student-teacher relationships (Andersen, 1979; Martin & Mottet, 2011; Sibii, 2010).  Many of these students enter the educational arena already behind their peers both cognitively and socially (Kronholz, 2012).  After years of falling behind academically, students begin to alienate themselves from the overall school setting and see themselves as academic failures.  Finn and Schrodt (2012) state

> When students perceive that instructors respond to their communicative attempts
> with verbal and nonverbal cues that communicate understanding, students are
> more likely to find the course content meaningful, feel competent to accomplish

course objectives, and perceive they have an impact on the learning environment

(p. 125).

By increasing teacher immediacy behaviors in alternative settings, at-risk students may achieve

success and graduate from high school.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to gain a deeper, richer

understanding of teacher immediacy through the lived experiences and perceptions of teachers

who educate at-risk students in an alternative setting.  Teacher immediacy is defined as verbal

and nonverbal cues that teachers display in their instruction (Henning, 2012; Richmond et al.,

2006).  By gaining a deeper and richer understanding of how teacher immediacy behaviors can

impact the overall school success of at-risk students, school districts can devise plans that will

help increase student graduation rates and decrease drop-out rates.  The phenomenon that is

being addressed in this research is teacher immediacy.

## Significance of the Study

A meta-analytical review conducted by Witt et al. (2004) indicated a correlation

between teacher immediacy and affective learning outcomes.  Furthermore, additional

research provides evidence that teacher immediacy behaviors can encourage students to

comply with teacher' requests and expectations, as well as help improve student-teacher

relationships (Burroughs, 2007; Henning, 2012; Kerssen-Griep & Witt, 2012).  Student-

teacher relationships that are supportive and encouraging can help to improve a student's

overall school success (Alderman & Green, 2011; Burroughs, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004;

Rey, Smith, Yoon, Somers, & Barnett, 2007; Sibii, 2010; Velez & Cano, 2008).

This study was conducted at an alternative high school site with at-risk students who have faced or are currently dealing with various negative social factors. Most of the students at the alternative school are potential dropouts and have fallen academically behind their graduation cohort. For many of these students, this alternative school site is their last resort or option to get a high school diploma. The results from this study will provide additional evidence that teacher immediacy behaviors can positively impact a student's overall school success, therefore assisting school districts in their efforts to improve teaching and learning. The results could be used to provide professional development to educators who teach in alternative settings as well as in traditional schools. There are many at-risk students who elect to remain at traditional schools; thus, all students could benefit from supportive student-teacher relationships.

## Research Questions

In order to gain a deeper and richer understanding of how teacher immediacy behaviors impact at-risk students, one must first understand the opinions teachers have about teacher immediacy, what they consider to be barriers to teacher immediacy, what resources they need to increase immediacy behaviors, and whether teachers believe that immediacy behaviors can positively impact student success. Therefore, this study addressed the following research questions.

**Research Question One:**

*What are the opinions of teachers who work in an alternative setting about teacher immediacy?* Most students who attend an alternative setting are at-risk students and have not been exposed to positive teacher immediacy behaviors, which can result in supportive student-teacher relationships (Andersen, 1979; D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009; Lagana-Riordan et al.,

2011).  Prior to attending an alternative program, many of these students have experienced poor success at their traditional schools and view the alternative site as their best opportunity for achieving a high school diploma (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011).  Numerous studies have shown that teacher immediacy has the potential to positively impact a student's overall school success (Henning, 2012; Richmond et al., 2006; Rocca, & McCroskey, 1999; Rocca, 2004).  When children form an early attachment with an adult figure, they are more likely to develop positive and supportive relationships with other adult figures in their lives (Fitton, 2012; Rey et al., 2007).  As much as children need food for their physical body, they also need love, respect, security, and a sense of belonging for their emotional wellbeing (Maslow, 1962).

**Research Question Two:**

*What do teachers state as obstacles to establishing teacher immediacy?*  Those who teach at alternative school sites realize that at-risk students deal with many negative social factors which can directly impact students' lives (Parkay et al., 2010).   Also, during an era in which accountability for teachers and students has increased, education budgets have been cut resulting in over-sized classes, a decrease in resources, and the elimination of professional development (Glasman & Conley, 2008; Martin & Mottet, 2011; Santos, 2012).  By understanding what's hindering teachers from displaying teacher immediacy behaviors, professional development activities can be developed to recognize those obstacles and produce strategies on how to deal with them.

**Research Question Three:**

*What additional resources do teachers state they need for establishing teacher immediacy?*  Once teachers understand those factors that interfere with their display of teacher

immediacy behaviors, teachers can determine the resources they will need to ensure that their classroom instruction includes teacher immediacy behaviors.  Districts as well as individual schools can use such information to develop professional development activities and provide educational resources that will increase teacher immediacy behaviors in the classroom.

**Research Question Four:**

*Do teachers who teach in an alternative setting perceive that teacher immediacy positively impacts student success and why or why not?*  In 1979, Andersen's work showed that teacher immediacy behaviors could impact affective learning.  Since then, a great deal of research has been conducted on teacher immediacy and how it impacts student learning (Allen, Witt, & Wheeless, 2006; Burroughs, 2007; Finn & Schrodt, 2012; Henning, 2012; Richmond et al., 2006; Rocca, 2004; Witt et al., 2004).

The information from this study is based on the lived experiences of the participants.  The phenomenon under investigation is teacher immediacy.  Thus, if the perceptions of those who teach at-risk students provide evidence that teacher immediacy impacts the overall success of students, then the study could be used as a supportive document for future research on teacher immediacy.

## Research Plan

This transcendental phenomenological study describes the perceptions of teachers who educate at-risk students in an alternative setting. Three forms of data collection were used for this study: Survey, interviews, and a focus group session, respectively.  This study was comprised of 12 educators who work with at-risk students at the alternative setting in the southeast part of the United States.  Twenty educators volunteered for the study but 12 were randomly selected.  The ages of the participants range from 40 to 75, nine were female, seven of the educators were

retirees who work part-time with the alternative program. The ethnicities of the participants were seven American Indians, three African Americans, and two Caucasians. The demographics of the participants are representative of the alternative site.

After consent forms were signed, participants completed the first from of data collection, which was the Nonverbal Immediacy Scale-Self Report (NIS-S) (Richmond et al., 2003). The NIS-S has an approximate alpha reliability of .90 (Richmond et al., 2003). The second form of data collection was the individualized interviews. According to Creswell (2013), by interviewing participants, a qualitative researcher will be able to collect data from those individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. Lastly, participants shared their viewpoints of teacher immediacy through a focus group meeting. A focus group meeting will allow participants to continue to share the "how" and "what" of their lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Once the data was collected, I utilized Moustakas' seven steps to analyze the data.

**Rationale for Transcendental Phenomenology Research Study**

Transcendental phenomenology seeks to bring meaning to the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). In order for the researchers to gain knowledge about the phenomenon in a transcendental phenomenology, they must be "open to see what is, just as it is, and to explicate what is in its own terms" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41), which is why this approach was selected for this study. By employing a transcendental phenomenological study, I sought to view the data from a state of pure consciousness, free from prejudices, judgments, or beliefs (Moustakas, 1994).

The goal of this research study is to gain a deeper understanding of how teacher immediacy can impact the overall success of students. Teacher perspectives can help provide insight into how students respond to those who display teacher immediacy behaviors as well as

how those behaviors can lead to an encouraging and supportive student-teacher relationship. The participant data can also provide educational best practices that both public and private education programs can implement into professional development training activities. This study can be used to improve teacher quality, which can result in an increase in student success, an overall goal of education.

## Delimitations

The delimitations of this study include the site selection, participant selection, methodology, and the self-reporting survey. The participants of this study were teachers who educate at-risk students in an alternative setting. Each faculty member serves as an onsite teacher for at-risk high school students who participate in a hybrid-learning environment. The site selection is an alternative program in a public school district in the southeastern part of the United States. Polkinghorne (1989) recommends 5 to 25 participants for a phenomenological study; this study will be comprised of 12 participants who teach at-risk students in an alternative school.

The alternative school site was selected because most of the students who attend this setting are at-risk students who are potential dropouts. Many of these students had not experienced a supportive student-teacher relationship prior to attending the alternative setting. According to the research, a positive student-teacher relationship often stems from the display of teacher immediacy behaviors (Gendrin & Rucker, 2007; Henning, 2012; Richmond et al., 2006; Velez & Cano, 2008; Velez & Cano, 2012, Witt et al., 2004). Some students attend the alternative site as recourse to suspension or expulsion due to behavioral issues at their traditional high school. A small percentage of the students at the site are battling severe illnesses that require a smaller setting and flexible attendance requirements. Also, some students are full-time

employees, some are married, some have children, as well as other social factors. Educators at the alternative site are well aware of the various issues their students are facing.

Potential limitations include the small sample size, the geographical location of the study, and the culture of the community. The poverty rate for the community is one of the highest in the state and nation; therefore, the school district has a large number of at-risk students. The community is one of the most diverse in the United States. Approximately 70% of the county's population consists of Native Americans, African Americans, and Hispanics while the student population is approximately 84% minority.

## Definitions

*Alternative setting*—a non-traditional educational setting which consist of numerous approaches to teaching and learning to meet the educational demands of at-risk students (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011)

*At-risk students*—students who are exposed to a variety of negative social factors and are at risk of becoming a high school dropout (Parkay et al., 2010)

*Credit-recovery*—students can receive credit-recovery for a course they failed by making up missed assignments or retaking failed tests or assignments and replacing the failing grade with the updated grade which allows course credit (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013)

*Graduation cohort group*—students who are educated during the same time period and graduate within four years with the students they entered ninth grade with (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013).

*Hybrid program*—online instruction coupled with on-site face-to-face tutoring; it is also known as blended learning (University of Washington at Bothell, 2015)

*Teacher immediacy*—verbal and nonverbal cues teachers display in their instruction that help to

develop a connection between the teacher and the students (Andersen, 1979)

*Verbal immediacy*—spoken behaviors such as praise, humor, self-disclosure, and humor

(Gendrin & Rucker, 2007; Henning, 2012; Mehrabian, 1972)

*Nonverbal immediacy*—unspoken behaviors such as eye contact, proximity, tone of voice,

gestures and body language (Gendrin & Rucker, 2007; Henning, 2012; Mehrabian, 1972)

# CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

## Introduction

Teaching and learning are terms that should go hand in hand. However, there are instances in which educators feel they are truly teaching content, but from the student perspective very little learning is actually occurring. Since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, testing has become a major component of the 21st century classroom (Shelly, 2012). Educators throughout the nation are working to prepare their students to be successful on state-mandated standardized tests while at the same time trying to maintain their career status, since in many states, teacher evaluations are connected to student performance (Glasman & Conley, 2008). As a result, teachers across the nation are focusing on improving their instruction by implementing the next educational trend in order to help students meet required accountability goals.

There are many instructional best practices that teachers can employ; however, improving the student-teacher relationship is an instructional strategy that is often ignored and in some cases not seen as an educational best practice (Aultman, Williams-Johnson, & Schutz, 2009). Educators spend so much time focused on teaching the content that sometimes the most important component of teaching, the child, is overlooked. When students believe teachers are concerned about their overall wellbeing in addition to the content, they become more engaged in the learning process, which can result in a reduction of behavioral issues (Alderman & Green, 2011; Burroughs, 2007; Goodboy & Myers, 2009; Klem & Connell, 2004; Rey et al., 2007). Various research studies have shown that student-teacher relationships can help increase student engagement and decrease inappropriate student behavior (Alderman & Green, 2011; Burroughs, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Rey et al., 2007; Split, Hughes, Wu, & Kwok, 2012).

Student engagement has been shown to be a key factor in student achievement (Burroughs, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Split et al., 2012). When students are engaged in the learning process, they have a greater chance of achieving success (Burroughs, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Split et al., 2012). Teachers who provide guidance and support will help increase the confidence level of their students and develop an educational setting where learning will become important and exciting (Lumpkin 2007). Students who perceive that their teachers have created a caring and warm environment where learning is expected and reinforced are less likely to become at-risk learners and more likely to pursue a post-secondary degree (Klem & Connell, 2004). These findings imply that a positive student-teacher relationship has the potential to positively impact a student's overall school success.

A positive student-teacher relationship not only impacts student achievement but it can alter student behavior. According to Alderman and Green (2011), when the student-teacher relationship improves, students are less aggressive and more willing to be actively engaged in the learning process because they realize their teachers are concerned about their overall well-being. However, when the student-teacher relationship is viewed as unhelpful or uncaring, it can breed violent, aggressive, and unwanted behavior in the classroom and can result in academic failure (Rey et al., 2007). Students are more willing to adhere to classroom expectations and procedures when they feel cared for and valued. Thus, positive student-teacher relationships can decrease inappropriate student behavior and improve students' overall school success (Alderman & Green, 2011; Rey et al., 2007).

The research supports the notion that when students perceive they are part of a warm and caring environment that fosters high expectations and support, they are more likely to achieve academic success (Velez & Cano, 2008). In many cases, student perceptions of their teachers are

based on the verbal and non-verbal cues that teachers display which have been defined as teacher immediacy (Gendrin & Rucker, 2007; Henning, 2012; Richmond et al., 2006; Velez & Cano, 2008; Velez & Cano, 2012; Witt et al., 2004). Therefore, the student-teacher relationship can be impacted by verbal and non-verbal teacher immediacy (Gendrin & Rucker, 2007; Henning, 2012; Richmond et al., 2006; Velez & Cano, 2008; Velez & Cano, 2012, Witt et al., 2004). Also, these communication behaviors can lead to an increase in student motivation, which can result in a positive school experience (Sibii, 2010; Velez & Cano, 2008; Velez & Cano, 2012).

This literature review provides an extensive amount of research on teacher immediacy. It addresses the influence that teacher immediacy has on a student's overall school success. This section contains an introduction, a theoretical framework, a literature review, and a summary. This section also identifies the gap in the literature that supports the need for this study.

## Theoretical Framework

There are various theories that can be applied to teaching immediacy but the two that were selected for this study are the Attachment Theory and Maslow's Motivational Theory. Theories provide "an explanation of phenomena by first specifying a set of theoretical constructs. A theoretical construct is a concept that is inferred from observed phenomena" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 7). The two theories that were selected imply the essential needs of humans must be met before they can achieve their highest potential. These theories support the need for teacher immediacy, which can lead to an encouraging and supportive student-teacher relationship. Various research provides evidence that a positive student-teacher relationship has the potential to impact a student's overall school success (Alderman & Green, 2011; Burroughs, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Rey et al., 2007; Sibii, 2010; Velez & Cano, 2008). The

theoretical framework provided an understanding of how these theories support the concept of teacher immediacy and serves as the foundation for this study.

**Attachment Theory**

The Attachment Theory is based on the work of Bowlby and Ainsworth. While working at a school for troubled children, Bowlby worked closely with two young men (Bretherton, 1992). One of the boys was a loner, displayed a lack of affection, did not have a mother figure in his life, and had been expelled from school (Bretherton, 1992). The second student followed Bowlby around the school site and became Bowlby's shadow (Bretherton, 1992). The differences in these two students led Bowlby to believe that family relationships could have an influence on personalities, and as a result, his interest in childhood psychology increased (Bretherton, 1992).

After World War II, many children were left as orphans and it was during this time that Bowlby began to observe the behaviors of children who had been away from their mothers for a long period of time (Miller, 2011). Based on his observations, Bowlby concluded that these children exhibited signs of "maternal deprivation" (Miller, 2011, p. 349). He also noted that an "early social attachment between infant and caretaker is crucial for normal development" (Miller, 2011, p. 349). It was during his work as a psychiatrist that he treated many children who were mentally distressed and came to realize that the common denominator for most of the children was the closeness to a mother (Miller, 2011).

Bowlby defined the Attachment Theory as an emotional bond that connects humans and has "indirect influence in that it plays an ongoing role during development in children's selection of environments, degree and type of engagement in activities in the environment, and interpretations of their experiences" (Miller, 2011, p. 349). Two major themes evolved from

Bowlby's work: (a) attachment is biologically necessary and (b) the mother and child bond is the most essential element in child development (Fitton, 2012). When this attachment has been disrupted, the infant's first response is to protest which leads to feelings of despair where the infant may display signs of grief, thus resulting in detachment (Miller, 2011). Additionally, in some cases the lack of adult attachment may result in psychological disorders (Miller, 2011).

Ainsworth served in World War II, and like Bowlby, her professional career was shaped by the war (Bertheton, 1992). The majority of Bowlby's work was based on observations, but Ainsworth developed an assessment technique known as the "Strange Situation" which "assesses babies' patterns of attachment to their mothers" (Miller, 2011, p. 349). Her work offered an explanation of the different forms of attachment among individuals by classifying people based on their reactions (Miller, 2011). According to Ainsworth, a person could be classified as securely attached, insecure-avoidant, or insecure-resistant. Those who do not fit in either category could be classified as disorganized or disoriented (Miller, 2011). "The initial attachment pattern sets in motion particular styles of thinking, feeling, and interacting that continue to influence the way children negotiate their environments throughout development" (Miller, 2011, p. 349). Both Bowlby and Ainsworth believed that when children formed bonds with their parents in the early years, they would develop a sense of security, while those who lacked the adult attachment could experience feelings of insecurity that could follow them throughout adulthood (Miller, 2011).

An adult attachment is the foundation for the social-emotional wellbeing of children and is crucial to their overall success in school (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Riley, 2009); therefore teachers must understand the impact attachment plays in the life of a child. The overall school success of students can be impacted by attachment in two ways: Attachment to parents and

attachment to teachers (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).  Adult child attachment relationships are representative of future relationships with friends, colleagues, and significant others (Fitton, 2012).  "Theoretically, early attachment security with a primary caregiver influences the development of other positive relationships as children come to expect others to be sensitive and supportive of their needs" (Rey et al., 2007, p. 347).  Sadly, there are many students who enter the educational setting and have not developed an emotional attachment with an adult figure (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Fitton, 2012; Rey et al., 2007; Riley, 2009).  Children can form attachments with their family members, as well as non-family members such as teachers and coaches (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Riley, 2009).  According to Riley (2009), there is no adult figure, other than parents, that is more significant in the lives of children than their teacher.  The power of the Attachment Theory is seen often in the coach-athlete relationship (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Riley, 2009).  Most coaches and athletes have a bond that in some cases is stronger than the parent-child relationship and can last for years.

There are two functions of the Attachment Theory that relate to the classroom: (a) a sense of security so that children feel free to explore and (b) a basis for socialization (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).  As a result, when students form an attachment with their teachers, they are more likely to take educational risks without fear of failure and are more motivated to participate in school activities (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).  Students realize if they lack knowledge of a concept, their teachers are willing to provide the support and guidance they need to become successful and learn new information.  Also, when students have supportive relationships with their teachers, they are more likely to make friends and have less discipline problems than their peers who have not developed an adult attachment (Riley, 2009).  Consequently, a supportive adult-student attachment can help develop a happier and healthier student.  According to Huebner (2010), a

happy student is one who experiences more positive emotions than negative and has developed a socio-emotional wellbeing.

**Maslow's Motivational Theory**

Maslow's desire to understand what motivates humans led to his Motivational Theory that stated the basis needs of humans must be met before they can reach their maximum potential (Freitas & Leonard, 2011; Gorman, 2010; Maslow, 1962; MindTools, Ltd., 2013). According to Maslow (1962), basic needs are as essential to the emotional wellbeing of humans as water, amino acids and calcium are to the physical body. No one ever questions whether humans need "iodine or vitamin C" (Maslow, 1962, p. 21); therefore, the need to be loved should go without question (Maslow, 1962). "It is these needs which are essentially deficits in the organism, empty holes, so to speak, which must be filled up for health's sake, and furthermore must be filled from without by human beings other than the subject" (Maslow, 1962, p. 21). When humans exist in a "sick" culture, defined as an environment that nurtures frustration, depression, conflict, guilt, shame, unworthiness, a lack of love and support, they become sick and negatively affect those around them (Maslow, 1962). Yet, healthy humans are part of an environment that satisfies their "basic needs for safety, belongingness, love, respect, and self-esteem so that they are motivated primarily by trends to self-actualization defined as ongoing actualization of potentials, capacities and talents" (Maslow, 1962, p. 23).

The basic needs of humans are connected in a hierarchical order; thus, one must achieve the first need in order to move to the next (Freitas & Leonard, 2011; Gorman, 2010; Maslow, 1962; MindTools, Ltd., 2013). This movement from one level to the next increases the "growth-motivation" in humans, which breeds an increased intensity where individuals desire to accomplish more (Maslow, 1962, p. 30). As a result, human beings are not satisfied remaining at

one level and the need to move motivates them to enhance their skill sets (Maslow, 1962).

"Growth-motivation" could be a long process (Maslow, 1962, p. 30). Hence, it could take some

doctors a long time to perfect their skills in one area or it may take a lifetime to become a great

artist (Maslow, 1962). However, the desire to grow motivates people to reach their fullest

potential, which can be the difference in "living fully and preparing to live fully, between

growing up and being grown" (Maslow, 1962, p. 30).

Maslow displayed his theory of basic needs in the form of a pyramid known as Maslow's

Hierarchy of Needs (Freitas & Leonard, 2011; Gorman, 2010; MindTools, Ltd., 2013). The first

level and the lowest level of the pyramid consist of biological and survival needs such as food,

water, and shelter (Freitas & Leonard, 2011; Gorman, 2010; MindTools, Ltd., 2013). The

remaining levels are security or safety (protection from harm, stability), sense of belonging

(relationships, attachments) self-worth or self-esteem (accomplishments, achievements,

prestige), and self-actualization (self-fulfillment, personal growth) (Freitas & Leonard, 2011;

Gorman, 2010; MindTools, Ltd., 2013). Maslow believed that before a person could move up a

level, the person must have first achieved the level below (Freitas & Leonard, 2011; Gorman,

2010; Maslow, 1962; MindTools, Ltd., 2013). Therefore, learning is not important to students

when they are hungry or cold and "self-actualization depends on having met underlying needs

and looking outward from oneself to humankind" (Freitas & Leonard, 2011, p. 10).

