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THE CARING TEACHER: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY THAT LOOKS AT WHAT TEACHERS DO AND BELIEVE ABOUT THEIR WORK WITH AT-RISK STUDENTS

by

Sarah Whitney Thompson

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THE CARING TEACHER: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY THAT LOOKS AT WHAT TEACHERS DO AND BELIEVE ABOUT THEIR WORK WITH AT-RISK STUDENTS

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University of Nebraska, 2010

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Caring teachers have been identified as a critical component of successful interventions with at-risk students, however just what constitutes a caring teacher is less well understood. Specifically, what are the behaviors, characteristics, and beliefs of caring teachers, and how are they impacted by the contexts within which they work? The purpose of this multiple case study was to understand more about caring teachers who work with at-risk students in secondary schools located in a Midwestern city and thereby to add complexity to the literature. Two middle school teachers and two high school teachers were recruited to participate. They were observed on multiple occasions and interviewed twice. The data from these observations and interviews were initially analyzed case by case; the cross case analysis based on the results from the individual case resulted in 6 themes that were present across the four cases. The following themes were identified: the role of relationships, perspective on at-risk students, providing opportunities for students to develop a positive sense of themselves, the value of a positive classroom experience for both students and teacher, negotiating power, and flexibility. Implications of this research for psychologists, educators, and policy makers, as well as future research are also discussed.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Nearly one-third of students who start high school do not finish (Baron, 2005). The nearly five million students who drop out of high school every year face an increased likelihood of being incarcerated, living in poverty, and abusing drugs and alcohol (American Youth Policy Forum, 2006). All too frequently the blame for school failure and dropping out has been placed squarely on the shoulders of the students, but the impact of school failure impacts everyone. The country's economy for example suffers when students drop out of high school. Each year's class of dropouts will cost the country over $200 billion during their lifetimes in lost earnings and unrealized tax revenue (Dynarski & Gleason, 2002; Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay, 1997). The consequences of a student leaving high school are large and yet we know more about the characteristics of those who drop out than we do about effective interventions (Christenson, Sinclair, Lehr, and Godber, 2001). Though school reform is prevalent, less is known about what actually works for students who are academically at-risk and more likely to drop out of high school (Hammond, Smink, & Drew, 2007; Catterall, 1987).

The definition of at-risk students varies from students who are members of socially disadvantaged groups (Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990), to students who have experienced past academic problems (Catterall, 1998), or both (Croninger & Lee, 2001). This study used the term to refer to students that originate from either socially disadvantaged groups (such as students from low-income origins, or ethnic minorities) or have had previous academic difficulties. Academic risk includes such factors as disengagement (Finn, 1989; McNeal, 1995), absenteeism (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Lee &

Burkham), low grades, early-grade retention and discipline problems (Croninger & Lee, 2001). As Croninger and Lee state however, these warning signs of future problems do not serve to explain the cause of the difficulties (2001).

For an explanation of academic problems, some researchers have looked at the environment at-risk students are in. The curriculum in schools serving at-risk students is often heavily based in "lower order 'rote' skills" (Becker & Luthar, 2003, 2002, p. 201). These instructional practices are not without consequences. They have been found to hurt student motivation and expectations of academic success (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Classroom observations in poor school districts uncovered classes focused on, "teacher-directed activities including independent seatwork, rote learning, and frequent interruptions of learning activities for behavior management (Haberman, 1991)" (Becker & Luthar, 2002, p. 201). While this type of learning environment sounds dismal, the actual reasons high school students gave for dropping out suggested that instead of these characteristics, students were more tuned in to the missing relational aspect of their school experience. According to the U.S. Department of Education, dissatisfaction with school is the most common reason students give for leaving school (U.S. Department of Education, 1990).

Because of this growing awareness that students' feelings about school impact learning, recent research has focused on students' sense of belonging in school (Anderman, 2003). This is appropriate considering that, "A disturbing proportion of at-risk students fail to complete high school for non-academic reasons" (Croninger & Lee, 2001, p. 564). Research focusing on the factors that increase resiliency has highlighted the important role that relationships with adults in their schools can have (Ryan, Miller-

Loessi, & Nieri, 2007). Researchers and developmental theorists have long known that relationships were necessary for good development. Relationships with supportive adults help children, "develop positive behavioral and social patterns" (Woolley, 2006, p. 93). These relationships also affect, "all aspects of that child's development, including school performance (Woolley, 2006, p. 93). Wetzel asserted in her work that these nurturing and caring adults can be found in all the systems at work in a child's life: school, home, and neighborhood (1999). The idea that all children need some form of adult social support or social capital for school success forms the thesis of this dissertation.