Educators have multiple opportunities to inspire students to reach their highest potential.

There are certain situations in the lives of students that are out of the control of the teacher, but

there are many areas in students' lives that teachers can influence. Teachers can provide a safe

environment, a place where students are willing to take academic risks and know that their

teacher will be there to help them until they reach success. Educators can also help fill the

missing link in a child's life by showing them they care. Caring can be displayed through verbal and nonverbal cues (e.g. smiling, close proximity, praise, body language) (Henning, 2012; Richmond et al., 2006; Santilli et al., 2011). "Children who perceive their teachers as offering warmth, acceptance, and self-esteem validation are more likely to perceive themselves as academically capable and belonging to school" (Hughes, 2011, p. 54). According to Teven and Hanson (2004), nonverbal immediacy allows teachers the opportunity to show students how much they care. Teachers have the opportunity to help meet the physiological needs of students by providing pertinent information to the appropriate personnel that can provide the resources students may need. In addition, as teachers display verbal and nonverbal immediacy, they are helping to meet the psychological needs of their students while helping students see the need to reach their personal best.

## Literature Review

High stakes testing has required states and schools to administer standardized testing for all students in certain grade levels (Santos, 2012; Shelly, 2012). Thus, a school's performance profile is based on the testing results of its students. Not only are states requiring high stakes testing for students, most states have now implemented a new type of teacher evaluation process, which connects student performance to teacher performance (Martin & Martin, 2011; Santos, 2012; Shelly, 2012). Therefore, if students' performance on the state standardized test is less than proficient, then their teacher's performance, as it relates to teaching and learning, is below standard. Due to this new evaluation system, educators across the nation are exiting the teaching profession (Glasman & Conley, 2008; Martin & Mottet, 2011; Santos, 2012) and those who choose to remain in education are looking for the next best practice that will help their students be successful. Educators and policy makers are asking what can be done to improve student

achievement and encourage educators to remain in a profession that is vital to the success of the nation.  According to Sibii (2010), an abundance of pedagogical literature supports the need for teacher immediacy and that effective teachers are those who have developed caring and supportive relationships with their students.

Not only are educators expected to increase student performance on standardized testing they are also required to prepare students to be college and career ready.  Some states have implemented the American College Testing (ACT) for all high school students to determine if schools are preparing students for college as well as the workplace (Sheehy, 2012).  A recent report stated that over a quarter of the 2012 graduates who participated in the ACT college readiness assessment fell short of meeting the necessary requirements and 60% of the students lacked proficiency in two or more of the four subject areas (Sheehy, 2012).  College readiness has been constant in the areas of English and mathematics over the past five years but "still, the two subjects continue to be areas where students need to make up the most ground" (Sheehy, 2012, par. 6).  Sadly only 31% of students possessed the necessary skills to be successful in an entry-level science course while over half were unprepared for an entry-level mathematics course (Sheehy, 2012).  Educators across the nation are expressing feelings of extreme stress due to accountability demands associated with high stakes testing, the implementation of the new Common Core Standards for English/Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics, preparing students to be college and career ready, along with additional requirements placed on them by federal, states, and local education agency policies and procedures.

**At-Risk Students**

In today's society, more and more students are considered at-risk and are facing various social factors during these tough economic times.  Scores of students are looking for

employment to help ease the financial burden that families are facing.  According to Swanson (2012), there has been an increase in the number of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch and that approximately 50% of students in the United States are living in poverty based on the poverty level as defined by the USDA (Dianda, 2008).  In a 2007 UNICEF report, the United States ranked 20th out of 21 technologically advanced countries on the wellbeing of nation's children and has maintained the highest poverty rate among developed countries for more than a decade (Dianda, 2008).

Students who live in poverty are more likely to be exposed to violence, crime, live in single parent homes or with grandparents, have a parent who was a high school dropout, receive welfare benefits, and have a lack of adult supervision (Dianda, 2008; Parkay et al., 2010).  However, the risk of exposure to negative social factors increases for minority students (Dianda, 2008).  A recent study showed that approximately one-fifth of the parents of at-risk students take an active role in their children's academic success and that most parents of at-risk students only visit the school when they are required to do so by administration (Azzam, 2007).  Therefore, if students continue on this trajectory, then dropping out of school becomes more appealing than staying in a setting where they feel like a failure (US Legal, Inc., 2013).

When students decide to leave the school setting without a diploma, it has adverse effects on the community and weakens the nation's ability to compete with other countries.  The United States graduation rate ranked 18th among other developed countries and the rate of those students who have a post secondary degree is expected to increase by only 4% by 2020 (Dianda, 2008).  Every time, a student leaves the educational setting without a diploma, revenue is lost; but, for every returning dropout who receives a diploma, there is an increase in capital (Richmond, 2013).  High school graduates can earn up to 43% more than their peers who drop

out of school and a college graduate can earn up to 150% more than a high school dropout (Dianda, 2008). Therefore, "each group of 18-year-olds who fail to graduate forfeits $156 billion in lifetime earnings, and costs the nation $58 billion in lost income tax revenue" (Dianda, 2008, p. 27). According to Dianda (2008), the United States will see an increase in the senior population in the couple of decades and without an educated working class, communities as well as the nation could suffer. It is important to understand that when students leave school without earning a high school diploma, their decision can have negative consequences for everyone.

Students who exit high school before receiving their diploma are more likely to be unemployed and receive some form of welfare assistance from the federal government (Dianda, 2008). They are also more likely to be diagnosed with major diseases (i.e., cancer, diabetes, heart disease), die prematurely due to the lack of early medical care, and be involved in criminal activity (Dianda, 2008). Approximately half of the people who are currently incarcerated were high school dropouts (Dianda, 2008). With all these negative factors, it is advantageous for the nation, states, and school districts to work together to develop educational plans that will meet the needs of at-risk students. "Preventing academic failure and school dropout for at-risk students is a significant task for schools because at-risk students make up large portions of the student population" (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011, p. 105). Therefore, school districts and states must choose to invest in programs and alternative settings that will help students be successful because the stakes are much higher when dropouts are ignored (Dianda, 2008).

The graduation rate is at its highest level in over 40 years with Asian students having the highest graduation rate of 81%, Caucasians 80%, Latino 68%, African Americans 62%, and Native Americans 51% (Richmond, 2013). However, in 2006 the rate for Latinos was 61.4%, African Americans 59.1%, and Native Americans 61.8% (Dianda, 2008). The graduation rate

for minority males was approximately 10% lower than minority females (Dianda, 2008). An increase in the graduation rate has occurred for Latinos and African Americans but Native Americans continue to decline and too many minority men are not graduating from high school (Dianda, 2008). The graduation gap is closing but there is still much work to be done.

Although the graduation rates have increased, the achievement gap is still widening. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), known as the Nation's Report Card, provides a national assessment for students in grades 4, 8 and 12 in the areas of reading and math (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). According to NAEP, the 2013 results for reading and math showed a slight increase for most ethnic groups. As a result, the gap is not closing because as African Americans and Hispanics show increases in the areas of reading and math, so are Asians and Caucasians (Nations Report Card, 2013). Sadly, the achievement gap for the Native American population continues to expand (Nations Report Card, 2013). Granted, there have been increases in academic achievement for most minorities groups but in actuality, the achievement gap is basically the same. According to Sheehy (2012), "only 23 percent of African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students tested hit the math benchmark, and fewer than 15 percent were prepared for college-level science courses" (par. 7); but by 2020 minorities between the ages of 25 and 64 will make up 30% of the nation's working population (Dianda, 2008). Therefore, ensuring that all students, especially minorities, have the necessary skills to enter the workforce is crucial to the Nation's economic success, as businesses struggle to find workers who possess the required skill sets companies need (Sheehy, 2012).

Students will face many problems while enrolled in the K–12 educational setting. Sadly, at-risk students are more susceptible to negative social factors, which can result in academic failure (Azzam, 2007; D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009; Ormond, 2008; Parkay et al., 2010; US

Legal, Inc., 2013). As students become overwhelmed with balancing societal issues and academics, they often give in to the pressures of life and withdraw from the educational setting without receiving a high school diploma (Azzam, 2007; D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009; Ormond, 2008; US Legal, Inc., 2013). Dropping out of school prior to graduation is no longer seen as an individual or community problem but as a national epidemic (Dianda, 2008; Richmond, 2013). Therefore, it is crucial for educators to embrace the concept that by helping students achieve academic success, they are enhancing their own future (Dianda, 2008; Richmond 2013).

Teachers can begin by incorporating teacher immediacy behaviors in their classroom. Students who are exposed to teacher immediacy behaviors are more likely to feel encouraged, supported, and motivated (Finn & Schrodt, 2012; Velez & Cano, 2008; Nixon, Vickerman & Maynard, 2010). When teacher immediacy behaviors are displayed, students begin to feel they are cared for and valued by their teacher (Andersen, 1979; Martin & Mottet, 2011; Sibii, 2010). As a result, students are more likely to comply with their teacher's request and take ownership in their learning (Alderman and Green, 2011; Aultman et al., 2009; Baker et al., 2008; Burroughs, 2007; Rey et al., 2007).

**Alternative Settings**

The United States began the Alternative Education Program in the 1960s in order to ensure that the needs of the poor, minority, and under-served students were being met (Carswell, Hanlon, O'Grady, Watts, & Pothong, 2009). However, there has been a significant increase in the number of alternative schools in the last 15 years due to an increase in the number of students who have been considered at-risk for school failure (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). "The number of alternative schools in the United States rose from 2,606 alternative schools in the 1993 school year to more than 10,900 in 2001" (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011, p. 106). These numbers

indicate a desire by school districts to develop educational settings that will meet the needs of students who may not be functioning well in traditional schools or may need a modified school setting or schedule due to various social issues.

Many "students who attend alternative schools were unsuccessful in traditional school programs and exhibited poor grades, truancy, behavior problems, or experienced special circumstances that impeded their learning" (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011, p. 106). Unfortunately, many of these students expressed that they experienced a lack of support from teachers in their traditional settings (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009). Some also expressed that due to lack of guidance, it was easier to withdraw from the school setting than to remain in an environment where they continuously felt like a failure (Azzam, 2007; D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009; Ormond, 2008; US Legal, Inc., 2013). Teacher immediacy behaviors can help students form connections with their teachers which will encourage students to become active participants in the learning process in addition increase their desire to be in school (Burroughs, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Rey et al., 2007; Rubie-Davis et al., 2010; Split et al., 2012).

Public schools have come to realize traditional settings may not benefit all students and they must devise and implement action plans that will discourage students from leaving the educational setting without a diploma (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). As a result, various districts have provided smaller school environments where students can receive individualized attention, creative curricula, and flexible instruction in order to help students graduate from high school (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). Most states now have virtual school programs where students can maintain their studies through an online approach in which all student work is completed via the use of technology. Also, some districts have provided online and hybrid courses for students, who may be employed, have childcare

obligations, or have been expelled from their traditional school setting (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). These students may not be able to attend school on a regular basis but need some face-to-face interaction with an instructor in order to be successful (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). Districts are providing opportunities for students who have fallen behind their peers to catch up and graduate with their cohort group by allowing them to participate in credit recovery courses or take additional courses during the school year. These opportunities can give hope to students who viewed dropping out of school as their only option (Azzam, 2007; D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009; Ormond, 2008; US Legal, Inc., 2013).

**Student-Teacher Relationship**

The concept of the student-teacher relationship and the influence that it can have on a student's overall school success has gained much attention in the last few years (Decker, Dona, & Christenson, 2007). A large amount of research indicates that when the relationship between adult and child deteriorates, then there is a decline in the child's academic, behavioral, and social wellbeing (Baker et al., 2008; Burroughs, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011; Murray & Zvoch, 2011; Peguero & Bondy, 2011; Rey et al., 2007; Sibii, 2010; Velez & Cano, 2008). According to Rey et al. (2007), "relationships are thought of as the vehicle through which children learn to become comfortable with themselves and their world" (p. 347). Therefore, when children feel safe and comfortable, they are more likely to be engaged in the learning process (Rubie-Davies, Peterson, Irving, Widdowson, & Dixon, 2010; Wu, Hughes, and Kwok, 2010). With all the research that provides evidence that a supportive and encouraging student-teacher relationship has the potential to impact a student's overall success (Alderman & Green, 2011; Baker et al., 2008; Burroughs, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011; Murray & Zvoch, 2011; Peguero & Bondy, 2011; Rey et al., 2007; Sibii, 2010; Velez &

Cano, 2008), the student-teacher relationship is still often overlooked as a foundation to teaching and learning (Aultman et. al., 2009).

Student-teacher relationships are important to all students; therefore, all children need to develop at least one relationship with an adult figure that is caring and supportive (Rey et al., 2007). Relationships are imperative to the overall success of at-risk students (Burroughs, 2007; Decker et al., 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Ormrod, 2008; Peguero & Bondy, 2011; Wu et al., 2010). Many at-risk students have not experienced a positive student-teacher relationship (Burroughs, 2007; D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009; Decker et al., 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Ormrod, 2008; Peguero & Bondy, 2011; Wu et al., 2010). They often feel that school is not for them (Burroughs, 2007; Decker et al., 2007; D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009; Klem & Connell, 2004; Ormrod, 2008; Peguero & Bondy, 2011; Wu et al., 2010) and their culture and values do not fit the middle class society that is often dominated by Caucasians (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007). Minorities, disabled students, males, and those who have not adjusted well to school are less likely to experience positive student-teacher relationships (Decker et al., 2007; D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009). In 2007 (Azzam), high school dropouts were asked what schools could do to help decrease the dropout rate and one suggestion that was provided, was to ensure that each student had developed a relationship with an adult figure at the school, someone each student could turn to for help. Only 56% of the high school dropouts stated they felt comfortable talking with an adult about school work and only 41% stated they had an adult they could turn to for help with personal problems (Azzam, 2007). When students think they do not have an adult figure they could turn to for help, then they view withdrawing from school as more attractive than remaining in a situation where they feel like a failure (Azzam, 2007; D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009; Ormond, 2008; US Legal, Inc., 2013).

Student-teacher relationships and high expectations are closely associated (Rubie-Davis et al., 2010). "Being a caring and supportive teacher does not mean coddling; rather, it means holding students accountable while providing the support they need to succeed" (Stipek, 2006, p. 47). Teachers who develop positive student-teacher relationships with their students allow students to take ownership of their learning, provide a nurturing environment, and have high expectations of their students (Decker et al., 2007). Students from urban and suburban schools stated when their teachers had high expectations of them it was an indication that their teachers cared about them (Stipek, 2006). "Thus, it is understandable that students who had positive relationships with teachers made more effort and persevered in learning because they internalized the academic values and expectations appreciated by teachers" (Lee, 2012, p. 336).

Student-teacher relationships that are supportive and helpful can motivate students, improve academic achievement, and increase their desire to attend school (Alderman & Green, 2011; Aultman et al., 2009; Baker et al., 2008; Burroughs, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011; Murray & Zvoch, 2011; Peguero & Bondy, 2011; Rey et al., 2007; Sibii, 2010; Velez & Cano, 2008). The initial step in helping students achieve school success is developing positive student-teacher relationships (Peguero & Bondy, 2011). Students who have formed a healthy and caring relationship with their teachers are more likely to be engaged in the learning process, which often leads to academic success (Burroughs, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Rubie-Davis et al., 2010; Split et al., 2012). Educators have the opportunity to create a classroom climate that is warm and supportive; a place where students feel safe to take risks because they understand they have a support system, a teacher who cares about them, and desires to see them achieve academic success. According to Wu et al. (2010), students who experienced a supportive relationship with their teachers had lower levels of conflict and higher academic

achievement. The research study showed that student-teacher relationships are important to a child's academic success and can be a resource for teachers; thus, the student-teacher relationship should be seen as an essential component of teaching and learning (Aultman et. al., 2009). When students connect to their teachers in a positive manner, they will become more involved in the learning process (Burroughs, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Rey et al., 2007; Rubie-Davis et al., 2010; Split et al., 2012).

A supportive student-teacher relationship has the potential to help ease the educational load that teachers bear. When students perceive that their teachers care about their overall success, they are more likely to take ownership in their learning (Alderman & Green, 2011; Baker et. al., 2008; Rubie-Davies et al., 2010). Educators must understand that while school structure, curriculum, and teacher student ratios are important educational factors; "children's regulatory abilities, school-related relationships, and classroom participation" can contribute to their overall school success (Valiente, Lemery-Chalfant, Swanson, & Reiser, 2008, p. 67). Therefore, education should not only be seen as subject-centered but it must also be student-centered so the needs of the whole child can be met (Parkay et al., 2010). Teachers should begin the school year by focusing on getting to know their students and building relationships instead of "diving into" the content. According to Wong and Wong (1998), effective teachers spend the first weeks of school putting procedures in place, developing their classroom norms, and displaying nonverbal language while ineffective teachers spend the first days of schools teaching the content and spend the rest of the school year dealing with discipline issues. Teachers who display teacher immediacy behaviors can manage their classrooms with minimal classroom disruptions and as a result the student-teacher relationship will grow, students will feel more appreciated, and student learning will increase (Wong & Wong, 1998). Once students realize

they are important to their teachers, the desire to become part of the learning process will intensify (Alderman & Green, 2011; Aultman et al., 2009; Baker et al., 2008; Burroughs, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011; Murray & Zvoch, 2011; Peguero & Bondy, 2011; Rey et al., 2007; Sibii, 2010; Velez & Cano, 2008).

**Teacher Immediacy**

Mehrabian first introduced the term immediacy in 1969 (Allen et al., 2006; Wheeless, 2006; King & Witt, 2009; Mehrabian, 1969; Mehrabian, 1971; Rocca, 2004; Teven & Hanson, 2004; Velez & Cano, 2008; Velez & Cano, 2012; Witt et al., 2004). According to Mehrabian (1969), immediacy is defined "as the extent to which communication behaviors enhance closeness to and nonverbal interaction with another" (p. 203). Immediacy can expose how individuals feel about things and people because there is a greater tendency to spend additional time with those things as well as those persons they appreciate and enjoy and less time with those things or persons they dislike (Mehrabian, 1971). Immediacy behaviors can decrease the amount of distance that may exist between individuals and help to develop a connectedness or closeness (Mehrabian, 1971; 1972). Immediacy and liking are closely associated in that immediacy impacts liking and liking impacts immediacy (Mehrabian, 1971). When a person enters a room full of people, he/she gravitates to those who are known and liked (Mehrabian, 1971). Others in the room may be acknowledged, but the preference is to be among those with whom there is a certain level of comfort (Mehrabian, 1971). This is evident when teachers allow students to form their own groups or select a partner for peer work. Students usually select their friends (Mehrabian, 1971) and unfortunately, there is usually a student who is often left to work alone. The concept can also be seen at various social events; people connect with those they know and are comfortable being around (Mehrabian, 1971). The concept of immediacy is seen

in the workplace as well; employees associate with those persons they enjoy and in some cases, there is someone who feels disconnected from the office staff (Mehrabian, 1971). Immediacy can be seen in all walks of life.

Mehrabian concluded that humans can transmit messages verbally and nonverbally (Gendrin & Rucker, 2007; Henning, 2012; Mehrabian, 1971; Mehrabian, 1972; Richmond et al., 2006; Velez & Cano, 2008; Velez & Cano, 2012; Witt et al., 2004) and the communication channels are opened when people express their thoughts and feelings to each other through words, body language, tone of voice, and facial expression (Mehrabian, 1971). Opening up a conversation is one way to initiate immediacy both verbally and nonverbally; it is associated with eye contact and self-disclosure of one's thoughts, ideas, beliefs, and feelings (Mehrabian, 1971). According to Velez and Cano (2008), verbal and nonverbal communication could be viewed as explicit and implicit messages while explicit messages contain content (verbal) and implicit messages are conveyed through emotions.

In the beginning, the primary focus of Mehrabian's work was on interpersonal relationships but through the work of various researchers, the term "teacher immediacy" emerged (Allen et al., 2006; King & Witt, 2009; Rocca, 2004; Teven & Hanson, 2004; Velez & Cano, 2008; Velez & Cano, 2012; Witt et al., 2004). Later, researchers began to apply the concept of immediacy to education with the notion that when teachers use communication cues, the perceived gap that may exist between teacher and students could narrow and students could experience increased learning (Allen et al., 2006). Andersen (1979) was one of the first researchers to connect immediacy to education. Her research showed that there was a strong correlation between teacher immediacy and affective learning (Andersen, 1979). As a result, there was an increase in the number of scholars researching teacher immediacy and its impact on

student learning (Allen et al., 2006; Burroughs, 2007; Finn & Schrodt, 2012; Henning, 2012; Richmond et al., 2006; Rocca, 2004; Witt et al., 2004).

Teacher immediacy behaviors are viewed as rewarding because they can reinforce positive behavior, student motivation, and student learning (Allen et al., 2006; Burroughs, 2007; Finn & Schrodt, 2012; Henning, 2012; King & Witt, 2009; Richmond et al., 2006; Rocca, 2004; Witt et al., 2004). These behaviors consist of verbal and nonverbal communication that teachers exhibit during their instruction (Henning, 2012; Richmond et al., 2006; Santilli et al., 2011). Verbal immediacy is displayed through humor, praise, feedback, a sharing of personal information as well as referring to students by their names (Gender & Rucker, 2007; Henning, 2012; Richmond et al., 2006; Velez & Cano, 2008). According to Velez and Cano (2012), verbal immediacy may include statements that determine ownership such as my class or our class or by using inclusive pronouns such as "we" instead of "I." Teachers who view their class as "our class," help to create a sense of community where students are more willing to participate because the students view their instructor as someone who cares about their learning (Henning, 2012; Sibii, 2010; Velez & Cano, 2008). Also, when verbally immediate teachers encourage their students to participate in class and verbally check for understanding, they are perceived as effective teachers (Henning, 2012; Velez & Cano, 2008). Nonverbal immediacy behaviors are comprised of emotions and feelings such as eye contact, proximity, gestures, tone of voice, and smiling (Henning, 2012; Mehrabian, 1972; Richmond et al., 2006; Sibii, 2010; Santilli et al., 2011; Velez & Cano, 2008). According to Andersen (1979), these behaviors can increase closeness between teacher and student. When teachers display nonverbal immediacy behaviors, students can become empowered and engaged (Finn & Schrodt, 2012; Nixon et al., 2010; Velez & Cano, 2008) because nonverbal immediacy behaviors will increase the amount of pleasure,

excitement, and liking the student feels towards the teacher and the subject (Henning, 2012; Mehrabian, 1972; Richmond et al., 2006; Sibii, 2010; Santilli et al., 2011; Velez & Cano, 2008).

Over the past 20 years, much research has been conducted on teacher immediacy and how it impacts student learning (Allen et al., 2006; Burroughs, 2007; Finn & Schrodt, 2012; Henning, 2012; Richmond et al., 2006; Rocca, 2004; Witt et al., 2004). According to Bloom there are three learning domains: Cognitive, affective, and psychomotor (King & Witt, 2009; Wilson, 2014; Witt et al., 2004). Cognitive learning involves being able to recall, comprehend, apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information (King & Witt, 2009; Wilson, 2014). Affective learning is based on feelings, emotions, values, motivations, and attitudes (King & Witt, 2009; Wilson, 2014), which all correlate with immediacy since according to Mehrabian (1971), immediacy impacts liking and liking impacts immediacy. Psychomotor learning includes a physical or kinesthetic activity that will support the cognitive or affective learning (King & Witt, 2009; Wilson, 2014). This research will present an additional type of learning known as perceived learning. For this study, perceived learning is defined as the amount of learning that students' perceive they have retained. King and Witt (2009) stated that perceived learning differs from cognitive learning while it is not based on students' performance on an assessment but rather on students' perceptions, which often stem from the student-teacher relationship. According to Allen et al., (2006), in order to understand how immediacy affects cognitive learning, one must understand how teacher behaviors motive students.

Witt et al., (2004), in their meta-analytical study, looked at the relationship between teacher immediacy and student learning. They compared the perceived learning, the cognitive learning, and the affective learning of students and found that perceived learning ($r = .63$) had the highest correlation, affective learning ($r = .55$) was next, and cognitive learning ($r = .12$) was the

lowest.  The results of the meta-analysis showed that an association existed "between overall teacher immediacy and overall learning, average r = .500, k = 8l, N= 24,474" (p. 197).  The study provided evidence that a higher correlation existed between teacher immediacy and affective learning outcomes and a much smaller correlation existed between teacher immediacy and cognitive learning outcomes.  Even though the correlation for cognitive learning outcomes was small, there was a connection between immediacy and cognitive learning.

King and Witt's (2009) research study sought to "compare three types of cognitive learning assessment: the performance measure of course grades, the perceptual measure of learning loss, and the additional measure of confidence testing" (p. 115) and how they are impacted by teacher immediacy.   The study consisted of a sample size of 72 undergraduate students who completed a nonverbal teacher immediacy measurement while enrolled in the instructor's class.  Eight weeks later, three additional measurements, the Confidence Testing Instrument, a 10-item Measure, and a Learning Loss Measure, developed by Richmond, McCroskey, Kearney, and Plax (1987), were administered and the students' final grades were also used as a measureable instrument.  The results showed that a significant relationship existed between perceived student learning and perceived teacher immediacy.  The researchers in this study pose the question as to whether perceived learning is a true indicator of cognitive learning.

Allen et al. (2006) conducted a meta-analytic study to "reexamine the affective-cognitive model across various studies that measured cognitive learning through recall, retention, or recognition" (p. 23).  The study consisted of three correlations; two of which were pulled from the Witt et al., 2004 meta-analysis.  The first correlation model reviewed immediacy (verbal and nonverbal) measures and cognitive learning (r = .13, k = 16, and n = 5,437 where k is the number of studies and n is the sample size). The second correlation model reviewed immediacy (verbal

and nonverbal) measures and affective learning correlation (r = .50, k = 81, and n = 24,474). The third correlation model existed between cognitive and affective learning (r = .08. k = 8, and n= 1449). Results from the study displayed positive correlations in all three models with the highest correlation existing between immediacy and affective learning. Although the third correlation was small, it still provided evidence that an association did exist between affective and cognitive learning. Therefore, when high levels of teacher immediacy are displayed, there is an increase in affective learning, which results in an increase in cognitive learning (Allen et al., 2006).

Burroughs' (2007) research study consisted of 564 undergraduates who were enrolled in general education courses and sought to answer four research questions. Students in this study were provided questionnaires during the 13th week of the school year. The questionnaires consisted of open-ended and closed questions that related to immediacy, cognitive, and affective learning   The results indicated that 55% of the college students in the study could not remember if their teachers asked them to do something they did not want to do (RQ1) and those who did recall (45%), 71% of them stated they complied completely with the teacher's request with 29% stating they refused to comply. The findings suggest the majority of the students were willing to comply with their teachers' request; yet, when resistance occurred, it was conducted in a covert or passive manner. For the most part, college students reluctantly adhered to the guidelines of their instructors. In reference to RQ2, students were more likely to respond to an immediate teacher than to a non-immediate teacher. Non-immediate teachers were exposed to more resistance from their students than immediate teachers. According to the study, students often blamed their non-immediate teachers for not completing assignments or for the lack of compliance. Therefore, the results for RQ2 provided evidence that teacher immediacy has a strong influence in the classroom because students are more likely to comply with classroom

procedures, which will result in less inappropriate behavior and more student engagement. The findings from RQ3 revealed a positive correlation ($r = .29$) existed between student resistance and perceived nonverbal teacher immediacy. The results indicated that students are more willing to cooperate with teachers who display nonverbal immediacy behaviors. Research question four (RQ4) indicated that teachers' nonverbal immediacy and students' willingness to take an active role in their cognitive and affective learning were positively correlated. The final research question (RQ5) examined how students complied or resisted behaviors impacted their affective and cognitive learning. Once again, students were more willing to comply and cooperate with teachers when they enjoyed the course; therefore, compliance or resistance behaviors are associated with perceived learning. The overall study concluded that when teachers display immediacy behaviors, students are more likely to comply with their teachers which will lead to an increase in perceived, affective, and cognitive learning and a decrease in inappropriate behavior.

Rocca's 2004 research study, which included 189 undergraduate students, developed and tested two research hypotheses using Pearson correlations to determine: (a) if a negative correlation existed between student absences and instructor immediacy and (b) if a positive correlation existed between class absences and verbal aggression. The students were required to complete a questionnaire, which asked questions about the professor they had prior to the course they were currently enrolled in. The students were then instructed to complete the Nonverbal Immediacy Measure, a Verbal Aggression Scale, and to self-report class attendance. The results from the study provided support to the hypothesis that student attendance increased when their instructors displayed high levels of immediacy and decreased when students perceived their instructors as high in verbal aggression. Therefore, based on this study, it appears that educators

who exhibit teacher immediacy behaviors and low verbal aggression in the classroom setting can develop an inviting and warm environment that students will enjoy. "It is important to recognize that instructors do have an impact on student behaviors, such as attendance, which ultimately may lead to learning" (Rocca, 2004, p. 192).

Velez and Cano's (2008) research study, which included 41 undergraduates, revealed a positive correlation between teacher immediacy and motivation. According to the study, instructors may not be fully aware of the body language (i.e., facial expressions and gestures) they display but this nonverbal language is clearly seen by students and is vital in helping motivate or demotivate students. Therefore, educators must be cognizant of their body language and be instrumental in consistently portraying nonverbal immediacy behaviors that can result in increased student motivation, which can lead to overall student success (Gendrin & Rucker, 2007; Velez & Cano, 2008). "If instructors intend to facilitate an optimal classroom environment, they must send supportive, caring communication messages to all students" (Velez & Cano, 2008, p. 84).

Nixon, Vickerman, and Maynard's (2010) qualitative research study involved four professors who taught at a large university. Each of the professors was expected to participate in the Peer Review of Teaching (PRT) process, which contained three stages. The first stage consisted of an external consultant who conducted teacher observations. Stage two required professors and external consultants to identify goals that revolved around teacher immediacy and participate in follow-up sessions conducted with lecturers and a buddy instructor to further examine immediacy and allow for feedback. The final stage involved taping and transcription of face-to-face interviews with the professors, which were conducted by an independent researcher. The participants reported positive results as it related to their verbal and verbal immediacy within

the Peer Review of Teaching. The first theme identified was the use of voice and verbal

qualities. The researchers concluded that professors should realize that voice projection could be

an integral component of effective learning, teaching, and assessment. The second theme

focused on body language. The study concluded that nonverbal communication could influence

learning. The third theme concentrated on teaching space and the environment. The

participants stated location in the room could increase or decrease student engagement and

achievement. The results from the study suggested that when teachers display positive

immediate behaviors, students became motivated and were more willing to participate in the

learning experience.

A study conducted by Santilli et al. (2011) containing a sample of 166 university

students, 100 from a university in the United States and 66 from a Brazilian university sought to

determine if a positive correlation existed between perceived nonverbal immediacy and professor

credibility by comparing the results of the two samples (U.S. and Brazil). Students were asked

to complete three measures: A questionnaire about a prior professor, the Nonverbal Immediacy

Scale, and the Source Credibility Scale. Researchers conducted t-tests to compare the means of

the two samples. The results from the study supported the hypothesis by showing students from

the U.S. ranked their professors higher on two areas, caring and competence, as compared to

their Brazilian counterparts. The Brazilian sample showed that "nonverbal immediacy was

significantly correlated with competence and caring, explaining 31% and 29% of the variance,

respectively, but it was not correlated with trustworthiness" (p. 271). There was not a significant

correlation difference between the two samples for trustworthiness and caring, but there was a

significant correlation difference for competence between the two samples. According to the

study, the U.S. and Brazilian students reported no significant difference between the levels of

immediacy, which could be interpreted that immediacy is the behavior that is most frequently connected to teacher credibility and can impact student learning in other cultures as well.

Finn and Schrodt's quantitative cross-sectional research study (2012) was comprised of 261 undergraduates.  In this study, researchers sought to determine if students' perceptions of their instructors' nonverbal immediacy and teacher clarity impacted student empowerment and, if so, to what extent students were empowered.  Student volunteers were instructed to complete an online questionnaire that consisted of multiple measures (i.e., teacher clarity, nonverbal immediacy, perceived understanding, and learner empowerment) and demographics.  Based on the results, when instructors responded to students with verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviors, students were more likely to be involved in the learning process, felt empowered to complete the task at hand, found the course content important, and were willing to learn the material.  This study supports previous research, which states that students' perceived learning and teacher credibility are associated with teacher immediacy behaviors and classroom engagement.

Martin and Mottet's (2011) factorial design included 179 ninth graders enrolled in an English Language Arts class at a predominately Hispanic charter school in Southern Texas.  The researchers sought to determine if a close student-teacher relationship, that was increased through teacher immediacy behaviors, would allow for more direct feedback and conversations without teachers worrying about how students may respond to constructive criticism.  The academic scholars tested three hypotheses.  Those students who volunteered for this study were given the details of the study and were required to have signed consent forms in order to participate. During the 8th week of the school year, students participated in a survey and were randomly assigned to one of the four conference scenarios.  The students were informed they

would participate in a one-on-one session and would be asked to read the conferencing scenario. After reading, participants completed a survey that contained measures of the dependent variables and demographic information. The results from the study provided evidence that when teachers display nonverbal immediacy behaviors to enhance the student-teacher relationship, then students will respond more favorably to direct verbal feedback they receive from their teachers.

Much of the research on teacher immediacy has focused on the college setting as well as college level online learning programs (Allen et. al., 2006; Burroughs, 2007; Finn & Schrodt, 2012; King & Witt, 2009; McCroskey, Sallinen, Richmond, & Barraclough, 1996; Witt et al., 2004). There is lack of research for the K–12 educational setting. In much of the research presented in this literature review, immediacy has a larger impact on perceived learning and affective learning than cognitive learning (Allen et al., 2006; Burroughs, 2007; King & Witt, 2009; Nixon et al., 2010; Rocca, 2004; Santilli et al., 2011; Velez & Cano, 2008; Witt et al., 2004). However, according to the research, affective learning and perceived learning can result in increased motivation which can lead to increased student engagement (Allen et al., 2006; Burroughs, 2007; King & Witt, 2009; Nixon et al., 2010; Rocca, 2004; Santilli et al., 2011; Velez & Cano, 2008; Witt et al., 2004). The research shows that when students are engaged in the learning process they are more likely to achieve academic success (Burroughs 2007; Velez & Cano, 2008). This research study seeks to explore how teacher immediacy behaviors impact student achievement in the K–12 educational setting.

## Summary

Today's youth are exposed to various negative social factors (i.e., crime, violence, pregnancy, single parents homes, drugs, and poverty) and are considered more at-risk than ever

before (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007; Parkay et al., 2010). Many of these youth enter the educational setting behind their peers, both cognitively and socially, and after years of continuous academic failure and a lack of support from adult figures, they view withdrawing from school as their best option (Kronholz, 2012; US Legal, Inc., 2013). At-risk students see the traditional school setting as an unsuitable learning environment for them (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009). In years past, students who withdrew from school were seen as a community problem, however, now high school dropouts are viewed as a national epidemic, an issue that can negatively impact all Americans (Dianda, 2008).

Alternative education has grown drastically over the years due to an increase in the number of at-risk students, as well as the societal and professional desires to increase the graduation rate (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009). States have come to realize that they are losing revenue when students leave the high school setting without earning a diploma (Dianda, 2008). Additionally, in today's society, a high school diploma has become a necessity since most jobs require at least a high school diploma. Most of the students who attend an alternative setting have few positive school experiences (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009). In some cases, these students exited their traditional school sites with low grades, a lengthy discipline referral sheet, low attendance, low self-esteem and a lack of parental support (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). Many have a negative outlook on school and believe they are uncared for by their teachers. Some have not developed an adult attachment, which is the basis for a child's social emotional development (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Riley, 2009). Therefore, it is crucial that all educators, especially those who work at alternative sites, understand the importance and need for teacher immediacy.

Teacher immediacy behaviors can result in an increase in student motivation, student engagement, and a decrease in classroom disruption (Allen et al., 2006; Burroughs, 2007; Finn & Schrodt, 2012; Henning, 2012; King & Witt, 2009; Richmond et al., 2006; Rocca, 2004; Witt et al., 2004), all of which can result in increased student-teacher relationships.  "When nonverbal immediacy behaviors are used, the teacher-student relationship is enhanced and affective learning takes place" (Martin & Mottet, 2011, p. 13).  Student-teacher relationships that are supportive, healthy, and caring can lead the way to students achieving overall school success (Peguero & Bondy, 2011).  "Therefore, it seems likely that teachers who are perceived as having high nonverbal immediacy, who demonstrate caring both verbally and nonverbally, can create a better learning environment for their students" (Titsworth, McKenna, & Quinlan, 2013, p. 41).  Hence, it is probable that students who perceive their teachers as immediate will have an overall positive learning experience than those who feel that their teachers do not care.  "In short, students' emotional responses to the instructor, content, and learning environment could influence the quantity and quality of the information learned in the course" (Witt et al., 2004, p. 190).

The majority of this literature review focuses on how immediacy behaviors can impact students in the college setting.  This study seeks to provide additional research to support the need for teacher immediacy in today's K-12 educational settings.  It also focuses on alternative settings and how immediacy impacts at-risk students.  Prolific research exists on teacher immediacy at the higher education level; yet, little research is focused on the K-12 setting and the amount of research on immediacy in alternative settings is even smaller.  Therefore, the gap that presented itself in the literature is teacher immediacy in the K-12 classroom and in alternative settings with at-risk students.

# CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

More frequently than ever, students are leaving the educational setting without earning a high school diploma.  At one time this was considered a community or individual issue but is now viewed as a national concern (Dianda, 2008).  Over a lifetime, students who earn their high school diploma can gross 40% more than their peers who leave school without a diploma and the rewards are much greater for those who gain a college degree (Dianda, 2008).  When students begin to fall behind in their academics, they find it increasingly more difficult to continue on a path that produces negative results and often view leaving school as their best option (Azzam, 2007; D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009; Ormond, 2008; US Legal, Inc., 2013).  Hence, educational agencies are looking for options that will encourage students to remain in school and earn their diplomas.  One of these options includes alternative settings that are designed to meet the needs of those students who have not found success in the traditional school setting (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011).

Various research have shown that teacher immediacy behaviors can increase student motivation and student involvement in addition to decreasing unacceptable behavior (Allen et al., 2006; Burroughs, 2007; Finn & Schrodt, 2012; Henning, 2012; King & Witt, 2009; Richmond et al., 2006; Rocca, 2004; Witt et al., 2004). When students positively connect to their teachers and perceive that their teachers care about them, they are more likely to become actively involved in the instructional process (Burroughs, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Rey et al., 2007; Rubie-Davis et al., 2010; Split et al., 2012).  Teacher immediacy behaviors can help the student-teacher connection (Andersen, 1979; Martin & Mottet, 2011; Sibii, 2010), which can result in student success (Alderman & Green, 2011; Burroughs, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Rey et al., 2007; Sibii, 2010; Velez & Cano, 2008).  Consequently, immediacy can bring closeness between

students and teachers that will increase the desire for students to attend school and to achieve

academic success (Henning, 2012; Richmond, Lane, & McCroskey, 2006; Rocca, & McCroskey,

1999; Rocca, 2004). Thus, when students form a connection with an adult figure at school,

someone they can turn to for guidance, they are less likely to withdraw from the school setting

(Azzam, 2007; D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009; Ormond, 2008; US Legal, Inc., 2013).

**Design**

Educational research is intended to construct a knowledge base that will describe, predict,

explain, and improve teaching and learning (Gall et al., 2007). It consists primarily of

quantitative and qualitative research (Gall et al., 2007). Quantitative research is the analysis of

social phenomena through the use of statistical or numerical data to determine if the hypothesis

is correct (Gall et al., 2007). While qualitative research is "the collection of data in a natural

setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and

deductive and establishes patterns and themes" (Creswell, 2013, p. 44). Qualitative research

designs utilize a small number of participants, in order to gather data unlike quantitative studies

that consist of a large number of cases (Creswell, 2013; Gall et al., 2007).

In qualitative research, open-ended questions are posed to participants through interviews

and focus group sessions to gain data as well as from observations in hopes of uncovering

prevalent trends (Creswell, 2013; Gall et al., 2007). By allowing teachers to voice their feelings

and thoughts about teacher immediacy, a wealth of information was gained that could be shared

across states, school districts, and schools. As a result of this study, educators could gain a better

understanding of how teacher immediacy behaviors have the potential to increase student

attendance and decrease inappropriate behavior in and out of the classroom, which can lead to an

overall increase in student achievement (Henning, 2012; Richmond, Lane, & McCroskey, 2006; Rocca, & McCroskey, 1999; Rocca, 2004).

A qualitative research study explores a phenomenon by asking participants to share their feelings and viewpoints of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013); it is an inquiry approach (Creswell, 2013). In qualitative research, once the investigator has determined what phenomenon will be studied, the investigator then (a) seeks to gain a deeper understanding of a lived experience, (b) gathers data from participants who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation, and (c) develops a universal theme based on the combined lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). In this study, data was collected through the use of a survey, individual interviews, and a focus group session.

There are several qualitative methods that could have been used; however, a phenomenological approach was best suited for this research study. Phenomenology is an inquiry research approach in which the essence of the human experience that relates to a phenomenon is explored through the lens of those who have lived the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological research study allows a small group of individuals to share their lived experiences about a phenomenon with a researcher (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Since phenomenology is the study of a human experience (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994), then using a qualitative approach was most effective in disclosing educators' perspectives of teacher immediacy. According to Moustakas (1994), "phenomenological research is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it" (p. 13). The researcher must focus on the "what" and the "how" of the phenomenon and then proceed to find the general concept that exists among all participants (Moustakas, 1994). By utilizing a

phenomenological approach, multiple perspectives were gained to help determine the similarities that exist among the participants and establish a universal experience that relates to the phenomenon being studied.

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to gain a deeper, richer understanding of teacher immediacy through the lived experiences and perceptions of teachers who educate at risk students in an alternative setting. Qualitative research is designed to gain a deeper understanding of a topic or a problem and is most appropriate when there is a need to explore a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The phenomenon that was explored in greater detail in this study was teacher immediacy. Teachers who work in an alternative setting provided insight as to how teacher immediacy behaviors impact at-risk students. The information gained from this study can be used to provide professional development activities for school districts that will focus on increasing teacher immediacy behaviors in all classrooms but especially in those established for at-risk students.