Research

This study was based on the idea that caring teachers are a critical piece of a successful program for at-risk students. However the literature suggests that not enough is known about what a caring teacher is. More information about caring teachers will enhance research and the development of interventions. This study will consist of interviews and observations with caring teachers in an attempt to identify their beliefs and actions.

Recent research has demonstrated that along with a meaningful and challenging curriculum, the presence of caring adults is essential, particularly for academically at-risk students (Dynarski & Gleason, 2002; James & Jurich, 1999). Interventions focused on applying and testing this hypothesis have resulted in outcomes which demonstrate that at-risk youth's levels of school engagement increases with the presence of supportive adults (Woolley, 2006). In spite of the knowledge that this is important, research does not indicate the ways in which these relationships can be developed or more specifically, what teachers do to foster students' sense of being cared for. As a result, information is

lacking about how adult-student relationships can be meaningful to students and impact their educational attainment. In addition, the details regarding how teachers go about creating a sense of relatedness in classrooms is absent in the literature. Perhaps because of this disparity, research that focuses on other ways of improving educational attainment seldom recognizes the significance of adult-student relationships in schools. (Hammond, Smink, & Drew, 2007). Many scholars and researchers (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Noddings, 1992) have stated that feelings of belongingness and of being cared for can lead, "to the adoption and internalization of goals and values of caregivers" (Wentzel, 1997, p. 411). With respect to schooling, this explains the notion that students will be motivated to engage in classroom activities if they believe that teachers care about them (Wentzel, 1997, p. 411).

Counseling psychologists have played a role in creating interventions, conducting research in schools, and training teachers to deliver interventions to at-risk students. Given that schools play a role in an individual's occupational and interpersonal success, as well as mental and physical health, (Lyubormirsky, King, & Diener, 2005), researchers have called for the educational and mental health issues to be examined as key aspects of understanding school performance and behavior (Roeser, Eccles, & Strobel, 1998). Some counseling psychologists have called for the professions' involvement at a systems level instead of working at the individual level of change (Stanard, 2003). In order to prevent students from dropping out of school, it has been suggested that counseling psychologists needs to "enter into active collaborations with school personnel, parents, and administrators" (Romano & Hage, 2000) and focus on tailoring programs specifically to the needs of at-risk students (Scheel & Gonzalez, 2007). The types of changes that

counseling psychologists must be engaged in are difficult, "These efforts will necessarily involve culture change as well as institutional change, and ultimately will need to transform relationships between teachers, students, and families, and among peers" (Weinstein, 2002, p. 33).

Rationale for study

This qualitative case study addressed several needs. The most glaring need is a lack of knowledge about what caring teachers do. The available literature is limited to how students define caring teachers (Pomeroy, 1999; Howard, 2002) and has paid little attention to the social and affective components of teacher-students relationships and the climate that supports these interactions (Pianta, Hamre, & Stuhlman, 2003). A qualitative study done on caring teaches will expand on the limited descriptions of caring teachers. This research is needed because of the large number of students who are not graduating from high school (Barton, 2006). If we knew more about what caring teachers do, future researchers could look at contexts in which caring teachers exist, as well as identify caring teachers for future research and interventions. In addition, this information would help pave the way for the design of interventions that reinforce or complement the work of caring teachers. Caring teachers are not always valued and the teacher turn-over in schools with a high percentage of at-risk students tends to be higher (Ingersoll, 2004). As a result, we need to learn how to foster and support these teacher characteristics in schools. The first step was to develop an understanding of what is a caring teacher is. After the context of caring teachers is understood better, future research could then identify how caring teachers are helpful to and effective with at-risk students.

Increased understanding of caring teachers' actions and stances can provide direction for the development of prevention programs designed by counseling psychologists to be implemented with teachers. This kind of programming would ultimately address the needs of at-risk students by facilitating more secure attachments with school and values in line with those of their teacher role models. Specifically, this study worked to deepen the understanding of what caring teachers working with at-risk students do. This study hoped to then improve upon efforts to help at-risk students complete high school successfully by creating a better understanding of the complexity and significance of defining what caring teaching means. In addition, it is my hope that this research will provide information for future studies on the role that caring adults play in the success of at-risk students.