This study employed a transcendental phenomenology research study. Transcendental phenomenology is a "rational path—knowledge that emerges from a transcendental or pure ego, a person who is open to see what it is, just as it is, and to explicate what it is in it's own terms" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41). As the principal investigator in this study, my goal was to see the phenomenon from a fresh perspective; therefore, I had to set aside my personal knowledge and viewpoints of teacher immediacy. The aim of this research was to gain a more in-depth understanding of how teacher immediacy behaviors can impact students in the K–12 setting. By focusing on educators who work in an alternative setting with at-risk students, I gained insight on how teacher immediacy behaviors influenced potential dropouts to remain in school and achieve their high school diploma. Thus, if the data collected from this study shows teacher immediacy

behaviors were instrumental in changing the perceptions of students who once viewed school as a setting that made them feel like a failure to a place they feel comfortable and enjoy, then implementing teacher immediacy behaviors could become a fundamental best practice for all classrooms. The participants selected for this study were those educators who worked in an alternative high school setting. Data collection was comprised of distributing a survey for participants to complete, conducting individual interviews with all participants, conducting a focus group session with a smaller number of the participants.

## Research Questions

This transcendental phenomenological study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the opinions of teachers who work in an alternative setting about teacher immediacy?

2. What do teachers state as obstacles to establishing teacher immediacy?

3. What additional resources do teachers state they need for establishing teacher immediacy?

4. Do teachers who teach in an alternative setting perceive that teacher immediacy positively impacts student success and why or why not?

## Participants

This transcendental phenomenological study was comprised of 12 educators who teach at-risk students in an alternative school setting. According to Creswell (2013), 12 participants are necessary to explore the phenomena while Polkinghorne (1989) recommends 5 to 25 participants. The alternative program that was used for this research study has 30 support personnel including: Three counselors, two social workers, two exceptional children's teachers, two behavioral specialists, one teacher assistant, one administrator, and 19 certified teachers.

The majority of the staff members are retired teachers who work part-time but have maintained their state teacher certifications. Six of the employees are full-time certified educators. The ethnic groups represented by the staff include Native Americans, African Americans, and Caucasians. Approximately, two-thirds of the staff is female and the ages of the staff at the alternative site range from 40 to 75. For this study, purposeful sampling was employed. Purposeful sampling implies that the researcher selects "individuals and sites for the study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 156). The educators who work with the alternative program are able to provide detail insight of how teacher immediacy behaviors impact at-risk students. All ethnicities, both males and females, as well as full-time and part-time personnel were included in this study.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

| Participant | Ethnicity | Gender | Part-time or Full-time | Years of Experience | Certification |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| April | American Indian | Female | Full Time | 5 -10 | Social Worker (K-12) |
| Beth | American Indian | Female | Part-time | 20 – 25 | Special Education |
| Carol | American Indian | Female | Part-time | Over 30 | School Counselor |
| Deborah | American Indian | Female | Part-time | Over 30 | Career Education and Mathematics |
| Grant | African American | Male | Full-time | 25 – 30 | Administration |
| John | Caucasian | Male | Part-time | 15 – 20 | Language Arts and History |
| Mary | American Indian | Female | Part-time | Over 30 | Language Arts and Administration |
| Monica | African American | Female | Full-time | 15 – 20 | Language Arts |
| Pamela | African American | Female | Part-time | Over 30 | Science |
| Rebecca | Caucasian | Female | Full-time | 15 – 20 | Counseling and Administration |
| Teresa | American Indian | Female | Full-time | 20 – 25 | Counseling |
| Samuel | American Indian | Male | Part-time | Over 30 | History |

**Site**

The alternative site was purposely chosen for this study.  A purposely chosen site can provide a deep understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013).  The study was conducted at an alternative school site within a rural public school system in the southeastern part of the United States. The educators at this alternative setting teach at-risk students through a hybrid delivery format.  The hybrid program is comprised of online instruction coupled with required on-site tutoring.  The majority of the students who attend the alternative setting are juniors or seniors who have fallen behind their peers in their high school matriculation.  The free and reduced lunch rate for the school district is 81%, but is 100% at the alternative site.

The district is comprised of six traditional high schools and one alternative program at two different sites due to the size of the district.  The students are bused from their traditional high schools to one of the sites.  The first site is located near the Career and Technical Education Facility.  As a result, interested students have the opportunity to enroll in courses that will prepare them for the work force.  Some of the courses offered at the site include: Plumbing, welding, automotive service, masonry, motorsports, digital media, drafting, computer engineering, and construction.  The second site contains a smaller number of students and they are all from one of the traditional high schools.  Most of the students who attend the alternative setting were not performing well academically in their traditional high schools, while some had been expelled from school and the alternative setting was their last resort due to their behavior. The majority of the students were potential dropouts and some had quit school but, with the help of school personnel, returned and entered the alternative program in order to complete their education and receive their high school diploma.  However, there are a few who attend the alternative program due to severe illnesses such as cancer or kidney disease and need a smaller

setting or a different environment to be successful.  Also, some of the students have children and work full-time jobs; therefore, alternative education is their best option because of child-care issues and the need to work in order to provide for their families.

## Procedures

As soon as the chair and committee members approved the proposal defense, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application was submitted within five days of the defense. Upon receiving feedback from the IRB Approval Board, appropriate corrections were made to the application, and it was submitted again.  As soon as IRB approval was granted (Appendix A), a meeting was scheduled with school district personnel in charge of research and development as well as the administrator of the alternative program to inform them IRB approval had been granted and the data collection process could begin.  Next, a meeting was planned with the educators who work at the alternative setting.  During this meeting, the purpose of the study was shared with the participants and they were asked volunteer for the study.  Twenty individuals volunteered for the research study but only 12 were needed.  As a result, those who volunteered were informed of how the names would be placed in a hat and 12 would be randomly selected. Information was shared with the faculty of the steps that would be taken to ensure representation existed across all ethnicities, genders, and age categories; thus, if only one male volunteered, that individual will be included in the study or if only American Indians were selected, then a couple of names would be removed and additional names would be redrawn until all ethnicities were chosen.

After the 12 participants were selected, the Participant Consent Form (Appendix B) was reviewed with the participants and they agreed to be part of the study by signing the consent form.  Next, the data collection began.  The first form of data collection was the Nonverbal

Immediacy Scale-Self Report (NIS-S) (Richmond et al., 2003). The participants completed the survey within 20 minutes or less. Some of them calculated their immediacy rating and for those who did not want to do the calculations, the calculations were done for them.

The next form of data collection was the individual interviews (Appendix C). The interviews were conducted at the alternative site. The interviews lasted until saturation occurred which was 28 minutes or less. During each interview, educators responded to a few closed-ended questions and to several open-ended questions. The semi-structured interview process allows flexibility to probe and explore new areas (Patton, 1990); and it gave me the opportunity to expound on information the participants shared during their interviews. According to Moustakas (1994), a phenomenological interview is comprised of a collaborative open-ended conversation. Each interview was audio recorded to ensure accuracy of transcribe memos. Participants were given the opportunity to take part in member checking which allows each participant to review their transcribed interview to ensure accuracy of the transcripts (Creswell, 2013).

The last form of data collection was a focus group meeting (Appendix D). An online invitation with a reply request was sent to five randomly selected participants who took part in the interview process. Each participant received a personalized follow up by phone or in person to ensure they had received the invitation and verified if they were available to attend the focus group session. The collaborative meeting was conducted at a local restaurant away from the alternative program after school hours. Discussion prompts were designed to guide the focus group meeting. At the beginning of the meeting, the importance of confidentiality was shared with all participants, both from the point of view of the researcher, as well as the participants. During the focus group meeting, the principal researcher facilitated the meeting while

participants responded to discussion prompts. The meeting was audio recorded and the recording was transcribed verbatim. Participants had the opportunity to participate in member checking to ensure accuracy. After the data was collected and checked for accuracy, coding was used to identify themes and continued until saturation had been reached.

## Personal Biography

My family was very poor and my parents did not graduate from high school. They loved and encouraged each of us to do our best. As a result, two of us are educators, one is a nurse, and one is a minister. However, they lacked the essential elements necessary to help us academically, so they relied on our teachers to provide us with the best education possible. I was blessed to have a few good teachers in my life but one left a lasting impression.

My fourth grade teacher, Ms. Bethea, made me realize that I could accomplish anything. On a daily basis, her verbal and nonverbal behaviors were so encouraging that I was always excited about being in her room; she made me feel special. When she would ask a question, I wanted to be the first one to answer because I wanted to please her. She had such an impact on my life that I wanted to become a teacher so I could do for other students what she did for me. Years later, I realized that I was not the only student whom Ms. Bethea made feel special; she made every student feel that way. I have had many educators along my educational journey, and many I have forgotten, but I have never forgotten Ms. Bethea; even as an adult, I am still inspired to reach my fullest potential because she made me believe that I could accomplish anything I set my mind to.

As an educator, I have also realized that most students desire to have a teacher who displays teacher immediacy behaviors, those verbal and nonverbal cues that have the potential to make a student feel appreciated and cared for. Those affirmative behaviors can lead to a positive

student-teacher relationship and can help students achieve success (Alderman & Green, 2011; Burroughs, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Rey et al., 2007; Sibii, 2010; Velez & Cano, 2008).   I see students on a daily basis who are looking for someone who will make a difference in their lives and this is especially true for at-risk students.  So many students could benefit from an encouraging and supportive relationship with an adult figure.  Not only can teacher immediacy impact a student's overall school success but it can help teachers as well.  On multiple occasions, I have taught students who were doing great in my class but would go to another class and misbehave or students who were failing another course but were excelling in my room.  When I asked, "What was the difference?" the common denominator was "They don't like me so I don't care."

Students are not concerned with how well educators know their content they want to know that their teachers care about them (Alderman & Green, 2011; Baker et. al., 2008; Rubie-Davies et al., 2010).  When teachers embrace the concept that students desire to have a supportive student-teacher relationship and work to develop that relationship, they will see an increase in student achievement and a decrease in inappropriate behavior (Alderman & Green, 2011; Burroughs, 2007; Goodboy & Myers, 2009; Klem & Connell, 2004; Rey et al., 2007).  A student-teacher relationship that is caring can bring success to both teacher and student and based on my experiences, teacher immediacy behaviors can enhance the student-teacher relationship, which can result in student achievement.

Because of the passion that I possess for student-teacher relationships and teacher immediacy, I felt that a transcendental phenomenological study was most appropriate. According to Moustakes (1994), *Epoche* is an important component of transcendental phenomenology; it requires setting "aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing

things, events and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again, as if for the first time" (p. 85). Therefore, I could not allow my biases to become part of this study. According to Creswell (2013), it is vital that qualitative researchers remain "conscious of the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study" (p. 216). In order to achieve this task, I kept a reflective journal. Journaling my thoughts, feelings, and ideas helped me remain conscious of my own belief system.

I work within the system where the study was conducted and I am familiar with the program. However, I am not the administrator of the program or do I serve in the capacity of supervisor of those who work with the alternative program. Since I have been in the system for my entire educational career, I know the teachers as well as the administrator on a professional level. However, I understand the importance of conducting ethical research and I was able to put aside any prejudices or preconceived notions about the phenomenon, site, or participants. I am a trained expert and it is my desire to allow the research to tell the story about teacher immediacy.

**Data Collection**

Three forms of data collection were utilized to ensure triangulation: Survey, individual interviews, and a focus group session. Triangulation "involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective" (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). Not all forms of data collection were anonymous. Since the focus group session incorporated a round table discussion format, information was shared with all participants about the importance of confidentiality. However, it remained solely up to individuals to refrain from communicating information that was shared by their colleagues. Participants were given an overview of the study and asked to complete consent forms (Appendix B). Each educator was assured their

willingness to participate in this study will be strictly voluntary and they would receive no form of reprimand if they refuse to participate or if they should withdraw from the study.

The first form of data collection was the survey. By providing the survey first, information was gained on how teachers communicate nonverbally. Thus, when the participants begin to use their hands while they are talking or avoid making eye contact during the interview, those behaviors correlated to the information obtained from the survey. The second form of data collection was individual interviews. The semi-structured individual interviews lasted approximately 28 minutes or less. The interview session provided the individuals to state their perspectives of teacher immediacy without input from anyone else. The last data collection was a focus group session. The focus group session is appropriate for the last form of data collection because at this point, information has been shared about teachers' non-verbal immediacy behaviors (survey) and their individual perceptions about teacher immediacy (interviews). Thus, the focus group session allowed for a group discussion of teacher immediacy. With the round table discussion, participants were able to voice their viewpoints and hear the opinions of their colleagues as well.

**Survey**

Once the informed consent form was reviewed and signed, participants completed the Nonverbal Immediacy Scale-Self Report, a self-reporting questionnaire (NIS-S) (Richmond et al., 2003). According to Gall et al. (2007), a survey is a questionnaire that is used to ask all individuals the same questions. Surveys are often used in quantitative research but can also be used in qualitative research (Gall et al., 2007). "A survey is a method of data collection using questionnaires or interviews to collect data from a sample that has been selected to represent a populations to which the findings of the data analysis can be generalized" (Gall et al., 2007, p.

230).  The purpose of the responses to the survey was to measure nonverbal immediacy.  The descriptive statistics gained from this survey combined with the interviews and focus group meeting helped to identify themes regarding teachers' perceptions of teacher immediacy.

The survey was administered to the 12 participants who were randomly selected from the volunteer list for the research.  The participants completed the survey at the alternative site.  All participants completed the survey within 20 minutes or less.  The analysis of the data from the survey was based on the information provided by the author.  Thus, the following steps were used to find the scores of each participant: First "add the scores from the following items: 1, 2, 6, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, and 25" next, "add the scores from the following items:  3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 15, 18, 20, 23, 24, and 26" and the "Total Score =  78 plus Step 1 minus Step 2" (Richmond et al., 2003).  I also used the norms from Richmond and his colleagues which included the following information: Females: Mean for nonverbal immediacy is 96.7, standard deviation for nonverbal immediacy is 16.1, high nonverbal immediacy is $\geq 112$, and low nonverbal immediacy is $\leq 81$, while for males the mean for nonverbal immediacy is 91.6, standard deviation for nonverbal immediacy is 15.0, high nonverbal immediacy is $\geq 106$, and low nonverbal immediacy is $\leq 77$ (Richmond et al., 2003).  The combined norms are: Mean for nonverbal immediacy is 94.2, standard deviation for nonverbal immediacy is 15.6, high nonverbal immediacy is $\geq 109$, and low nonverbal immediacy is $\leq 79$.  The survey has an alpha reliability of approximately .90 and a predictive validity that is excellent (Richmond et al., 2003). The survey was listed on the Measurement Instrument Database for Social Sciences website (http://www.midss.org).  According to the website, "the site is designed to be a repository for instruments that are used to collect data from across the social sciences.  Please use the site to discover instruments you can use in your research" (http://www.midss.org/about-us).

**Interviews**

"The phenomenological interview involves an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). The semi-structured interviews consisted of a few closed-response questions but most of the questions were open-ended. The purpose of the closed-response questions were to help the participants relax prior to moving into the more in-depth questions about teacher immediacy. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer has the flexibility to probe and explore new areas (Patton, 1990).

Prior to conducting the interview process with the educators who work at the alternative setting, a pilot interview process was conducted with two educators who have completed a qualitative method and have received their doctoral degree. The purpose of the pilot interviews was to practice and to ensure the validity of the interview questions. After the pilot interviews, each mock interviewee was asked if the questions were clear and concise and to provide any necessary feedback to add clarity to the questions as well as gather their input as it relates to my interview techniques. The experimental interviews were recorded and listened to, in order to confirm the recording device was working properly. Providing an additional recording device safeguarded the recordings. Once feedback was received from the two educators about the interviews and the recordings were checked for accuracy, recommendations were made and a second simulated interview process was conducted to certify the interview process was ready to be implemented with fidelity.

Of the 30 educators who work at the alternative school site, 12 participants engaged in the semi-structured interviews, which lasted until saturation had been reached, which was approximately 28 minutes or less. Saturation involves obtaining enough information about the phenomenon so that there is no need to gather additional information (Creswell, 2013).

Participants had the option to have the interview conducted at the site or at a different location away from the alternative setting.  All of them opted to have the interviews on the site because most of the participants are part-time employees and they wanted to complete the interviews before going home for the day.  Therefore, their schedules were the guiding factors in planning the interview times.  The interviews were recorded to ensure accuracy and a backup recording device was used as well; also a few notes were taken during the interview session.  However, note taking ceased after the first couple of interviews because it seemed to make the participants a little nervous.

During the interview, data analysis software was utilized to record and transcribe the interviews verbatim.  The recordings and the transcripts were reviewed for accuracy.  After the interviews had been transcribed, participants were allowed the opportunity to take part in member checking.  Member checking involves each participant reviewing their transcribed interview to ensure accuracy of the transcripts (Creswell, 2013).   Next the transcripts were edited and approved for accuracy.   After the member checking procedures were completed, the coding process began; data was classified through coding.  Creswell (2013) defines coding as "aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different data bases being used in a study, and then assigning a label to the code" (p. 184).

The interview questions (Appendix C) helped to answer the four research questions:

1.  What are the opinions of teachers who work in an alternative setting about teacher immediacy?

2.  What do teachers state as obstacles to establishing teacher immediacy?

3. What additional resources do teachers state they need for establishing teacher immediacy?

4. Do teachers who teach in an alternative setting perceive that teacher immediacy positively impacts student success and why or why not?

Interview questions one and two were generic questions and were designed to help participants feel relaxed. The final question (#13) allows participants to add any additional comments they felt were not addressed or maybe add clarity to a statement. The remaining interview questions were open-ended in order to allow for additional questioning and clarity of responses.

Research question one sought to understand the opinions and statements that teachers who teach in an alternative setting make about teacher immediacy. Participants shared why they chose teaching as a career choice, what were the differences between an alternative setting versus a traditional setting, what were the challenges and rewards of teaching in an alternative setting, what they felt was most important to students, and how they felt about the student-teacher relationship. The majority of students who attend an alternative setting have a negative view of school and many have been unsuccessful when it comes to developing a student-teacher relationship that is supportive and encouraging (Andersen, 1979; D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011).

In order to answer research question two, educators were asked to share their thoughts on teaching in an alternative setting by stating the differences, challenges, rewards, as well as possible traits educators should possess when working in this type of environment. The information obtained from the interviews identified obstacles that could interfere with teacher immediacy behaviors and how those obstacles could hinder the development of positive student-teacher relationships. There are many negative social factors facing today's youth (Parkay et al.,

2010); yet teachers are expected to have the necessary skill sets to deal with those negative issues while at the same time preparing them for high stakes testing (Santos, 2012; Shelly, 2012). Those who work in an alternative setting provided insight as to what could be seen as hurdles or stumbling blocks to displaying immediacy behaviors in the classroom.

The third research question focused on resources teachers need to establishing teacher immediacy.  The participants described those resources as professional development activities as well as personality traits a person may need to possess.  When teachers display immediacy behaviors in their instruction, then students' perceive their teachers care about them (Andersen, 1979; Martin & Mottet, 2011; Sibii, 2010) and they begin to take a more active role in the learning process (Henning, 2012; Richmond, Lane, & McCroskey, 2006; Rocca, & McCroskey, 1999; Rocca, 2004).  These verbal and nonverbal behaviors can be as simple as a smiling, making eye contact, praising a student, or providing constructive feedback (Henning, 2012; Mehrabian, 1972; Richmond et al., 2006; Sibii, 2010; Santilli et al., 2011; Velez & Cano, 2008). As simple as these behaviors are, they can lead to the development of a positive student-teacher relationship (Andersen, 1979; Witt et al., 2004), which can result in student achievement (Henning, 2012; Richmond, Lane, & McCroskey, 2006; Rocca, & McCroskey, 1999; Rocca, 2004).

The aim of this study was to determine if teacher immediacy behaviors could positively impact student success.  In order to gather data for research question four, teachers were asked to share their opinions regarding student-teacher relationships, the rewards and challenges of teaching in an alternative setting, and the perceptions of the students they teach as it relates to student-teacher relationships.  Teacher immediacy behaviors have gained much attention over the past two decades (Allen, Witt, & Wheeless, 2006); Burroughs, 2007; Finn & Schrodt, 2012;

Henning, 2012; Richmond et al., 2006; Rocca, 2004; Witt et al., 2004).  Much research has been

conducted to show that teacher immediacy behaviors can positively impact student learning

(Henning, 2012; Richmond, Lane, & McCroskey, 2006; Rocca, & McCroskey, 1999; Rocca,

2004).

**Focus Group Meeting**

The last form of data collection was a focus group meeting (Appendix D).  An online

invitation with a reply request was sent to a small number of randomly selected participants who

took part in the interview process.  If some of the participants were unable to attend, additional

participants were randomly selected and received an invitation as well.  The meeting was

conducted at a neutral site away from the alternative site.  Discussion prompts were used to

guide the focus group meeting.

Before the actual focus group session with the educators who teach at the alternative site

took place, a preliminary focus group session was conducted with three educators who work in

the district.  The goal of the pretend session was to practice and ensure the authentic meeting

would be conducted in a credible manner.   After the trial session, each member of the mock

focus group session was asked to provide feedback as it relates to the questions being asked and

to my role as the facilitator of the meeting.  The introductory meeting was recorded and a second

recording device was in place as a backup. Once the opinions of the educators were received and

updates made, an additional simulated focus group session was conducted to make certain the

process was ready to be carried out with fidelity.

When the main focus group session occurred, the meeting was recorded and transcribed

verbatim.  A second recording device was in place as a backup to protect against a second group

session occurring.  After the discussion had been transcribed, participants were provided the

opportunity to participate in member checking to ensure accuracy.  Once the data was collected

and checked for accuracy, it was analyzed and the findings recorded in a report.  Through the use

of the NIS-S survey, interviews, and focus group meeting, coding was applied in an effort to

uncover themes.

The focus group topics helped to answer the research questions:

1. What are the opinions of teachers who work in an alternative setting about teacher
   immediacy?

2. What do teachers state as obstacles to establishing teacher immediacy?

3. What additional resources do teachers state they need for establishing teacher
   immediacy?

4. Do teachers who teach in an alternative setting perceive that teacher immediacy
   positively impacts student success and why or why not?

Focus group topic one was designed to answer research questions one and four.  Focus group

topic two helped to answer research questions one, two and three.  Focus group topic answered

all four of the research questions.  See Appendix D for focus group topics.

## Data Analysis

The first step of data analysis was *Epoche* or bracketing.  *Epoche* is defined as putting

away prejudices and one's own experiences so the phenomenon can be viewed from an unbiased

perspective (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994).   The analysis of the data required reading,

reviewing, and examining each of the transcripts equally (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

Each participant's statement was listed and viewed as equally important as it related to the

phenomenon.  This step is called horizontalization and the beginning of the phenomenological

reduction process.  The second step, delimiting horizons or meanings, consisted of eliminating

repetitive text and focusing on those statements that stood out (Moustakas, 1994). Once the completion of delimiting horizons or meanings, significant statements were grouped into similar units or themes. This step in analyzing the data is called invariant qualities and themes (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). By clustering information, relevant topics of the phenomenon were identified. Once the statements were clustered into themes, the next step in the process was textural description. Textural description requires scripting the "what" of the lived experiences of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013) the participants shared in their interviews and focus group session. This section included individual narratives as well as group narratives, which includes integrating the lived experiences of all participants into a combined narrative. This entire process is called phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994).

After phenomenological reduction, the imaginative variant component of the research design began. Imaginative variant involves viewing the data from all angles or from different perspectives in order to see various viewpoints or sides to the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This task requires looking and reviewing all relevant data multiple times, which can lead "to deeper layers of meaning" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 96). The major task of imaginative variant is to identify the "how" that speaks to conditions that illuminate the "what of experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). Through the use of imaginative variation, structural themes were derived. Structural description relates to the "how" of the experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). It requires the researcher to determine significance or relevance of the structured themes by viewing the phenomenon through multiple angles (Moustakas, 1994). In this step of the data analysis process, themes were integrated into individual structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). Next, a composite structural description was compiled and a group narrative was written.

The last major component of the data analysis process is synthesis of composite textural and composite structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). At this point, a combination of the composite textural and composite structural descriptions synthesized the essence of the experience by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). After the data was analyzed, a peer reviewer was employed to ensure the integrity of the research process. An external audit provides an outside consultant an opportunity to examine the process, product, and the accuracy of the results (Creswell, 2013). Each participant had the opportunity to participate in member checking, which allowed participants the chance to review transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the data (Creswell, 2013).

## Trustworthiness

Phenomenology is based on the lived experiences of individuals (Creswell 2013; Moustakas, 1994); therefore, safeguarding the accuracy of the study and the authenticity of the results required the implementation of trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is an important component of any qualitative study; it seeks to answer the question, "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?" (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p. 290). There are several perspectives that can be used to validate qualitative research (Creswell, 2013) but for this study, the following methods were implemented: Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### Credibility

Credibility is viewed as a crucial factor in sustaining trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was achieved by employing member checking, reflexivity, triangulation, and a peer reviewer. Member checking allows participants the opportunity to review transcripts to

ensure the accuracy of the data (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, each participant was provided a copy of their individual transcribed interview and those who participated in the focus group session was given a copy of the transcribed session to review as well. Each participant was given the chance to add, delete or provide clarity to any written statements. After the corrections were made, the participants signed a form stating they had read and agreed with the transcribed data (Appendix E). Next, the data was analyzed and an email was sent to each participant inviting them to a meeting where they could view the results from the study and provide any additional comments or suggestions.

Reflexivity was obtained by journaling. Transcendental phenomenology requires viewing the phenomenon from a fresh state (Moustakas, 1994); therefore, thoughts, beliefs and feelings about the phenomenon must remain neutral and the best way for me to achieve this task was by daily reflection and journaling my thoughts. Journaling helps to bring consciousness to any preconceived notions that may exist. See Appendix F for journal entries.

In order to add extra credibility to the study, I employed triangulation. Triangulation consists of using multiple data sources (Creswell, 2013). "This process involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective" (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). This study included three forms of data collection: Survey, interviews, and a focus group meeting. The participants completed the independent survey first, the individual interviews second, and the collaborative focus group session last.

Lastly, to ensure credibility, a peer reviewer was asked to read the transcribe transcripts and themes to make sure the information was presented accurately. The goal of the peer reviewer was to "ask hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations" (Creswell, 2013, 251). By allowing another person to analyze the project, it reinforced the validity of the

study.  The person selected as the peer reviewer had completed a phenomenological study.  She has also worked with other doctoral students and has a wealth of knowledge in this process.  She also teaches undergraduate and graduate students.

**Transferability**

Transferability allows researchers to apply the findings of a particular study to other studies (Shenton, 2004).  Since qualitative studies contain a small number of participants, it is somewhat unreasonable to assume the results from a qualitative study can be generalized to a larger population (Shenton, 2004).  "Nevertheless, the accumulation of findings from studies staged in different settings might enable a more inclusive overall picture to be gained" (Shenton, 2004, pp. 70-71).  Thus, "To make sure that the findings are transferable between the researcher and those being studied, thick transcription is necessary" (Creswell, 2013, p. 246).  Therefore, interviews and the focus group session were transcribed verbatim in order for researchers to use the information in other studies.  Purposeful sampling and the peer reviewer added reliability to the transferability of the study.

**Dependability**

Dependability refers to how reliable the results are and if the study could be replicated given the same circumstances (Shenton, 2004).  "In order to address the dependability issue more directly, the processes within the study should be reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work" (Shenton, 2004, p. 71).  Thus, it was important that precise measures and details were given in explaining the process used in collecting and analyzing the data as well as reporting the results.

In order to achieve dependability, the interview and focus group sessions were protected by employing mock interviews and a pilot focus group session.  Also, an individual with

expertise in teacher immediacy reviewed the interview questions and focus group topics to make sure the interview and focus group questions were designed to answer the research questions. Next, the data was transcribed verbatim and the participants were given copies to read as well as provide comments. Lastly, triangulation helped to achieve dependability.

## Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the objectivity of the researcher. "Here steps must be taken to help ensure as far as possible that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). Thus, researchers must be fully aware of their biases and not allow them to interfere with the study.

Confirmability was achieved through the use of an audit of the research process (Creswell, 2013). An external audit provided an outside consultant an opportunity to examine the process, product, and the accuracy of the results (Creswell, 2013). A peer reviewer was utilized to ensure the integrity of the research process. This was an individual who completed a phenomenological study and has a clear understanding of the required components of qualitative research.

## Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were employed to protect all participants involved in the study. To ensure anonymity, the site and the participants were given pseudonyms. All pertinent information that pertains to the study is kept in a locked cabinet at my home and electronic files are password protected. Participants were given informed consent forms, which stated they could remove themselves from the study at any time without any negative repercussions. The interviews were conducted on campus for convenience; however participants were given the

option to leave the campus but due to their schedule, they chose to conduct the interviews on campus. The focus group session took place at a local restaurant afterschool. During the focus group session, participants were informed the information they share would remain confidential from the part of the researcher. However, since it was a round table discussion, confidentiality was dependent upon those at the table.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to gain a more in depth understanding of teacher immediacy through the eyes of those who educate at-risk students in an alternative setting. Researchers who utilize a phenomenological approach see things as they are in nature and view the phenomena from all angles in order to find meaning (Moustakas, 1994). They arrive "at essences through intuition and reflection on conscious acts of experience, leading to ideas, concepts, judgments, and understandings" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 58). Phenomenology is a reflective approach that is dedicated to detailed and accurate descriptions of the shared experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). A transcendental phenomenological study "moves beyond the everyday to the pure ego in which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34).

This chapter will contain the results from the Nonverbal Immediacy Scale-Self (NIS-S) Report survey, interviews, and focus group session. The data was used to answer the research questions.

1. What are the opinions of teachers who work in an alternative setting about teacher immediacy?

2. What do teachers state as obstacles to establishing teacher immediacy?

3. What additional resources do teachers state they need for establishing teacher immediacy?

4. Do teachers who teach in an alternative setting perceive that teacher immediacy positively impacts student success and why or why not?

**Participants**

This study was comprised of 12 participants with: (a) seven having more than 25 years of experience in education, (b) seven having advance degrees, (c) four full time employees and (d) two counselors, one social worker, one administrator, and seven teachers.  Each person had been licensed by an accredited institution and held a state certification in their content area.  Eleven of the members of this study had worked in a traditional setting prior to moving to the alternative setting.

The first meeting consisted of the entire staff being briefed on the study.  Once the details of the study were outlined, educators were asked to volunteer and 20 participants volunteered for this study.  Each volunteer was provided a consent form.  Once the consent forms were signed, the participants were given the NIS-S survey to complete; therefore, all twenty participants completed the survey.  Since only 12 participants were needed, the names were placed in a cup and randomly selected; yet, due to the fact, that only one Caucasian was selected, an American Indian participant was removed from the selected number and the selection process continued until an additional Caucasian was selected.  Once the final 12 were identified, each person participated in the individualized interviews and the final data collection was the focus group session, which was comprised of a smaller number of participants.

**Participant Profile**

The participants involved in this study work at the alternative program in the school district.  Most of the educators at the site are retired personnel who work part time; however, there are a few who are fulltime employees.  Twenty participants volunteered for this study but 12 were randomly selected to be part of the study.  All ethnicities and genders as well as part time and full time personnel were represented in the study.  Of the 12 participants selected to be

part of the study, seven were American Indian, two were Caucasian and three were African American; there were also nine females and three males as well as seven part time employees and five full time employees. The years of educational experience range from 5 to 30 plus years.

**April** is a social worker at the alternative site. She has been in education for five years. She serves two schools in the district.

**Beth** is a retired exceptional children's teacher with over 20 years of experience. She spent most of her educational career in the elementary setting but has taught middle and high school students as well.

**Carol** is a retired educator who worked in the middle and high school settings as well as at the district office in various administrative settings. She has over 30 years of experience in education.

**Deborah** is a retired teacher with over 30 years of experience. She began her teaching career in a non-traditional school setting. However, she has spent most of career teaching at a traditional high school prior to moving to the alternative site.

**Grant** is a full time employee who has worked as a teacher as well as an administrator. He has over 25 years of experience in education.

**John** is retired military and taught middle school language arts and history for over 15 years. He also teaches language arts and history at the alternative site.

**Mary** is a retired teacher who has taught elementary, middle, and high school. Mary has also worked at the district office and has served in various administrative capacities. She has over 30 years of experience in education.

**Monica** is a full time employee who taught in one of the high schools in the district. She is one of the original staff members at the alternative site and has been in education over 15 years.

**Pamela** is a retired teacher with over 30 years of experience. She taught high school science the majority of her career prior to moving to the alternative site where she currently teaches science courses.

**Rebecca** is a full time employee. She spent her time working in a high school prior to moving to the alternative site to teach. She has over 10 years of experience in education and has been teaching at the site since it opened.

**Samuel** is a retired teacher with over 30 years of experience in education. He taught middle and high school history.

**Teresa** is a full time employee who has over 20 years of experience in education. She has worked in elementary, middle, and high school settings.

### Interviews and Focus Session

The participants took part in the semi-structured interviews at various times during the day due to the fact some of the educators are part time employees and some are full time. The individual interviews were conducted in a separate room on the alternative site. Each person was asked to respond to 13 questions with each interview lasting between 10 and 28 minutes depending on how much detail the participants were willing to provide. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. A second recording device was used as a backup in order to protect the interview session. Each participant was provided the opportunity to participate in member checking to ensure the accuracy of the data. A letter explaining member checking and a copy of the individual's transcribed interview was given to each participant. The

participants were provided the opportunity to view their individual transcribe interview and offer any necessary feedback.  Once they agreed with the transcriptions, participants were asked to sign a form stating they approved of the transcriptions (Appendix E).

The focus group session took place after school at a local restaurant.  Individuals received an email inviting them to the focus group session.  The session was audio recorded and transcribed exactly.  A second recording device was used to protect the session.  Member checking was employed.

Table 2

*Enumeration of Horizon of Codes*

| Open Codes | Frequency of Open-Code Appearance Across Data Sets | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| Body Language | 15 | Students Pay Attention to Immediacy Behaviors |
| Tone of Voice | 12 | |
| Visual | 7 | |
| Facial Expressions | 8 | |
| Relationships | 41 | Student-Teacher Relationships |
| Support | 16 | |
| Treat Them/Fair | 32 | |
| Connections/Bonds | 22 | |
| Walls/Barriers | 16 | Building Trust |
| Gained/Earned Trust | 28 | |
| Disappointments | 12 | |
| Respect | 20 | Caring Teachers |
| Love/Value/Matter | 63 | |
| Expectations | 24 | |
| Lack of Judgment | 22 | Compassionate |
| Understanding | 33 | |
| Home Life/Negative Factors | 21 | |
| Everyone is Different | 17 | Flexible |
| Every Day is a New Day | 21 | |
| Lack of Bells and Schedule | 11 | |
| One-on-One Attention | 16 | |
| Student Centered | 23 | Educating the Whole Child |
| Life Skills | 16 | |
| Productive Citizens | 10 | |
| Guidance | 9 | Student Performance Based on Immediacy Behaviors |
| Sense of Belonging | 12 | |
| Students Like Their Teachers | 24 | |
| Encouragement | 11 | |
| May Not Be Rich | 22 | Teachers Are Making A Difference |
| Love My Job | 25 | |
| Changing Lives | 18 | |

**Research Question One**

What are the opinions of teachers who work in an alternative setting about teacher immediacy?  The purpose of research question one was to gain the viewpoints of teacher immediacy from those who work closely with at-risk students in an alternative setting.  Based on the data collected from the participants, two major themes were identified:

- At-risk students pay close attention to teacher immediacy behaviors.

- A positive, supportive, and encouraging student-teacher relationship is crucial for the overall success of at-risk students.

*Teacher Immediacy Behaviors*

The participants gave a great deal of input on how students respond to verbal and nonverbal cues.  Teresa stated,

> I think that communication skills are very important in that your tone of voice, your facial expressions, your body language, they really pick up on that a lot because they're visual people.  We see them all the time watching…they respond to facial expressions and they watch your tone of voice.  If they see you are getting upset and angry or giving directions in a negative tone of voice; they will respond to you in negative manner.

According to Carol, at-risk students are very conscious of verbal and non-verbal communication. During the interview process, Carol shared with me many of the students at the alternative site have experienced such verbal and non-verbal abuse that they have difficulty connecting to anyone.  Therefore, they are watching and waiting to see how teachers will respond to them both verbally and nonverbally.  Carol became so emotionally distraught as she spoke about the students that she asked if I turn the audio off until she could gain her composure.

Teresa also stated that teachers must be very much aware of student body language as well.  Monica supported Teresa's statement by saying that sometimes students will come to school angry because of something that has happened over the weekend, before they left home, or on the bus and as their teacher you have to "step back and realize they are not angry at me and find out what the problem is before you can start teaching and you have to pay attention to your body language also."  According to Samuel, "students pay close attention to how you to respond to them and it can make or break the relationship."  During the focus group session, the participants reiterated that at-risk students pay close attention to verbal and non-verbal cues.

***Student-Teacher Relationship***

The student-teacher relationship was the most consistent theme during the interviews and the focus group session.  Every participant spoke about the importance of building relationships and how relationship can help impact the overall success of at-risk students.  Several responses from the interviews are listed below.  Pamela stated,

> I think the student-teacher relationship is very important.  I think it is much like a child and mother…they [mothers] have to have that unconditional love.  They [students] need to know that you're going to be there for them no matter what they do but at the same time they have to have limits.  You [teacher] have to set expectations and limitations for them because they need that also.

Monica responded by saying,

> Without that student-teacher relationship there's no way you can break all those layers they have because a lot of them come here already feeling defeated.  But once you develop a relationship with them and they see that you genuinely care

about them, it just makes all the difference in the world.  So, I think it is number

one, the relationship; you have to build it first before these kids will let you in.

According to Rebecca the student-teacher relationship,

Is everything; it is everything!  Without that relationship, there is no

breakthrough.  It is the connection; how can I connect to you as a person in the

here and now; it has nothing to do with what happened in the past or what is

going to happen in the future; it is about right now, here and now are we

connecting.   If we connect, you can teach me something and I can teach you

something.

Based on John's response, teachers must prove themselves before a positive student-teacher

relationship can be established.  "If you have not established some kind of relationship, you're

not going to teach a child much."

Samuel supported his colleagues with his response,

At-risk kids really need a student-teacher relationship.  Let's face it, there's a

reason they're at-risk.  These students just need to know teachers care about them.

Some need a one-on-one relationship because there are so many that have not had

a positive relationship with a teacher until they get here.  So, yes I think it [student-

teacher relationship] is very important.

Grant stated, "It [student-teacher relationship] is important; it is the piece that is vital to their

success."  Beth's comments were similar to those of her counterparts.  She stated, "you have to

maintain a relationship with these students.  You can't be there buddy but you can let them know

you care and they can come to you with any concerns."  April added that you have to constantly

encourage them [students], build a relationship with them and "let them know that we are here

for them, if they need to just sit and talk to someone." According to Teresa, students who do not have a positive student-teacher relationship often misbehave. She states, "They think they are hurting the teacher but in reality they are hurting themselves. So, the student-teacher relationship is very important."

The student-teacher relationship was also a major topic at the focus group session. Each individual who participated in the focus group session seemed to resort back to the importance of building relationships with students. I began the focus group session by defining teacher immediacy; then I asked the participants to share their feelings, thoughts, and viewpoints about teacher immediacy. Samuel began by saying,

I think it is one of the best things for the kids because it is probably the reason

they want to continue the program. They want to develop a relationship with us

and that is what motivates some of them and gives them an incentive to continue

and graduate.

Deborah chimed in by saying,

Once they have a relationship with a teacher, if that teacher is out and they are

having a problem, they might say, I will wait until Mr. or Ms. returns because he

or she understands me. So, it is important for us to understand that maybe this

student only trust Mr. or Ms. and not to push them.

According to Mary, "the relationship can help to keep them focused and many of them are not accustomed to having a one-on-one relationship with someone. So the relationship is very important especially to these children." Teresa supported Mary's statement by adding that the student-teacher relationship "helps to keep students focused because they know you are going to be there for them if they need you."

**Research Question Two**

What do teachers state as obstacles to establishing teacher immediacy in the alternative setting? This question was designed to gather information on what could hinder teachers from displaying teacher immediacy behaviors in the classroom. The identifiable themes for research question two were:

- Teachers must gain the trust of their students.

- Students must know teachers care.

*Trust*

Trust was a main talking point during the interview session. Many of the participants stated before teachers can develop a student-teacher relationship with at-risk students, teachers must first gain their trust. They stated trust was a crucial element in the lives of at-risk students and most of the students at the alternative site have not had a supportive and trusting relationship with an adult figure. According to the participants, the majority of the students enter the alternative site not believe anything the faculty and staff have to say at first because they have heard so many false statements during their lifetime. Monica shared,

Students are coming in with walls built up, they have been through so much and, until you earn their trust, they are not going let you in. The challenge is winning their trust but once you win their trust and they see you really care about them, it becomes easier to get them to see the purpose of education.

Deborah stated that honesty was important to at-risk students because they had been disappointed many times by many people. John had the same sentiment by saying, "I feel they have to learn to trust us and understand that we are here for them and…we want them to know

we want them to succeed." When asked, "What were the rewards of teaching at-risk students in an alternative setting?" Grant replied,

> The overall reward is seeing them gain their confidence, seeing them come every day, seeing them come from day one being very skeptical, being standoffish or afraid, and not wanting to trust anyone to interacting with everybody that's here and gaining a sense of belonging.

Teresa views were similar to Grant's. She stated,

> In August the students are kind of standoffish and we see them at a raw point where they don't have relationships with adults. So, they have a lot of trust issues and we have to start working with them at that point. It takes a couple of months before we can build a relationship with them and for them to begin to trust us.

Carol indicated,

> One of the challenges we face is gaining the students' willingness to understand that we're here to work with them. Their willingness, which is the trust, to help them understand we're not just here to teach a subject or to get something done, or to get through a day; that we're here to help them achieve their high school diploma.

The participants spoke of how crucial trust is to at-risk students. Many of them stated once trust was established, the relationship can form and learning can occur. One of the participants summed the importance of trust up by saying, "If they trust you, they will let you in and you can get them to do whatever you need them to do."

Trust was also mentioned during the focus group session. Once again, the participants stated you must gain the trust of the students before you can ever form a relationship. Mary affirmed that unless "students trust you, you are wasting your time." Samuel agreed by saying,

> Trust is everything to them and what you tell them, they expect that to happen.
>
> When you tell them you are here to help them graduate, one of the first things
>
> they will say to you, 'I've heard that before' and you have to prove to them that
>
> you are here for them.

Deborah affirmed Samuel's statement by saying many of the students enter the setting without trusting anyone and at first they do not believe anything the teachers have to say. Another participate added that once she has gained the trust of her students, the students will speak up if another students begins to misbehave by saying, "she is here to help you and you need to realize that." Everyone in the focus group session stated the importance of establishing trust with at-risk students and how trust is the foundation to forming bonds with students. One person stated how trust was the foundation for building supportive relationships with students.

### Teachers Care

A caring teacher was a common theme throughout the entire data collection process. According to every participant, students must know you care about them and this is true for students in a traditional setting as well as students in an alternative setting. However, they agree for at-risk students in an alternative setting, the caring element is crucial for their success. Every participant stated in order to work with at-risk students in an alternative setting you must love children. Pamela stated, "They don't like me most days; I don't like them many days but in the end we love each other every day." When asked, "What do you feel is important to your students?" Monica stated,

It is that they matter; that they see that you believe that they matter. Just because

you made a mistake does not imply that you do not matter. Once they see you

really care about them, they will work for you. That they matter and that they

have a story and once you break through that wall and they see you really care

about them then the education starts. So, I think what's important is that

somebody cares about them and they feel that they have somebody who will listen

to them. And you can't fake it because they will know if you truly care about

them or not.