Statement of the Problem

The presence of a caring adult in schools has been shown to assist at-risk students to complete high school and succeed academically. The research that has identified this as an important source of support has not included information on what it is these caring adults do. In particular, no studies have looked at the beliefs and behaviors of teachers who are perceived as caring. Given the importance of finding solutions and strategies for ensuring student success, it was necessary to conduct a multiple case study research that will add complexity and richness to the literature and discover what is unique about teachers who develop caring relationships with at-risk students (Stake, 1995).

Research Questions

The central research question that this study aims to answer was, what is a caring teacher? This study will also addressed these sub-questions,

1. What contextual factors support caring teachers?
2. What are the qualities or characteristics of caring teachers?
3. How do teachers view the role of caring in the work that they do?
4. What do teachers do to show they care?
5. How do teachers care?
6. Why do caring teachers care? What fundamental beliefs and values underlie their caring attitudes?

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

In the United States, the federal government has in the last ten years placed an emphasis on improving low performing schools. Most of these programs have focused only on increasing students' performance on high stakes testing. One effect of this law is that few changes have been made to improve graduation rates in, "a system that virtually guaranteed their failure" (Kretovics & Armaline, 2004, p. 214). Inequity in educational outcomes for poor and minority students remains prevalent. While reform has been well intentioned, it has on a grand scale failed to improve the rates of school completion (Dillon, 2008).

School is considered in this society to be the path to opportunity particularly for those students coming from less privileged origins. "Schools function as door openers as well as gatekeepers for access to knowledge, and for meaningful participation in work and in the broader society" (Weinstein, 2002, p. 23). Encouraging psychology's participation in conversations about school reform, is the idea that all students regardless of their demographics are able to have access to an education that improves their opportunities as adults. This means ensuring that students, "in the bottom half of the achievement hierarchy have continuing and non-stigmatizing opportunities to develop into fully competent adults" (Weinstein, 2002, p. 23).

Addressing the needs of the students who fall into this bottom half of the achievement hierarchy is complex. In order to address this complexity, this chapter is divided into five sections. The first section describes the ecological framework and looks at the systems

that impact children. The systems highlighted in this section include family, characteristics of at-risk students, teacher influence, culture, and schools. The second section of this chapter examines the role that relationships play for at-risk students through the lenses of personalization, resilience, the developmental role that relationships play, the role that caring has on at-risk students, and how it is that relationships provide support to help at-risk students succeed. The third section looks at research that examined what has been learned about caring adults in schools. The fourth section provides detail from the literature on what a caring teacher and caring classroom are. The final section includes the remaining questions or gaps that have been identified in the literature, the rationale for focusing this research on teachers, and questions that previous research has raised that are yet unanswered about the role of caring teachers for at-risk students.

The Systems at Work in At-risk Students' Lives

The ecological framework that influences people is made up of a complex web of related systems that include relationships and community membership in many environments such as home, school, and neighborhood (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, Richman, Bowen, & Woolley, 2004; Woolley, 2006). These relationships and activities are all sources of influence that, over time either promote or detract from school successes and completion (Brofenbrenner, 1977; Pianta & Walsh, 1996; Woolley, 2006). O'Connor and McCartney (2007) speak specifically of the ecological model as an important lens for looking at the role that teachers can have on students lives, "To better understand the influences of teacher-child relationships on achievement within the context of children's

lives, it is necessary to study the effects of these relationships using ecological-contextual models" (p. 341).

The ecological framework has been used to analyze the systems affecting the development of children. This approach has been used to look at the interactions between families, individual characteristics, neighborhoods, schools, and culture and their contribution to students' academic successes and failures (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These spheres of influence have also been used to try to predict which students would have difficulties in school. In conducting these analyses, it became clear that not every student in danger of leaving school ends up having problems. Several protective factors were identified that appeared to increase the likelihood of success for at-risk students. These include, "(a) psychological factors such as perceived academic competence, (b) characteristics of the family context such as involved parenting, and (c) the availability of external support systems, as exemplified by a supportive teacher or institutional structure such as a caring school environment" (Gutman & Midgley, 2000, p. 225). These protective factors provide useful information about how to structure prevention and intervention programs for students at-risk of school failure. This study explored in further detail the support provided by caring teachers, identified by Gutman & Midgley as a protective factor for at-risk students.