Grant's opinion was similar to Monica's. He stated,

The biggest challenge in dealing with at risk students is getting them to believe

they have value. They have been pretty much pushed to the side and given the

impression they don't have value as a student or value as a future citizen.

According to Rebecca, students "want to have somebody to say I appreciate you; they don't want

much. It's not cell phones and cars they want; they want to be loved and appreciated," which

was a sentiment shared by all the participants. She also stated the core value of those who work

at the alternative site "is they love kids" and "there's no standard on their love." Samuel stated,

"Students want to know they can depend on you and when they believe they can count on you,

they are willing to put forth the effort to achieve their high school diploma." Beth and Deborah

both stated if students believe you care about them, they are willing to work for you. John said,

"These kids are like family; I mean they're part of us…because you get attached to them." April

added, "Students want to know there is someone who wants to see them do better in life."

According to Teresa, in most traditional settings, teachers expect to be respected by their

students because "they are the teacher but in this setting, it is different." She said, in the

alternative setting, teachers have to show students respect first and "respect means caring for them and then they will show you respect. Here you have to earn their respect." She also shared once you have their respect, you may run into some situations where you may have to redirect them but because you have earned their respect, they are more willing to listen and be attentive to your request.

Pamela's thoughts and views were comparable to her colleagues. She shared that many students do not have an adult figure in their lives that is willing to share in their accomplishments or their heartbreaks. During the interview, she told me a story of a young man who came to school one morning and stated he was quitting school because no one would be there to see him graduate. He said there was no point in continuing with school since he was not going to graduate. She stated she spent most of the morning convincing him he was too close to graduation and she would be at his graduation as well as the other teachers who worked at the alternative site. Pamela said,

> Having that constant, an adult who is concerned with just them and their
> successes; who wants to see them motivated, to see them succeed and have better
> opportunities, I think that's what's most important to the students here at the
> alternative site.

Mary told of a similar situation with another student who stated he was not planning on graduating because he did not have the money to pay for the cap and gown. She informed him that was not an issue because his cap and gown would be taken care of and he would have people there to see him march across the stage.

During the focus group session, the participants spoke of how important it was for students to know teachers care. Some of the same comments from the interviews were restated.

For instance, Deborah said, "I'll say it again, if they think you don't care about them, you can't get them to do anything." Mary added, "If they believe you don't like them, you can forget teaching." Teresa shared with the group that students will sometimes fail a course if they think the teacher doesn't like them. Once again, she stated, "students think they are hurting the teacher but in reality they are hurting themselves but they can't see that." All of the participants who took part in the focus group session said without caring, it is almost impossible to teach at-risk students and students will know if you are genuine because they will push you to the limit in order to see if you are real. According to Deborah, "You have to say to them, I care about you but this is what we have to do." She said, "You have to let them know that you care but you also expect them to do their work." Samuel echoed the comments of his colleagues by simply replying, "I agree. You have to care about your students."

**Research Question Three**

What additional resources do teachers state they need for establishing teacher immediacy? The participants who took part in the study stated there were several elements necessary for educators who work with at-risk students in an alternative setting. These may not be viewed as resources but the participants stated they were necessary components educators should possess when working with at-risk students in an alternative setting. The recognizable themes from the data collection were:

- Educators need to be compassionate.

- Teachers must be flexible.

- Educators must focus on the whole child.

*Compassionate*

When asked, "What were some necessary traits that educators who teach at-risk students in an alternative setting need to possess?" the overwhelming response was compassion. The participants stated many of the students at the site are exposed to various negative social factors. Carol shared that many at-risk students do not have an adult figure in their lives and there are various situations where students do not have the basic essentials such as clothing, shoes, and food. Her response was,

> Many do not have a stable home situation. We have kids who are homeless and like our folks would say, 'they stay from pillar to post'. They never know where they're going to sleep at night or where their next meal will come from. When lunch comes, you can just watch them and know this may be the only meal they may receive today.

According to Carol, those who teach at-risk students in an alternative setting "have to be teachers who are understanding." April added you have to let students know they can make it regardless of their home situations because "they have a lot of family issues that can help determine whether they come to school or whether they graduate; therefore, you have to provide them support." Beth agreed with her colleagues by stating teachers "have to be understanding and patient."

The focus on compassion continued with Grant. He indicated educators "need to be very compassionate and understanding of the issues that our students are facing." He also stated if educators show compassion, students would begin to know that "I'm in an area of safety, now I can come and now I can work and know that there are individuals that are supporting me. That sense of compassion is most important." Deborah concluded you must be an understanding

person to work in an alternative setting. Rebecca's comments were, "I think being humble and compassionate and just letting your stereotypical judgmental attitudes fall by the wayside and is absolutely necessary." Pamela and Teresa both implied you have to be an empathetic person to work at the alternative site. Pamela added that working at the alternative site has "helped me to become a more empathic person and it helps me to understand, it helps me to be more open I guess to other issues that I don't necessarily have or been exposed to."

The focus group session emphasized compassion. Mary indicated that it is miraculous that many of the students make it to school due to the negative issues that surround them. She shared that several of their students have children, some are homeless, and "some are just dealing with some major home life situations; therefore, you have to be understanding."

### *Flexible*

Flexibility is a plus for those who teach at the alternative site. The participants shared the site does not have a bell system because they work more one-on-one with the students than teachers do in the traditional setting. They also implied that often situations may arise which are out of their control and you must be able to adapt to those situations. According to Pamela,

Flexibility is the most important trait here. You have to be able to accept

whatever changes may occur because the student-teacher relationship and their

academic work changes all the time. So, you have to be open to those changes

and you have to be forgiving and not take what the student may say personal

because it is not necessarily for you; it may be something that someone said to

them that morning on the bus and you are the person that is there and that is able

to take it. You have to be able to take whatever they dish out and still say that's

great but now let's get back to work.

Carol shared during her interview "you get an opportunity to work with the kids one on one as opposed to teaching to a whole group; it is more individualized" and you realize "what works with one might not work with another; therefore, you have to be flexible and realize not all students come from the same background and from the same opportunities." Teresa implied every day is a challenge and you have to be flexible because issues can arise quickly and you have to be ready to deal with the issue. Mary added you have to be flexible in your thinking, you can't be rigid or by the book; "It doesn't work here. You can't be a completely structured person; you have to be able to bend."

The focus group session added several comments about flexibility. Samuel stated, "You never know what the day will be like; you just come and hope for the best." Deborah indicated some days the students will come ready to work and some days they will not but you have to try to find out what happened and get them back on track." Teresa shared "we have to remember, it is not a traditional setting, it is an alternative setting." Samuel stated,

> Until you work here, you just can't understand what is happening with these
>
> students; you can't expect the norm. It is a different setting; you have to show a
>
> lot of patience here. In the traditional setting, you might take immediate action
>
> with certain behaviors whereas here, you are more flexible.

### *Educate the Whole Child*

Educating the whole child is another theme from the data collection. Many of the participants stated they were teaching more than academics; they were teaching life skills. According to John, the teachers are teaching life long skills. He stated, "It is not so much about formal education as it is about teaching life lessons. I don't think we emphasize some of the things that are lifelong." Monica indicated that many of the students who attend the alternative

setting have made mistakes in their lives and "just because you've messed up or made bad decisions it does not imply you will be unsuccessful and that you can't turn your life around with education. That's a lesson I want them to learn." Carol added that the alternative site is "truly about the student. It is about giving them a second chance and about teaching them lessons beyond academics."

Deborah shared a story during her interview of one of the students at the site. She stated the young man had several negative social factors in his life and was close to becoming a high school dropout when he began attending the alternative program. After months of working with this student, he completed the requirements for graduation and was able to march with his graduation cohort. She continued the story by saying the young man has been working at a local grocery store where he is now the assistant manager. According to her, he is doing well and is a productive citizen of society instead of a high school dropout who cannot find a job and provide for his family. Deborah concluded by saying, "It makes me feel so good and sometimes I cry when I see where he is now."

Grant added by saying,

Our teachers know the academic information, they know how to get the academic information over to students and help students gain an understanding but again we have to go beyond just academics. We have to understand that the students that we are dealing with are facing many obstacles. And we have to understand how to deal with those obstacles first before we can move to the academic side; therefore, we have to focus on the whole child.

The focus group session reiterated many of the comments shared during the individual interviews. Those who participated in the session stated the job is not all about academics.

According to Teresa, "sometimes the focus is not on academics because you have to deal with some sort of issue the students have faced during the night or over the weekend." Mary chimed in with, "some of the adult figures in their lives may be impacting them in a negative way, so you have to somehow let them know it may not be good for them without insulting them." Samuel replied with, "Yes, and if that behavior is all they know, sometimes it is hard to convince them they need to change but you try." He also added you try to do the best you can and teach the students life lessons because many of "them have already been exposed to things most of us have never experienced." Deborah responded with, "You have to be honest with them but you also have to let them know "I am telling you this because I care about you and I know that you can do better."

**Research Question Four**

Do teachers who teach in an alternative setting perceive that teacher immediacy positively impacts student success and why or why not? Based on the interviews and the focus group sessions, the theme that presented itself was:

- Student performance is driven by teacher immediacy behaviors.

*Student performance*

During the interviews, the participants spoke of how at-risk students strive on the connection they feel with their teachers. Mary's statement was "I think it is important for students to like their teachers and I think they like us. And of course, we like them." She went on to say if students do not like their teachers or feel they cannot connect to their teachers, they are less likely to perform in class or even attend school. According to Grant, the educators at the alternative site connect with students who have "never been reached in a positive manner." Therefore, you have to be "proactive in giving them positive reinforcement." He stated many of

these students feel alienated and without guidance, they can easily leave without receiving their

high school diploma.  Grant states,

> One of the things we try to do every morning special for students who have not
>
> been to school in a while, is ask them where have you been, we missed you, you
>
> know we need you here.  So, we give them that sense of belonging and eventually
>
> it carries a long way for them.  They start to feel like there are people who really
>
> care about them.  We need them to know they belong here.

He adds when students see teachers responding to them in a positive manner, then students are

willing to respond to their teachers' request and learning can occur.  Teresa's comments were

similar to those of Grant.  She stated students pay close attention to the immediacy behaviors of

teachers.  Teresa described a situation where a student felt the teacher did not like him so he

decided he was not going to do any work and his behavior escalated.  However, after the

situation was resolved and the student was placed with another teacher, the student began to

connect with the teacher, began completing his assignments, and his behavior changed for the

better.

Rebecca's shared her own life story of how a teacher turned her life around.  She stated

she was a student very similar to the students she teaches at the alternative site.  She added she

had a troubled home life and she was very close to becoming a high school dropout but her

teacher and her principal took an interest in her.  According to Rebecca,

> I identify with these students plus I have empathy and I don't judge the book by
>
> the cover.  I know there's unlimited possibilities within the book and if you have
>
> somebody there for support even though that support is in places you don't even

suspect, you can come through and you can make it. I know that because I did it

and if I can, then anybody can.

She added, "It is true, they do live up to your expectations because no matter what they have done if you say, 'Gosh you're a good kid, you're just the best,' they live up to that; that's the difference." Monica sentiments were similar to Rebecca. "I have had students say, I would not do this if it wasn't for you." John touches on the topic also during his interview by stating many of students enter the alternative setting with low grade point averages but once the teachers begin to work with the students, they realize "these students are smart and somewhere along the way something happened." Beth indicated one of the biggest challenges is gaining their trust but one of the greatest rewards is "once you have gained their trust, they are willing to work for you where before they would not work for others."

There was a great deal of conversation about teacher immediacy and how it can impact student performance. All of the participants who took part in the focus group session agreed that teacher immediacy behaviors does impact a student's overall success. They began by saying at-risk students pay close attention to how teachers respond both verbally and nonverbally. Mary stated teacher immediacy behaviors are very important to students. She said, "Unfortunately, there are teachers out there who are very harsh to students sometimes both verbally and nonverbally, and some students will just cut you off if you raise your voice at them." Deborah stated, "If you treat them [students] fair, they will do whatever they can for you." One of the participants spoke of a several situations where students stated they failed courses because they felt the teacher did not like them.

**Unexpected Theme**

The data collected during the interviews and focus group session provided an unexpected theme. When participants were asked, "How do you feel about your job?" every participant made reference to how important their job is and how they feel they are making a difference in the lives of at-risk students. Many of the educators shared the program has been as much of a benefit to them as it has been to their students. When Mary was asked about her job, she stated, "I feel wonderful about my job; I feel like I'm making a difference, a big difference." Teresa indicated that she has worked at all levels in the traditional setting but she enjoys the challenge of helping at-risk students and helping them achieve their high school diploma. Pamela responded by saying, "I like this job. I think is a very necessary. I think it is helpful to the schools, students, and helpful to me." Monica shared that her job provides her with a purpose, which is to build the self-esteem of at-risk students and "help them realize that there is a job or a career out there them." Rebecca mentioned,

> I love my job but I'm not going to say that it is easy because sometimes it is
>
> emotionally draining but I actually enjoy getting up and going to work every day.
>
> I am never going to be President of the United States of America, I will never be
>
> Bill Gates I am never going to be rich but at the end of the day, I know that I have
>
> done something that for generations to come will help somebody maybe not them
>
> but their grandchildren. So, I sleep pretty well at night!

April and Deborah had the same statement, "I love it!" John added, "the greatest part is working with kids and even though all of them don't get to where you want them to be; you learn real quick you except the successes and try to figure out what caused the failures." Carol spoke of how much gratification she received from seeing students who were potential dropouts receive

their high school diploma. She also spoke of how much satisfaction she gets from "seeing a child be appreciative that someone really does have an interest in them." Samuel indicated he likes his job because he gets great pleasure in knowing he is "contributing some way to the achievement of the students." Beth revealed, "I am very grateful that I'm able to work with at-risk students because often they are lost in the cracks and overlooked." Grant summed it up with, "I truly enjoy it."

The focus group session only added credence to the interviews. Once again the participants stated, how much they enjoy being a part of the alternative setting. Several of them spoke again of how the program has not only enriched the lives of their students but how it has impacted them as individuals. They stated since working closely with at risk students at the site, they have become more empathic to the needs of others and they love their job.

## Survey

The Nonverbal Immediacy Scale-Self Report (NIS-S) Survey contained 26 questions with a Likert Scale ranging from one (Never) to five (Very Often). Thirteen of the questions were focused on the use nonverbal immediacy such as: "I use my hands and arms to gesture while talking to people," while the remaining 13 questions focused on a lack of nonverbal immediacy with phrases such as, "I look over or away from others while talking to them" (Richmond et al., 2003). Each individual gave the ranking, (one, never; two, rarely; three, occasionally; four, often; and five, very often) which they most identified with. As soon as the participants completed the surveys, the surveys were collected and the participants were thanked for their willingness to participate in this study.

**Descriptive Statistics**

The NIS-S Survey score was obtained by adding the degree from questions 1, 2, 6, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, and 25.  Next, the degree from the questions 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 15, 18, 20, 23, 24, and 26 were added.  The third step consisted of adding 78 to the sum of first set of questions, then subtracting the total from the sum of the second set of questions.  The range of whole group nonverbal immediacy was 86 to 119.  The whole group descriptive statistics were: Mean was 103.8, the standard deviation was 10.7, and the median was 104.5.  When the data was segregated by gender, the results were similar.  For the male population, the range of data was from 90 to 119, the mean was 102, the standard deviation was 15.1 and the median was 97.  The results for females were, 86 to 117, the mean was 104.4, and the standard deviation was 9.9 and the median was 108.  Based on the descriptive statistics, the whole group data showed there were two participants whose scores were more than one standard deviation lower than the mean and three participants' scores were more than one standard deviation higher than the mean.  Thus, the majority of the participants fell within one standard deviation of the mean.  When looking at the descriptive statistics based on gender, there was only one male who did not fall within one standard deviation of the mean; his score was more than one standard deviation higher than the mean.  As for females, three did not fall within one standard deviation of the mean.  One participant's score was more than one standard deviation lower than the mean and two were more than one standard deviation higher than the mean.  All other females fell within one standard deviation of the mean.

The results from the survey showed that two participants were low in displaying nonverbal immediacy and three were high in nonverbal immediacy.  Based on various research nonverbal immediacy behaviors can be seen through touching, eye contact, smiling, and other

body language (Henning, 2012; Mehrabian, 1972; Richmond et al., 2006; Sibii, 2010; Santilli et al., 2011; Velez & Cano, 2008). The information gathered from the survey provided evidence that those who educate at-risk students in the alternative setting display nonverbal immediacy behaviors. Many of the participants responded to the survey questions with a focus on nonverbal immediacy such as: "I touch others on the shoulder or arm while talking to them" or "I gesture when I talk to people" (Richmond et al., 2003) with a degree of 4 (often) or 5 (very often) and low (1) never or (2) rarely on those questions with a lack of nonverbal teacher immediacy.

Individual participant data is listed in Table 3. Comparisons of the combined descriptive statistics of the NIS-S of the participants in this study to the descriptive statistics conducted by Richmond and his colleagues as well as gender comparisons are listed in the following tables.

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics from NIS-S Survey*

| Participant | NIS-S Score | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|
| April | 86 | 103.8 | 10.7 |
| Beth | 100 | 103.8 | 10.7 |
| Carol | 110 | 103.8 | 10.7 |
| Deborah | 117 | 103.8 | 10.7 |
| Grant | 97 | 103.8 | 10.7 |
| John | 90 | 103.8 | 10.7 |
| Mary | 115 | 103.8 | 10.7 |
| Monica | 101 | 103.8 | 10.7 |
| Pamela | 95 | 103.8 | 10.7 |
| Rebecca | 108 | 103.8 | 10.7 |
| Teresa | 108 | 103.8 | 10.7 |
| Samuel | 119 | 103.8 | 10.7 |

Table 4

*Comparison of Combined Descriptive Statistics from NIS-S*

| Descriptive Statistics | Richmond & Colleagues | This Study |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Mean | 94.2 | 103.8 |
| Standard Deviation | 15.6 | 10.7 |
| Low Immediacy | $\leq 79$ | $\leq 93$ |
| High Immediacy | $\geq 109$ | $\geq 114$ |

Table 5

*Comparison of Gender Descriptive Statistics from NIS-S*

| Descriptive Statistics | Richmond & Colleagues (M) | This Study (M) | Richmond & Colleagues (F) | This Study (F) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mean | 91.6 | 104.4 | 96.7 | 102 |
| Standard | 15.0 | 9.9 | 16.1 | 15.1 |
| Low Immediacy | $\leq 77$ | $\leq 94$ | $\leq 81$ | $\leq 86$ |
| High Immediacy | $\geq 106$ | $\geq 114$ | $\geq 112$ | $\geq 117$ |

**Summary**

In this chapter, I presented the findings from this transcendental phenomenological study. The findings were based on the information obtained from the survey, interviews, and focus group session. The first form of data collection was the survey; participants individually completed the survey. The second form of data collection was the individualized interviews, which lasted approximately 28 minutes or less. The interviews were conducted on the campus during a time that was conducive to each participant. The final data collection component was the focus group session. This collaborative session occurred at a local restaurant after school hours and it lasted about an hour. The participants elected to conduct the meeting directly after school. Therefore, the round table discussion occurred first, then, the participants took part in the meal that was provided for them.

The results from the survey, interviews, and focus group session provided detail information that helped to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the opinions of teachers who work in an alternative setting about teacher immediacy?

2. What do teachers state as obstacles to establishing teacher immediacy?

3. What additional resources do teachers state they need for establishing teacher immediacy?

4. Do teachers who teach in an alternative setting perceive that teacher immediacy positively impacts student success and why or why not?

There were several identifiable themes from the data, which added evidence to support each research question.

For the first research question, two themes were discovered from the data. First, at-risk students pay attention to the immediacy behaviors displayed by their teachers. This was most evident in the interviews and focus group session. The participants stated that students respond to how teachers speak and act. Several teachers indicated it is vital for them not to allow what is occurring in their personal lives to enter the alternative site because at-risk students are very good at reading body language. One participant shared how many of the at-risk students have been exposed to negative nonverbal immediacy behaviors; thus in a sense, they have become experts at identifying body language. The second theme was how important it is for teachers to develop positive student-teacher relationships with their students. Many of the participants mentioned that most of the students at the alternative site have not experienced supportive student-teacher relationships in the past or lack an adult attachment in their lives. According to the educators, most of the students enter the setting with an "emotional wall" that has to be broken. One teacher stated, "they [students] come believing we are like everyone else in their lives and we have to work hard to prove to them we have their best interest at heart."

Two themes were uncovered that related to the second research question. The first theme was how crucial trust is for at-risk students. Based on the viewpoints of the participants, at-risk students have very little trust due to the fact they have seen disappointment after disappointment. Those who took part in the interviews and the focus group session stated the biggest challenge they have at the alternative site is gaining the trust of at-risk students. The second theme was students want to know their teachers care about them. The participants shared that one of the most important components to teaching is making certain students know they are cared about. One person stated if students believe they are uncared for by their teachers, they would not focus on academics. However, the educators also stated that once trust had been established and

students believed their teachers cared about them, they were more willing to work towards achieving their high school diploma, which can result in a more productive life.