The Families of At-risk Students

Family characteristics that support high school completion include adult supervision, high expectations for academic success, and an emphasis on the importance of education (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). Additionally, families can offer children additional help by having conversations with their children related to education and by being actively

involved in the school (McNeal, 1999). Brewster and Bowen said, "Parental support helps direct children towards positive behavior in school by reinforcing the notion of education as valuable and by monitoring children's engagement in school" (2004, p. 51). The help that families provide to successful students is important for understanding what help at-risk students may not be receiving. The relationship between the parents of at-risk students and schools can be complex. For example, at-risk students often come from families where parents did not have positive relationships themselves with school (Kenny, Blustein, Chaves, Grossman, Gallagher, 2003). As a result, these parents may not reach out to be involved in their children's school and often do not have a strong relationship with their children's school (Christenson, 2004). Additionally, many parents of at-risk students develop an adversarial relationship with schools when they hear only negative things about their son or daughter from teachers and administrators. One study demonstrated that if African-American parents think that schools care about all children then, "positive school-family relationships will result, which lead to better outcomes for students" (Woolley, 2006, p. 94). These examples indicate how significant a strong parent-school partnership is for student success. Parents' feelings of exclusion and lack of knowledge about their children's educational activities may get communicated to their children and subsequently impact their performance (Comer, 1980). When parents can feel engaged at their children's school in a useful way, this will also be communicated to their children (Comer, 1980; Eccles & Harold, 1993). When parents feel comfortable in their children's school, and are able to communicate with teachers, their children are more likely to feel connected to their school and teachers (Gutman & Midgley, 2000).

At-Risk Students Characteristics

At-risk students often enter school with more educational needs and emotional needs than other students, but in spite of their needs for additional resources, they actually receive less positive attention than their successful peers (Croninger and Lee, 2001). As a result at-risk students are often identified as being disruptive in school and instead of receving additional assistance, they often receive even less positive attention. Ultimately this cycle leads to the students', "further alienation, in the form of academic underachievement, school suspension and expulsion, and myriad other implicit and explicit punitive actions" (Howard, 2002, p. 427). Teachers' low academic expectations also influence their engagement and motivation (Murdock, 1999), whereas high teacher expectations have been shown to increase school completion (Christenson et al., 2000). Research has demonstrated that teacher expectations are impacted by the characteristics of the students. In particular, it has been found that teachers have lower expectations for minority students and those from low SES backgrounds (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Eccles et al., 1993; Goodenow, 1993, Murdock, 1996;).

Students who leave high school often cite both social and academic reasons. Many students who have left school acknowledge that in spite of trying to gain assistance, "they had fewer positive social interactions and less access to assistance from teachers than their more successful peers" (Croninger & Lee, 2001, p. 551). Students that have dropped out of school have expressed in various studies that their teachers do not care about them, are not interested in how well they do in school, and are unwilling to help with problems (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Fine, 1986; MacLeod, 1987). That at-risk students slip through the cracks and are unable to garner the help they

need is an indicator that there is a chasm between available services and the needs of those students most at-risk.

Exit interviews for students who were leaving school revealed that half left due to academic failure and not liking school and one third left because they didn't get along with teachers or other students (Catterall, 1998). These findings highlight the primacy of teacher interactions for at-risk students regarding their participation in school. In another study, students who had dropped out of school at one point identified three problem areas in their interactions with teachers. Students felt that teachers failed to intervene in student conflict, exhibited behavior that discriminated on racial grounds, and had qualities that made students feel undervalued (Pomeroy, 1999). In summary, these students did not feel valued in school and the educational ramifications of this were major.

Students have also described feeling singled out or picked on because of cultural norms, beliefs, and ethnicity (Phelan, Yu, & Davidson, 1994). In one study, African American and Latino students reported that the following factors negatively impacted their school performance was negatively impacted by interactional patterns and expectations that appeared racist and lacking in empathy and caring and (Howard, 2002). Studies demonstrating the implications of poor teacher-student relationships have been consistently replicated. However, relationships have not been prioritized as a necessary component of the educational environment for at-risk students.

Teachers

Particularly in urban schools, there is a high rate of teacher turnover. Within the first five years of teaching, 50% of urban teachers leave the profession (National

Commission for Teaching and America's Future, 2002). Teachers describe leaving teaching because of a lack of support from school administrations, student behavior problems, classroom intrusions, and not being adequately prepared for the demands of urban teaching (Haberman, 2005; Song, 2006; Stafford & Haberman, 2003). As a result of this high turnover, students in urban schools often are taught by less experienced teachers (McKinney, Haberman, Stafford-Johnson, & Robinson, 2008).

Many studies have demonstrated that teachers respond more positively to students that do well and are highly motivated (Lee, Dedrick, & Smith, 1991). Academic meritocracy has been the prevalent model of education in this country. While schools are starting to realize the disadvantages of this approach, the alternative is quite time-consuming. It is difficult for teachers with a large number of students to attend to the needs of all. One consequence of this is that at-risk students entering high school with pre-existing difficulties and weaknesses, both academically and behaviorally, receive "less support and guidance from teachers to address these difficulties" (Croninger & Lee, 2001, p. 561).

Under NCLB, teachers have been charged with the difficult task of raising achievement for all students including at-risk students. As a result of the emphasis on high-stakes policies, teachers have reported having less time to connect with students. Teachers are increasingly "asked to relate to their students differently, enact pedagogies that are often at odds with their vision of best practice, and experience high levels of stress" (Valli & Buese, 2007, p. 520). Perhaps because of lower expectations (Kagan, 1990; Oakes, Gamoran, & Page, 1992), at-risk students in particular are given tedious work that is not engaging or relevant to their lives (Becker & Luthar, 2002).

Teachers have tremendous influence on their students' academic outcomes. Students reports of supportive teachers with positive expectations were the strongest predictors of positive school outcomes (Murdock, 1999). In spite of the data suggesting their huge impact on students through daily contact, surprisingly few studies look at teachers as sources of social capital for students (Croninger & Lee, 2001).

Social Support: Summary

Parents, teachers and schools are all important systems that have been shown to impact students' feelings about school and teachers (Demaray, Malecki, Davidson, Hodgson, & Rebus, 2005). What happens when students do not have an adult who is knowledgeable and connected with school in a positive way? What happens when there is no one who serves, "as a safety valve for adolescents, providing them with emotional support, encouragement, and actual assistance when academic or personal problems threaten to overwhelm them" (Croninger & Lee, 2001, p. 551). Unfortunately, according to the literature on resilience, there is less likelihood for success (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Social capital is the individual's perception that "he or she is cared for, esteemed, and valued by people in his or her social network, that enhances personal functioning, assists in coping adequately with stressors, and may buffer him or her from adverse outcomes" (Demaray, Malecki, Davidson, Hodgson, & Rebus, 2005, p. 691). A student without these resources is not equipped to deal with many of the struggles and challenges that adolescence invariably brings.

Adults in schools play a special role for at-risk students. In particular, students with difficult lives at home, who are unable to find other sources of social capital are especially dependant on school for support and guidance (Croninger & Lee, 2001).

Minority students and students from low SES backgrounds may have less access not only to the support of teachers, but also to adult role models or mentoring in their communities (Carnegie Council of Adolescent Development, 1995). This reveals an important gap in the resources of these students. Such relationships with adults are especially important to adolescents (Stanton-Salazar, 1997), "who often require adult guidance and assistance in performing important developmental tasks" (Croninger & Lee, 2001, p. 553).

Culture

Civil rights struggles still exist, perhaps most visibly in our educational system (Weinstein, 2002). While not frequently examined, the culture of adults in schools is often different from those of at-risk students. Because of these types of discrepancies, at-risk students may feel alienated in the school environment. As a result of this, relationships may play a special role in the academic success of students, "who are more likely to feel alienated and unaccepted in an environment whose values and beliefs seem incompatible with their own" (Gutman & Midgley, 2000, p. 229). These relationships can do a great deal toward bridging the divide between the culture of school and home, and prevent some of the damage done by poverty and stress from acculturation (Coatsworth et al., 2000; Demaray, Malecki, Davidson, Hodgson, & Rebus, 2005; Gillock & Reyes, 1999; Lopez et al., 2002;).

Students from low SES or minority background may face many obstacles on their path to success in life. At-risk minority students may experience additional poverty, racism and violence, (Gillock & Reyes, 1999) which in turn, may impact their school performance. Students who come from families with a low SES may not have access to adequate health, material, or intellectual resources (McKinney et al., 2008). Students

may reside in neighborhoods that are unsafe and violence or threats of violence may be a frequent occurrence. There may be an absence of career role models (Bluestein, 2006).