Research question three was supported by three themes. The first overwhelming theme from the interviews and the focus group session was educators who teach at-risk students must be compassionate. Compassion was reiterated over and over. The participants shared how at-risk students are dealing with countless negative social factors; therefore, educators must be compassionate. One of the participants mentioned you must have empathy for what the students are facing because for many of these students they may be the first one in their family to graduate from high school and "in this day and age, it is hard for most of us to understand that." Several indicated since working at the alternative site, they have become a more empathetic person because they have not had to face some of the issues their students are dealing with. The second theme was the importance of flexibility in that alternative setting. Educators said the alternative setting is completely different than the traditional setting and flexibility was a characteristic that is necessary for those who work with at-risk students. They shared how things do not always go as planned. Often the day is determined on what issues or concerns students are facing that day; therefore, you have to be willing to adjust to whatever happens that day. Lastly, participants stated their job entails focusing on educating the whole child. Thus, it involves a great deal more than academics; it consists of teaching students life skills, those lessons that may not be found in a textbook.

There was one theme for the last research question. Every participant believed teacher immediacy behaviors are a motivator for the overall success of at-risk students in an alternative setting. The participants shared how many students enter the setting so far behind their peers when you look at their transcripts but when the teachers begin working with the students, they

realize the students have the intellectual ability to be successful. Educators at the site shared story after story of how students stated they performed poorly in a class or how their behavior escalated for the worse because they felt the teacher did not like them. The participants were also realistic in saying that sometimes, you have students who do not want to comply to guidelines and in some cases you may have to "use tough love." However, the educators state you start the next day fresh, approach them in a positive manner, and once the students see you are concerned about their overall success, they are more apt to participate in the learning process.

There was an unexpected theme exposed during the interviews and focus group session. Every participant shared how they truly enjoy their job and how they feel they are making a difference in the lives of children. The teachers also stated how emotional draining the job can be but most importantly how rewarding it is. Those educators who are full time employees indicated that they could have moved to a traditional setting, yet, they feel they are helping to change the lives of students for the better. This unexpected theme was worthy of recording in this study.

The survey results showed that most of the teachers fell within one standard deviation of the mean. When the combined descriptive statistics of those who participated in this study to the descriptive statistics of the authors of the NIS-S were compared, none of the participants were low in nonverbal immediacy. Thus, all participants were within one standard deviation or higher in nonverbal immediacy. The survey combined with the interviews and focus group session show a high level of immediacy in the alternative classroom setting.

**CHAPTER FIVE:  DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The final chapter of this dissertation provides an overview of the study, a summary of the findings and the evidence that supports those findings.  It also includes how the theoretical framework and the literature reinforced the study.  Next, the chapter contains implications and limitations of the study as well as recommendations for future research studies that relate to teacher immediacy.  Lastly, a conclusion of the study is presented.

**Overview**

Due to high stakes testing, accountability mandates, and a lack of educational resources, teachers across the nation are exiting the classroom for other profession (Glasman & Conley, 2008; Martin & Mottet, 2011; Santos, 2012).  Many are trying to find the next best practice that will enhance their teaching and increase student achievement.  Yet, an educational best practice that is often overlooked is the student-teacher relationship (Aultman et. al., 2009).  An encouraging and supportive student-teacher relationship can help motivate students to learn and decrease inappropriate behavior (Alderman & Green, 2011; Burroughs, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Rey et al., 2007; Split, Hughes, Wu, & Kwok, 2012).  However, when immediacy behaviors are displayed in the classroom, the student-teacher relationship is enhanced (Martin & Mottet, 2011).

Although there has been a great amount of attention on the impact teacher immediacy has on student learning over the past several years (Allen et al., 2006; Burroughs, 2007; Finn & Schrodt, 2012; Henning, 2012; Richmond et al., 2006; Rocca, 2004; Witt et al., 2004), a gap presented itself in the literature on teacher immediacy in the K–12 setting.  Most of the literature on teacher immediacy reflects on the post-secondary educational scene.  Thus, this

transcendental phenomenological study sought to gain a more in depth understanding of teacher immediacy through the eyes of those who teach at-risk students in an alternative setting.

Data was collected using three instruments in order to achieve triangulation. The survey, individualized interviews, and a focus group session helped to answer the four research questions. Member checking was utilized for participants to add clarity and approval to the transcribe transcripts. Once approval of the transcripts was provided, I proceeded with the analysis of the data and coding was implemented in order to aggregate the data "into small categories of information" (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). I began by looking at the individual transcripts and then developed a composite textural description of the data. Clustering of the data allowed the themes to emerge.

### Summary of Findings

The shared responses of participants and the identifiable themes from those responses were listed in chapter four. The four research questions were designed to fill the gap in the literature. This section will include themes for each research question as well as an unexpected theme. The research questions for the study are:

1. What are the opinions of teachers who work in an alternative setting about teacher immediacy?

2. What do teachers state as obstacles to establishing teacher immediacy?

3. What additional resources do teachers state they need for establishing teacher immediacy?

4. Do teachers who teach in an alternative setting perceive that teacher immediacy positively impacts student success and why or why not?

Based on the opinions of teachers about the concept of teacher immediacy, two themes were identified from the data. They were:

- At-risk students pay close attention to teacher immediacy behaviors.

- A positive, supportive, and encouraging student-teacher relationship is crucial for the overall success of at-risk students.

As teachers shared their thoughts on what could hinder students from achieving success, two themes came from the interviews and the focus group session.

- Teachers must gain the trust of their students.

- Students must know teachers care.

Three themes were identified when teachers talked about the necessary components to establishing teacher immediacy.

- Educators need to be compassionate.

- Teachers must be flexible.

- Educators must focus on the whole child.

When teachers were asked to share their thoughts of the impact that teacher immediacy behaviors have on student performance, one theme was presented.

- Student performance is driven by teacher immediacy behaviors.

The data collection also provided one unexpected theme, which was:

- Teachers are making a difference in the lives of students.

**Theoretical Implications**

Teacher immediacy is defined as the physical and psychological connection or closeness that exist between students and their teachers (Allen et al., 2006; King & Witt, 2009; Rocca, 2004; Teven & Hanson, 2004; Velez & Cano, 2012; Witt et al., 2004). Various researchers have

linked teacher immediacy to positive student-teacher relationships, student motivation as well as affective, perceived and cognitive learning (Allen et al., 2006; Burroughs, 2007; Finn & Schrodt, 2012; Henning, 2012; King & Witt, 2009; Richmond et al., 2006; Rocca, 2004; Witt et al., 2004). The two theoretical frameworks identified to support this study were Bowlby's Attachment Theory and Maslow's Motivational Theory. Both theories focus on the importance of meeting the basic needs of individuals in order for those individuals to reach their highest potential. The data collected from the participants combined with the two theoretical frameworks provided a theoretical understanding of the impact of teacher immediacy in the K–12 setting.

**Attachment Theory**

The Attachment Theory is an emotional bond that connects individuals across time (Miller, 2011). The connection that is formed can develop into a lasting relationship (Miller, 2011). According to Bergin and Bergin (2009), the social growth of children is dependent on the attachment they form with the adults in their lives. Unfortunately, many students enter school settings without ever forming an adult child attachment (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Fitton, 2012; Rey et al., 2007; Riley, 2009). Yet, the student-teacher attachment is the most meaningful attachment children can form with an adult beside the attachment they develop with their parents (Riley, 2009). Based on the literature, the Attachment Theory was appropriate for this study since the aim of the study was to determine if teacher immediacy behaviors impact the overall success of students.

The participants shared in their interviews and the focus group session many of the students at the alternative site lack an attachment with an adult figure. Many of the themes from the study confirm the lack of attachment in the lives of the students. However, the attachments

children form with adults are characteristic of the relationships children form with friends and other individuals (Fitton, 2012).   The themes from this study that supported the attachment theory were: Relationships, caring, and trust.

The participants concluded that many students enter the site without having experienced a supportive student-teacher relationship.  Yet, they state forming a positive and encouraging student-teacher relationship is vital for the success of at-risk students.  The student-teacher relationship is often viewed as the foundation of a student's overall success (Aultman et. al., 2009) but a large number of at-risk students lack a relationship that is built on trust and care. Every participant stated they were unable to reach their students until they were able to gain their trust.  But once trust had been established, students began to see and believe their teachers have their best interests at heart.  According to the participants, gaining trust was not always easy. They implied students pay close attention to the teacher immediacy behaviors and those behaviors help to determine if teachers genuinely care about their students.  Once students perceived their teachers did care, they were more likely to trust their instructors and allow the student-teacher relationships to flourish.

**Maslow's Motivational Theory**

Maslow's Motivational Theory states individuals are motivated by certain needs and the basic or lower levels needs must be meet before higher needs can be satisfied (Freitas & Leonard, 2011; Gorman, 2010; Maslow, 1962; MindTools, Ltd., 2013).  Just as the physical components of our body must be met, so should the mental or psychological (Maslow, 1962). Thus, students are unconcerned about education when they are hungry; what's important to a hungry child is food.  According to Hughes (2011), when children feel warmth, caring, and

acceptance from their teachers, they are more likely to develop a sense of belonging at school and become more concerned about their academic performance.

The comments from the participants supported Maslow's Motivational Theory as a theoretical framework for this study. Most of them shared how many of the students enter the program unconcerned about receiving their high school diploma because of the various negative social factors they are dealing with on a daily basis. One participant stated how a student was ready to quit the program because he did not have anyone who would be at his graduation but when he was informed his teachers would be there for him, he was willing to continue to work. Several educators shared how they have purchased graduation attire for students because their students did not want to attend the ceremony without being properly dressed which helps to confirm a participants' statement that some of these students lack what most people consider the basic needs of life. The participants also indicated how many of the students have such low self-esteem and enter the site feeling unloved. They implied students view the location as a place of safety and develop a sense of belonging because once they are at the site they do not want to leave. These few examples provide additional evidence of Maslow's Motivation Theory serving as a theoretical framework for this study.

### Connecting Themes to the Literature

**Research Question One**

The first research question sought to determine what teachers' viewpoints were of teacher immediacy? The themes that were identified from the data and supported research question one were: At-risk students focus on teacher immediacy behaviors and supportive student-teacher relationships are crucial to at-risk students. The literature states immediacy behaviors help to uncover how people feel about each other because people will spend more time with those they

enjoy being around and less time with those individuals they dislike (Mehrabian, 1971). When immediacy behaviors are displayed, it narrows the gap that exists between those individuals and helps to form a close bond (Mehrabian, 1971, 1972). According to the interviews and focus group session data, students watch how teachers respond to them before they are willing to comply with their requests, which is supported by the research that shows students are willing to comply with teachers who display immediacy behaviors (Alderman and Green, 2011; Aultman et al., 2009; Baker et al., 2008; Burroughs, 2007; Rey et al., 2007).

The student-teacher relationship is an important element for the success of at-risk students. The research shows when a supportive student-teacher relationship exists students are more engaged in the learning process and less likely to behave themselves inappropriately (Alderman & Green, 2011; Burroughs, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Rey et al., 2007; Split, Hughes, Wu, & Kwok, 2012). The participants reiterated this by stating without building rapport with their students, learning will not occur. They all stated how all aspects of teaching hang on the student-teacher relationship.

**Research Question Two**

Research question two looked at what could hinder teacher immediacy and the themes from the data collection were: Building trust and caring teachers. According to the research, "immediacy is also arguably the instructor behavior most frequently associated with teacher credibility" (Santilli et al., 2011, p. 267). When students perceive their teachers are trustworthy, they are motivated to learn (Santilli, 2011). The perceptions of the participants correlated to the research. They affirmed over and over again that trust had to be established in order for learning to take place. Several spoke of how the students refused to allow any attachments to form until they felt they could trust their teachers. Therefore, based on the perceptions of teachers who

educate at-risk students in an alternative setting, there is a connection between trustworthiness of teachers and immediacy behaviors.

Not only is trust a valuable element to at-risk students but caring is vital as well. This is consistent with the Klem and Connell's (2004) research, which showed when students are part of a caring environment they have a greater chance of achieving academic success. The research implies when teachers display immediacy behaviors, their students view them as caring teachers (Teven & Hanson, 2004; Velez & Cano, 2008); as a result, student behavior becomes less aggressive, and students are more motivated to learn (Finn & Schrodt, 2012; Nixon et al., 2010; Rey, et al., 2007; Teven & Hanson, 2004; Velez & Cano, 2008). Nurturing teachers help students believe they are capable and help them develop a sense of belonging at school (Hughes, 2011). The research was characteristic of the responses of the participants. Person after person shared how crucial it is for at-risk students to know their teachers care about them. They indicated if students believed their teachers truly cared for them, students were more eager to attend school, take part in the learning process and comply with the expectations of their teachers.

**Research Question Three**

When working with at-risk students, what are some resources teachers need in order to display teacher immediacy behaviors? For this research question, the participants provided evidence to support three themes. The themes were teachers need to be compassionate, flexible, and teachers must focus on the whole child. At-risk students are exposed to various negative social factors (Dianda, 2008; Ormond, 2008; Parkay et al., 2010). Many of these students live in poverty, in single parent homes, or with grandparents, they have experienced violent activity, and are often deprived of adult guidance (Dianda, 2008; Ormond, 2008; Parkay et al., 2010),

which is why education is more than curriculum. The aim of education is to meet the needs of the whole child (Parkay et al., 2010; Valiente et al., 2008). This research is symbolic to the viewpoints of the participants. They stated so many of their students at the alternative site enter with issues that are beyond the realm of education.

Compassion was the most overwhelming theme; it was repeated over and over by all the participants. The participants spoke of how many of the students at the alternative site are dealing with things in their lives that most of the educators have never had to face, which is why participants view flexibility as a necessary element for educators to embrace. On the word of the participants, students may have had challenges the previous night or the morning before arriving at the alternative site and they bring those anxieties and frustrations associated with the challenges with them to school. Several people shared how they first have to help students with the problems in their lives before teaching can occur; hence, educators must be flexible when working with at-risk students. They mentioned how days may not go as planned but as educators, you adjust and continue with the process. Consequently, educators meet the needs of the entire child. Teachers shared how they are teachers, counselors, parents, social workers, and the list goes on and on. They implied their jobs extend beyond curriculum; it consisted of meeting the needs of the whole child.

**Research Question Four**

The last research question was dedicated to finding out if teacher immediacy behaviors impact the overall success of at-risk students. Various research studies indicate there is a connection between the display of teacher immediacy behaviors and learning outcomes (Burroughs, 2007; Henning, 2012; Kerssen-Griep & Witt, 2012; Richmond et al., 2006; Rocca & McCroskey, 1999; Rocca, 2004; Witt et al., 2004). Andersen (1979) was one of the first

researchers to show a connection existed between teacher immediacy and affective learning. Witt and colleagues' (2004) meta-analysis study found a correlation existed between teacher immediacy and affective learning. Not only is affective learning associated with teacher immediacy but perceived and cognitive learning as well. Several research studies showed strong correlations between perceived learning and immediacy behaviors, which can result in cognitive learning (Allen et al., 2006; Burroughs, 2007; King & Witt, 2009; Nixon et al., 2010; Rocca, 2004; Santilli et al., 2011; Velez & Cano, 2008; Witt et al., 2004).

The information from the participants supported the research. Participants shared how students are more likely to perform when they like their teachers, which verifies Mehrabian's (1971), concept of immediacy that people connect to those they enjoy. According to the educators at the alternative site, at-risk students focus a great deal on body language, which can encourage students to continue with their education or deter them from receiving their high school diploma. They provided stories how many of the students have the academic ability but failed courses at their traditional high school because they felt uncared for by their teachers. Several participants summed this theme up by indicating if students like you they will work and the opposite is true as well.

**Unexpected Theme**

Lastly, the research study provided an unexpected theme that was worthy of reporting and reinforces the need for teacher immediacy behaviors. Every participant stated they felt they were making a big difference in the lives of students. They shared how there are days when things are tough and it can become very emotional dealing with the day to day trials yet, they stated they had gained so much from helping students reach their goals. This theme is valuable to this study because educators are exiting the teaching profession (Glasman & Conley, 2008;

Martin & Mottet, 2011; Santos, 2012).  Thus, teacher immediacy can impact the overall success

of students and help teachers realize their jobs are valuable and rewarding which can lead to

more teachers remaining in the profession.

## Implications

The significance of this study was to gain a deeper and richer understanding of teacher

immediacy from looking at immediacy through the eyes of those who teach at-risk students in a

non-traditional setting.  The evidence provided by the participants suggests students' perceptions

of teacher immediacy impact the overall success of students.  At-risk students place a great deal

of emphasis on teacher immediacy behaviors and those behaviors lead to positive and supportive

student-teacher relationships which help to develop warm and caring environments.  When

students perceive their teachers care about them, they are more willing to comply with the

expectations of their instructors, become less aggressive in their behavior, and more confident in

their academic ability.  As a result, students begin to realize achieving a high school diploma is a

goal that is not out of their reach as originally believed.

While teachers are seeking best practices in education that will enhance their instruction,

they should not loose site of the power of teacher immediacy behaviors.  Those verbal and

nonverbal cues that convey to students they are cared for and their education is important.

Teacher immediacy helps to establish supportive student-teacher relationships, which promotes

academic success and a positive change in student behavior as well as create a learning

environment that is conducive for students and teachers.  When immediacy behaviors are

displayed in the classroom, not only will those behaviors impact student achievement and student

behavior, they will also impact the whole child.  Children begin to form attachments with adults,

which builds their self-esteem.  When students embrace their capabilities, they begin to reach

goals they once viewed as impossible. Immediacy behaviors are also beneficial for teachers because teachers begin to realize they are making a difference in the lives of students and enjoy their jobs.

## Limitations

The study has several limitations. First is the location of the study. This study was conducted in the southeastern part of the United States in a rural school district with a focus on high school students in an alternative setting. The school district serves a diverse population and the poverty rate is one of the highest in the nation, as a result, the district has a large number of at-risk students. Secondly, I work in the school district where the study was conducted and I know each of the participants selected for this study on a professional basis. Therefore, partiality may have been a factor in the participants providing their perceptions of teacher immediacy. Next, because I am so passionate about the topic and as much as I applied bracketing and journaling in order to recognize my biases, there is the chance that my own prejudices could have found their way in this study. Another limitation is the self-reporting survey. I had to trust that each participant reported accurate information. Lastly, methodology is a limitation as well. This phenomenological study describes the essences of the lived experiences (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994) of educators who work with at-risk students in an alternative setting. When implementing a qualitative study, the sample size is small; thus, the results from the study should not be generalized to large populations.

## Recommendations for Future Research

There are numerous research studies on teacher immediacy from the higher education setting (Henning, 2012; Richmond, Lane, & McCroskey, 2006; Rocca & McCroskey, 1999; Rocca, 2004); yet, there are few studies that focus on teacher immediacy in the K–12 setting and

a smaller number of research studies that concentrate on immediacy in the K–12 alternative setting. This study adds to the body of literature that examines the link between teacher immediacy and student achievement. However, additional research should be conducted to fully understand the connection that exists between teacher immediacy and the overall success of students.

This research study was conducted in an alternative setting in one school district in the southeastern part of the United States. The district has a diverse population and a high poverty rate, which increases the number of at-risk students. As a result, further research should be conducted in other school districts across the nation to determine the accuracy of this study based on a sample that is representative of a larger population. It is also recommended that not only qualitative studies be conducted but quantitative studies as well in order to test hypotheses and theories with a larger participant pool.

## Conclusion

The conclusion for this study is when working in an alternative setting with at-risk students teacher immediacy behaviors can determine the overall success of students. At-risk students are very observant and pay close attention to the verbal and nonverbal cues of their instructors. These cues can be a factor in determining if at-risk students are successful or unsuccessful.

Educators who work with at-risk students in an alternative setting must be compassionate individuals. Due to various negative social factors at-risk students have been exposed to, they have trust issues and lack attachments with adult figures. As a result, educators must establish a warm and inviting classroom atmosphere in order for students to believe their instructors care about them. When students believe their instructors care about them, they become willing

partakers in the learning environment and begin to develop positive student-teacher relationships. Supportive student-teacher relationships can motivate and encourage students to strive for academic excellence as well as help to change unwanted behavior.

Students who attend the alternative program gain more than academics; they receive life lessons. Instructors understand they are teaching more than mathematics, reading, science, social studies, and the arts. In this setting, they are teaching students many life skills, which is why flexibility is so important. Teachers realize you have to be flexible because situations may present themselves and you will have to handle that situation the student is dealing with before the student can focus on academics.

Teaching at-risk students in an alternative setting is not always easy. It can be emotional draining. However, the rewards are greater than the challenges. Teacher immediacy behaviors help teachers connect to their students and form lasting bonds, which allows teachers and students to feel a sense of accomplishment. Students who were potential dropouts achieve their high school diplomas and become productive citizens of society. While educators achieve satisfaction knowing they had a part in helping a student graduate.

The impact immediacy behaviors have on student learning has been studied extensively in the higher education setting. However, a smaller amount of research focuses on K–12 alternative settings. This study sought to fill the gap in the literature and provide research that will encourage other researchers to explore immediacy in other educational environments.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL



Dear Connie,

We are pleased to inform you that your above 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 are attached to your approval email.

Your IRB-approved, stamped consent form is also attached. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

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

Sincerely,

**Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.**
*Professor, IRB Chair*
**Counseling**

**(434) 592-4054**

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**APPENDIX B:  PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

TEACHER IMMEDIACY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TEACHERS WHO EDUCATE AT-RISK STUDENTS IN A HIGH SCHOOL ALTERNATIVE SETTING:  A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY STUDY

Connie Locklear
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of concerning how teacher immediacy behaviors influence at-risk students who attend an alternative setting.  You were selected as a possible participant because you teach at-risk students at an alternative site.  I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Connie Locklear and the Education Department at Liberty University are conducting this study.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper, richer understanding of teacher immediacy from the perspective of teachers who educate at-risk students in an alternative setting.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:  (1) complete a survey on non-verbal teacher immediacy which will last approximately 15 to 20 minutes, (2) participate in a 20 to 30 minute interview session, and (3) participate in focus group meeting which will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes.  The interviews and focus group meeting will be recorded and transcribed verbatim with each participant having the opportunity to review the records for accuracy.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

Risks:  The risks associated with this study are similar to those in a school day setting.