In addition, the educational resources and opportunities in high poverty areas are generally lower (Gutman & Midgley, 2000). Schools in low-income areas may experience inequalities in their school's resources and opportunities (Gutman & Midgley, 2000). The obstacles can be numerous. Often at-risk students end up in larger classes, with teachers who are less experienced (McKinney et al., 2008). The curriculum for these students has been found to be less engaging, often focused on rote skills (Darling-Hammond 2000). The instructional strategies used for at-risk students in general have also been found to be less interesting (Kretovics & Armaline, 2004; Wheelock, 1992), and in fact harmful to students' motivation (Darling-Hammond, 2000). For example, classroom observations in poor school districts reveal an emphasis on teacher-directed activities including independent seatwork, rote learning, and frequent interruptions of learning activities for behavior management" (Becker & Luthar, 2003, 2002, p. 201).

Students in some research identified their lack of self-discipline as a likely barrier to their success in school. While this may be accurate, researchers such as Fine et al., (2004), suggest a more interesting explanation, "that by blaming themselves and their friends and only minimally recognizing the role of racial and social class barriers, low-income ethnic and racial minority youth may be expressing their internalization of negative societal stereotypes" (Kenny, Blustein, Chaves, Grossman, Gallagher, 2003, p. 342). While it can be challenging for students to be recognized as advocates in their education, rebellions against social and racial barriers are present. Negative educational experiences often lead to bad student outcomes. One study looking at students'

perceptions of what impacted their experience in school found that students coped with negative, non-caring environments by creating disruptions in class or withdrawing quietly from class (Phelan, Yu, & Davidson, 1994).

Classrooms and Schools

The climate in schools has been shown to impact not just academic performance, but also student behavior and well-being. This process is thought to take place partially through the impact the school climate has on staff members' sense of efficacy about how successful they can be in helping at-risk students (Bowen, Rose & Ware, 2006). The research done on schools that have a large percentage of minorities, or students living in high poverty has found that these schools exhibit a lower average sense of community (Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 2003). Teachers in these studies report less positive perceptions of school and classroom climate than do teachers of higher SES students (Gutman & Midgley, 2000).

Middle schools have been shown to be less supportive than elementary schools. The structure of middle schools is different, with new teachers for each academic subject. By meeting with a different teacher for each subject middle school students likely experience less teacher support and more meaningful teacher-student relationships are more difficult to develop (Demaray, Malecki, Davidson, Hodgson, & Rebus, 2005). Adolescents are developmentally more inclined to look to their social support network, however the experience of middle school is often characterized by less connection between the members of their social support network, including peers and teachers. In addition, the middle school environment is typically more complex and one in which students receive less emotional support from teachers than they did in elementary school (Becker &

Luthar, 2002; Gutman & Midgley, 2000). So the need for additional interpersonal connections and support often goes unmet at school (Eccles & Midgley, 1989). This depersonalized school structure is thought to threaten students' identification with their teachers and connection to their school environment (Ford, 1993; Steele, 1992). These types of changes, in particular, may challenge the academic success of poor and minority students who are more likely to feel unconnected to an environment whose culture seems irreconcilable to their own (Gutman & Midgley, 2000).

Part of what a caring teacher does is create a classroom that is caring (Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 2003). Teachers who created a caring, structured, and fair classroom with high expectations had students with higher levels of school engagement and achievement (Klem & Connell, 2004). Research into caring school communities has found that these classrooms include: respectful supportive relationships, opportunities to help and collaborate with others, opportunity for autonomy and influence, emphasis on common purposes and ideals (Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 2003). "A caring community of learners exists when the full range of students experience themselves as valued, contributing, influential members of a classroom or school that they perceive as dedicated to the welfare and growth of all its members" (Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 2003, p. 5).

What At-Risk Kids Need to Be Successful: Protective Factors and Personalization

Results from large-scale national longitudinal surveys indicate dropouts cite school-related reasons, such as "disliked school" and "couldn't get along with teachers," more often than any other reason (NCES, 1995; Rumberger, 1983). In various forms, research into what works for at-risk students has demonstrated the benefits of the presence of a

caring adult in school (Coll & Stewart, 2002; Dynarski & Gleason, 2002; Woolley, 2006, 2007). Students that are highly successful in school are less likely to describe the quality of their school relationships as a barrier to success. It is also interesting that all of the students who, "described school as a barrier also recognized their teachers as potential sources of guidance and expectations" (Kenny, Blustein, Chaves, Grossman, Gallagher, 2003, 342).