Benefits:  This research study has the potential to change the way teachers respond to their students.  The benefits to this study include sharing information that educators can use to meet the needs of at-risk students.  Students who are at-risk are more likely to leave school without a high school diploma, which becomes a societal problem.  According to Dianda (2008), high school graduates can earn up to 43% more than their peers who drop out of school and a college graduate can earn up to 150% more than a high school dropout.  The hope is this study will provide evidence that will support the notion that when teacher immediacy behaviors are displayed in the classroom, students will increase their chances of having a positive school experience.  The benefits also include professional development opportunities with a focus on teacher immediacy for all educators.

Liberty University will not provide medical treatment or financial compensation if you are injured or become ill as a result of participating in this research project. This does not waive any of your legal rights nor release any claim you might have based on negligence.

**Compensation:**

There will be no compensation associated with this study.

**Confidentiality:**

All data collection and information will be kept in a locked filed cabinet and all electronic files will be password protected. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from this research, no personally identifiable information will be shared. Participants will be given pseudonyms to ensure privacy. Since a focus group meeting will be part of this study, I cannot assure that other participants will maintain 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 the Public Schools of Robeson County. 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:**

You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time with affecting the relationship you have with Liberty University or the Public Schools of Robeson County. If you elect to withdraw from the study, send your request by email to Connie Locklear at clokear3@liberty.edu. Once I receive your email, I will respond to you by email and any information (i.e. audio and video recordings, coding sheets, transcripts) that was collected from you will be destroyed and will in no way be part of the research study.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Connie Locklear. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at clocklear3@liberty.edu or her advisor, Dr. Russell Yocum at ryocum@liberty.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher and advisor, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

***You will be given 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.

Please check one or both of the following as applicable.

☐ I agree to participate in the audio recorded, face-to-face interview.

☐ I agree to participate in the audio recorded, face-to-face focus group interview

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____

**IRB Code Numbers:** [Risk] *(After a study is approved, the IRB code number pertaining to the study should be added here.)*

**IRB Expiration Date:** [Risk] *(After a study is approved, the expiration date (one year from date of approval) assigned to a study at initial or continuing review should be added. Periodic checks on the current status of consent forms may occur as part of continuing review mandates from the federal regulators.)*

## APPENDIX C:  SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1.  How long have you been in education?

2.  How long have you been working at the alternative site?

3.  Why did you want to teach?

4.  How is teaching at an alternative setting different from teaching at a traditional high school?

5.  What are the challenges of teaching at-risk students in alternative setting?

6.  What are the rewards of teaching at-risk students in alternative setting?

7.  How do you feel about your job?

8.  What do you feel is most important to your students?

9.  How do you feel about the student-teacher relationships?

10. How do you feel when a student withdraws from the program?

11. What are the necessary traits or characteristics for teachers who teach at-risk students?

12. What resources and/or professional development are necessary for teachers who teach at-risk students in an alternative setting?

13. Do you have any additional comments you would like to share?

**APPENDIX D:  FOCUS GROUP TOPICS**

(1) What are your overall feelings about teacher immediacy?

(2) How do verbal and nonverbal behaviors impact your students?

(3) What information would you share with a teacher who has been moved to an alternative

setting?

## APPENDIX E:  APPROVAL OF TRANSCRIBED TRANSCRIPTS

I have read and approved the transcription of my interview and focus group meeting with Ms. Connie Locklear as they relate to her study, Teacher Immediacy from the Perspective of Teachers Who Educate At-Risk Students in a High School Alternative Setting:  A Transcendental Phenomenological Study.

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## APPENDIX F:  EXCERPTS FROM THE REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

### Journaling

Teaching immediacy is a concept that is near and dear to my heart; therefore, it was important to employ journaling to keep my thoughts and viewpoints in tact.

Days 1 - 2
After I received IRB approval, I met with the principal and the district personnel in charge of research to inform them both I had been approved to proceed with the research study and I am smiling from ear to ear.  Next, the administrator allowed me to meet with the alternative staff the next day, since he already had a meeting scheduled.  During the meeting, once again, I was extremely excited.  I read the statement directly from the IRB application but I tried very hard not to allow my nonverbal communication to speak louder than the verbal comments.  After reading the information pertaining to my study, 20 people volunteered for the study.  I was elated because I was a little concerned that I may not receive 12 participants, which is the number I had planned for.  The consent forms were signed and participants completed the survey.  Hooray, the first form of data collection is completed and now I will need to schedule the interviews.  Hopefully, the rest of the data collection process will run as smooth.

Interviews
Individualized interviews were conducted during the school day to accommodate the participants.  Several of the participants were part-time employees and wanted to complete the survey before they left the campus.  Those who were full-time, the interviews were conducted during their free time.

### Day One of Interviews

Interview #1—Samuel
Samuel's interview lasted 20 minutes.  He was very pleasant and he answered the questions with confidence.  During the interview, I felt Samuel was very proud of the work he was doing at the alternative site.  However, he also was willing to say that it was not always easy.  He also used a great deal of nonverbal communication during the interview such as:  Hand motions, smiling, and the raising of the eyebrows.

Interview #2—Carol
Carol's interview was approximately 24 minutes due to the fact that it was two parts and the time in between.  Half way through the interview Carol began to cry as she shared information about the importance of being a caring person.  She asked me to stop the audio recording in order to gain her composure.  Once she gained her composure, the audio recording began again.  I felt the compassion and the caring in Carol's voice as she spoke of the students and the lack of support they often experience.  She was very detailed in her responses and related every question back to the students.

Interview #3—John

John's interview was the most surprising of all the interviewees because he is quiet and reserved. However, during the interview process, he was very open and willing to share a great deal of insight. His thoughts were passionate and I saw a different side of this man. I have known Participant for a while and my perception of him was that he was not friendly and somewhat "cold natured" at times. Yet, his interview was the complete opposite. It was warm and compassionate. I found myself becoming very emotional as he began to share his thoughts and viewpoints. So, I began to remind myself that I must remain neutral during this process. At the end of the interview, I stood and thanked Participant for his sincere and honest responses and I felt that a respectful bond had been established between the two of us. He smiled and left the meeting, and I was reminded that sometimes things are always what they seem. The interview lasted approximately 20 minutes.

Interview #4—Deborah
Deborah's interview process lasted 20 minutes. She was very thorough with her answers at times and at other times very blunt. For instance, she was asked, "Why did you want to become a teacher?" and she responded, "I love children period." She used more immediacy during her interview than anyone else. Hand gestures were used constantly. Her responses implied that she cared for the students, but she believed in the "hard love concept" completely. Yet, when she spoke of how the successes of many of the students, she beamed with pride. For instance, "But this child, he is the assistant manager at Food Lion; it makes me feel good and he even cuts my grass. It makes you feel good."

Interview #5—April
April seemed to struggle more with the interview process than any of the other participants. During the interview process, I sensed that April was not comfortable. When she responded to the questions, her responses were short and to the point. On several occasions, restated her response for her to add clarity. Her entire interview process lasted 10 minutes, which was the shortest of all the interviews.

Summary of Day One
The first day of interviews ended with April. Today was a success and emotionally draining at the same time. I felt that each participant was honest in their comments because they were heart felt. The emotions they brought to the table were real and raw at times. Even though the interview process was difficult for April, she was very sincere in her responses. At times it was difficult to listen and not to share my viewpoints; however, I understood the importance of viewing the phenomenon from a pure state. Tomorrow will be a new day and I will continue with the interview process and I am sure it will be just as emotional.

**Day Two of Interviews**

Interview #6—Rebecca
Rebecca was as excited about participating in the study as I was about her willingness to do so. Rebecca had the longest interview of all the participants. When I asked her why she wanted to be a teacher, she related it back to her life story, which was so much like the students she works with on a daily basis. Rebecca's story was so emotional and so uplifting that I found myself

being pulled while she shared her story. She identified with the students more than any other participant. She spoke a great deal about the importance of "not judging a book by its cover" and how students live up to the expectations you have for them. Rebecca shared about the difference she is making in the lives of students and that along brings her great joy. When she left the room, I had to pull myself together. Her story and the love she has for the students, was very touching. Rebecca's interview was 28 minutes. There were times when I could have stopped her but I felt she needed to share some personal experiences; thus I listen and I believed it was helpful for both of us.

Interview #7—Monica
Monica's interview lasted approximately 14 minutes. I could sense much passion in her voice. As she spoke of t the students, her face seemed to glow. During the interview process, I asked, "What do you feel is important to your students?" and her response was
"That they matter, that they see that you believe that they matter; that just because you made a mistake does not mean that you do not matter." After hearing that statement, I paused to try and gain my composure but before I realized it, the tears began to flow from my eyes. I tried to stop but I could not. The statement took me back to when I was a young girl and my teacher told me that I mattered to her; that I was important. I thought yesterday was emotional but after Rebecca and Monica's interviews, I hope I can make it to the end. We finished the interview process and Monica gave me a hug before she left. It was a beautiful meeting.

Interview #8—Pamela
Before the interview with Pamela, I took a short break. When Pamela began the interview session, her comments were short and to the point but about half way through the interview she became more opened as she talked about the students. The interview lasted approximately 13 minutes. Several times during the interview, Pamela stated how working at the alternative program has changed her to more empathetic person. Several years ago I worked with Pamela in a traditional high school and I wondered if she wanted to get the message across to me that she was a more compassionate person.

Interview #9—Teresa
Teresa displayed immediacy behaviors during her interview. She used hand gestures, smiled, nodded her head, and checked for feedback by saying, "You know." She spoke a lot about the children and their desire to form bonds. She was passionate as well about the students and the job. Her interview lasted 15 minutes.

Interview #10—Grant
Grant's interview process was 15 minutes. He was very comfortable and poised during the interview process. He answered each question with detail yet, without displaying emotion. He was not cold and reluctant but rather calm and composed. He presented himself as a professional who does not allow himself to get emotionally involved.

Interview #11—Mary
The last interview of the day was with Mary. By the time, I got to Mary, I am exhausted and she seems to be ready to get this interview process over. She took a moment to think about the question before answering but her answers were not lengthy. As I watched her, I realized that

she was process the information before responding to the questions.  Her interview lasted 11 minutes.

Summary of Day 2
The second day of interviews were much more emotional for me than the first day.  I can't believe I cried but I could not hold the tears back.  After hearing Rebecca's story and Monica's comments, it was difficult for me to maintain my composure.  I do not believe the tears influenced Monica's comments; I believe her viewpoints were her own and she truly feels what she says.  I thought the first day was emotionally draining but little did I know; day two was tough but so rewarding.  It was great to hear that there are educators who genuinely care for the toughest students.

**Day Three of Interviews**

Last interview—Beth
Beth was out of town during the first two days of interviews so I had to wait until she return.  Beth's interview was similar to April's.  Beth did not see comfortable during the interview process.  Maybe it was because she was the last person to be interview; I'm not sure.  Her interview lasted about 10 minutes.

Hooray!  The second data collection is complete.  Now comes the hard part, the transcription.

**Focus Group Session**

The focus group session occurred directly after school at a local restaurant.  I was waiting on one participant and he had an emergency and was unable to attend.  I was in panic mode because I did not know how to proceed.  I decided to go on with the meeting since everyone else was there and contact my chair for guidance after the meeting because those who were there wanted to proceed and I did not want them to feel their time was not valuable.  The meeting was conducted first.  I had three focus group topics.  Everyone responded to each topic.  It first it seemed that everyone was waiting for the next person to begin.  However, once one person started the conversation, the others joined in quickly.  The three topics expanded to several subtopics.  The comments from the collaborative meeting were similar to does gained during the interviews.  It was refreshing to see the participants interact with each other by nodding their heads in agreement, raising their hands in the air as confirmation, or tapping the table waiting to jump in the conversation.  After the session was completed, participants ordered food and I paid for the meal.

I just emailed my chair informing her one of my participants was unable to attend the focus group session.  I may have to redo this process.  I hope not but I will know as soon as I she emails me back.

Dr. Austin emailed me back and she stated my focus group session is fine.  Thank you Jesus!!  I have all the data collection complete.
**Transcription Process**

The transcription of the audio transcripts is one of the most important parts of the study. I used the Dragon Dictation App hoping that it would make the transcription process quick and easy. I will say that it helped but it was not an easy process at all. Every community has it's own particular dialect and the App had difficulty identifying many words due to the dialect. Therefore, I must say it was not quick and easy. I began the process on a Saturday morning around 8:00 am and I was still sitting in my gown at 3:00 pm and not completed with the process. I began my listening to a couple of sentences of the transcripts, then reading what the App had recorded. I continued that daunting process until I was completed with an interview. It took several days to complete the process.

**Comment after the process was complete.**
Now that I have completed the process, I must say it was beneficial. I became so familiar with the information provided by the participants, that as I was transcribing, the themes began to emerge. I would say to myself, wait, I just read that or so and so said that; thus this process was most helpful.

**Data Analysis**
*Epoche*/Bracketing—I felt that I had to begin this process during the interviews and focus group session. I did not allow my personal thoughts or viewpoints to interfere with those of the participants. During the data analysis process, I removed myself from the study by taking breaks and returning to the data with a fresh state. I constantly reminded myself of my passion for this topic and how valuable it would be to view the information from a pure state. *Epoche* was an ongoing process.

Horizontalization—When I begin viewing the data, I made sure to listen and read each transcript equally. At times, I had to leave the data because I was getting exhausted and at that point I was not viewing the data properly. After leaving the data and giving my mind a break, I was able to return and see the data equally and from a fresh state.

Delimiting horizons—After I read the transcripts, I focused on those statements that stood out and I grouped them into themes or subjects by wrote a description of theme for instance, each participant shared how important it was for students to know their teachers care about them. Therefore, I grouped all the viewpoints about caring together and came up with a composite textural description of caring based on the information received from the participants.

Clustering the information into themes was not as difficult as I originally thought. I listed the individual responses of the participants (individual textural description) and then I grouped them together (composite textural description). Many of the statements from the participants were similar and the themes presented themselves. However, I was surprised that one theme emerged that I was not looking for and I did not know if I should present it or not. I spoke to a colleague who had completed a qualitative study and he stated I should list it as a notable achievement, which is what I did.

Note: I can't believe this but it is 3:30 am and I just finished writing about a theme. I could not sleep and a theme emerged so I jumped up from bed and wrote it down so I decided to add a side

note to the journal.  I am going back to bed, hopefully, I can sleep since tomorrow is church.

**Writing of Chapter Four**
Chapter four was not as difficult to me as the first three chapters.  Here I am just reporting the viewpoints and opinions of the participants.  I think I am going to add the notable achievement at the end.  Hopefully, this is where it belongs.

**Writing of Chapter Five**
Chapter five is more difficult for me than chapter four.  I began the writing then stopped.  I feel like I have a mental block.  I know that part of this is due to the fact that my family is dealing with a great deal of difficulty aright now and I can't seem to get my mind clear.  I am leaving it for now and I will return later.

**APPENDIX G:  DISTRICT CONSENT FORM**


TEACHER IMMEDIACY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TEACHERS WHO EDUCATE AT-RISK STUDENTS IN A HIGH SCHOOL ALTERNATIVE SETTING:  A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY STUDY

Connie Locklear
Liberty University
School of Education


Dr.            , Assistant Superintendent,                                                          is invited to be part of this research study concerning how teacher immediacy behaviors influence at-risk students who attend an alternative setting. The district was selected because the primary investigator resides in the district.  Participant selection is based on those who teach within the district's alternative program.  Dr.        also serves as the district's research consultant; therefore, Dr.        is asked to read the information listed below and share any questions or concerns pertaining to this study.

**Background Information:**
The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper, richer understanding of teacher immediacy from the perspective of teachers who educate at-risk students in an alternative setting.

**Procedures:**
If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:  (1) complete a survey on non-verbal teacher immediacy which will last approximately 15 to 20 minutes, (2) participate in a 20 to 30 minute interview session, and (3) participate in focus group meeting which will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes.  The interviews and focus group meeting will be recorded and transcribed verbatim with each participant having the opportunity to review the records for accuracy.

 **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**
The risks associated with this study are similar to those in a school day setting.  The benefits to this study include sharing information that educators use to meet the needs of at-risk students. Liberty University will not provide medical treatment or financial compensation if you are injured or become ill as a result of participating in this research project.  This does not waive any of your legal rights nor release any claim you might have based on negligence.

**Compensation:**
There will be no compensation associated with this study.

**Confidentiality:**
All data collection and information will be kept in a locked filed cabinet and all electronic files will be password protected.  In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from this research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.  Participants will be given

pseudonyms to ensure privacy.  Since a focus group meeting will be part of this study, I cannot assure that other participants will maintain 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 the Public Schools of Robeson County.  If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:**
The researcher conducting this study is Connie Locklear.  You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact me via email at clocklear3@liberty.edu; or by phone (910) 521-1147.  My advisor is Dr. Shante' Moore-Austin and you may contact her via email at somoore@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher and advisor, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

***You will be given 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                                               Date

**APPENDIX H:  PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM**

TEACHER IMMEDIACY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TEACHERS WHO EDUCATE AT-RISK STUDENTS IN A HIGH SCHOOL ALTERNATIVE SETTING:  A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY STUDY

Connie Locklear
Liberty University
School of Education

Mr.            , Principal for the Alternative Site, is invited to be part of this research study concerning how teacher immediacy behaviors influence at-risk students who attend an alternative setting. The district was selected because the primary investigator resides in the district.  Participant selection is based on those who teach within the district's Alternative Program.  Mr.      also serves as the district's research consultant; therefore, Mr.      is asked to read the information listed below and share any questions or concerns pertaining to this study.

**Background Information:**
The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper, richer understanding of teacher immediacy from the perspective of teachers who educate at-risk students in an alternative setting.

**Procedures:**
If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:  (1) complete a survey on non-verbal teacher immediacy which will last approximately 15 to 20 minutes, (2) participate in a 20 to 30 minute interview session, and (3) participate in focus group meeting which will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes.  The interviews and focus group meeting will be recorded and transcribed verbatim with each participant having the opportunity to review the records for accuracy.

 **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**
The risks associated with this study are similar to those in a school day setting.  The benefits to this study include sharing information that educators use to meet the needs of at-risk students. Liberty University will not provide medical treatment or financial compensation if you are injured or become ill as a result of participating in this research project.  This does not waive any of your legal rights nor release any claim you might have based on negligence.

**Compensation:**
There will be no compensation associated with this study.

**Confidentiality:**

All data collection and information will be kept in a locked filed cabinet and all electronic files will be password protected.  In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from this research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.  Participants will be given pseudonyms to ensure privacy.  Since a focus group meeting will be part of this study, I cannot assure that other participants will maintain 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 the Public Schools of Robeson County.  If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:**
The researcher conducting this study is Connie Locklear.  You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact me via email at clocklear3@liberty.edu; or by phone (910) 521-1147.  My advisor is Dr. Shante' Moore-Austin and you may contact her via email at somoore@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher and advisor, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

***You will be given 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                                                       Date

# APPENDIX I:  INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND FOCUS GROUP TOPICS VALIDITY

# AND RELIABILITY

The literature review section was the driving force behind the creation of the interview questions and focus group topics.  Based on the literature, teacher immediacy behaviors can lead to the development of an encouraging student-teacher relationship, which can impact the overall success of students (Burroughs, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Rey et al., 2007; Rubie-Davis et al., 2010; Split et al., 2012).  The theoretical framework was also embedded in the design of the questions.  The Attachment Theory and Maslow's Motivational Theory served as the groundwork from whence the questions emerged.

In order to ensure the interview questions and the focus group topics were valid and reliable, I sought the help of two peer reviewers.  The first reviewer is a professor in the education department at a local university who has taught various education courses from content specific to pedagogical.  She currently serves as Interim Dean, School of Education. This professional woman is well respected by her peers and those in the educational community. The second person selected as a peer reviewer is an individual who completed a phenomenological research study in order to achieve her doctoral degree several years ago.  She understands the qualitative research design in detail and has a wealth of knowledge as it relates the phenomenological study.  She teaches undergraduate and graduate students and has mentored several doctoral candidates.

Each peer review received a copy of the interview questions, focus group topics, and the research that supported teacher immediacy.  Based on their expertise, they felt the questions and topics were valid and reliable.

## APPENDIX J: EMAIL FROM PEER REVIEWERS

### FIRST REVIEWER'S EMAIL

Connie, I think you definitely have a very interesting study outlined...and look forward to reading your results! I believe your questions are on target.

Your question about whether your interview and focus questions were going to address the four areas you plan to study ---I think the answer is YES! You may want to tweak a question to ask their beliefs about teacher behaviors and a positive (or negative) impact on student achievement or success. Essentially, you have addressed that in your questions, but it is okay to be very direct and use those words in your questions to teachers. Teachers are so used to talking about student achievement and success these days--I think you will get an earful of their thoughts and opinions on this topic. Your questions and topics are worded well---you ask many questions to get good answers---so I think your data will be rich!

I did have a question about how you will choose the 12 teachers (out of the 30) and I also did not know if you would be required to get some kind of consent form from the teachers you will be using for your groups. That may relate to policies in the school district---and I do not know if you are required to put this information in your paper or not. If you are using teachers in your LEA, then you may not need this!

I would love to read your completed work---what a great idea for a study! Please let me know if I can be of additional assistance in any way....keep me posted! Good luck---have a good time :)

### SECOND REVIEWER'S EMAIL

Feedback: Great job on developing the four phenomenological research questions. The four questions and APPENDIX B: NONVERBAL IMMEDIACY SCALE-SELF REPORT (NIS-S) SURVEY support the Problem and Purpose statement. Your questions will help the reader to understand the experiences of the teachers in this phenomenological study. Looking forward to reading your Dissertation!