The idea that at-risk students may have different needs from other students at school has proven to be a source of contention. "One could argue that a high level of school meaningfulness, or "liking school," is not a prerequisite for achieving passing grades and graduating from high school. However, this may be more likely in the case of students possessing capital (resources) in other areas, such as financial, social, and educational capital" (Brewster & Bowen, 2004, p. 62). While students who do well in school may not enjoy it, this dislike is unlikely to get in the way of finishing high school. For at-risk students, whether they like school or not can have significant implications for their success or failure in school (Brewster & Bowen, 2004).

Resilience: The Developmental Role of Care and Nurturing Relationships

The need for relationships with adults, specifically those that are able to facilitate healthy decision making, is a necessity for children's development. Relational theorists have described these types of relationships as serving, "as a context for the experience of the self" (Palladino & Schultheiss, 2003, p. 301). While leading to greater self-understanding, children's relationships with adults also have an impact on children's learning. Specifically, "A child can perform at a more advanced level with structure and

support provided by a proficient adult, a process known as scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978)" (as cited in Masten & Coatsworth, 1998, p. 206).

The characteristics of caring relationships contribute to well-being in several ways that would impact school performance. Caring relationships have been shown to increase self-esteem and self-efficacy beliefs. They also increase one's belief that help is available, and faith in one's competence in life roles (Cutrona, 1996). Relationships with teachers can provide students with emotional support, information, guidance or assistance with school work (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Students are helped either by relationships that occur more formally during the school day or more informally outside of the classroom, "These informal opportunities for gaining assistance from teachers appear to be especially important for students who have a history of difficulties at school" (Croninger & Lee, 2001, p. 565).

One of the ways in which caring relationships impact change is through the internalization of the goals and values of the caregiver (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Noddings, 1992; Wentzel, 1997). In part through believing teachers care about them, it is thought that students academic engagement increases (Wentzel, 1997). Students' psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness are thought to impact their motivation in school (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In order to increase students behavioral alignment and identification with school values and goals, these psychological needs must be met through the creation of a school community (Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000).

According to some theorists, relationships with teachers can help explain differences in the probability of dropping out; however the quality of the relationship is an important

predictor of its impact on student success (Croninger & Lee, 2001; McDermott, 1977; Raywid, 1995; Sizer, 1984). Children with higher quality relationships are equated with higher levels of achievement than children with lower quality relationships (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Following from that, it is thought that, "higher quality teacher-child relationships may therefore serve as intervention for children at risk for lower levels of achievement" (O'Connor & McCartney, 2007, p. 341).

Teacher support, besides impacting motivation also has been shown to affect attitudes toward school and teachers, and academic competence (Demaray & Malecki, 2002b; Demaray, Malecki, Davidson, Hodgson, & Rebus, 2005; Goodenow, 1993; Malecki & Demaray, 2003; Wentzel & Asher, 1995;). Teachers have also been shown to have more impact on students' interest in school than either parents or peers (Wentzel, 1997). Practically speaking, relationships with teachers and their impact on beliefs and attitudes can influence visible behaviors such as attendance and academic achievement (Goodenow, 1993; LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Leko & Fernandez, 1989; Wentzel & Asher, 1995). These relationships can, "create powerful incentives to attend school, even when schoolwork is difficult and classroom expectations are troublesome" (Croninger & Lee, 2001, p. 551). Especially when challenges arise for at-risk students, teachers play a significant role in student success by, "preventing negative developmental outcomes from occurring by being a reliable source of emotional support, guidance, and assistance to adolescents" (Croninger & Lee, 2001, p. 552).

An understanding of the significance of relationships is more supported than it once was. There has been a movement in psychology towards a relationally based perspective that acknowledges the importance that interpersonal connections play in

healthy functioning (Bowlby, 1982; Cutrona, 1996; Gilligan, 1982; Jordan et al., 1991; Josselson 1992; Teyber, 2000; Palladino Schultheiss, 2003). Students who experience economic or social difficulties need guidance and support to succeed in school from some source (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Through this increased emphasis on the developmental role of caring relationships, the significance of social capital for at-risk students has gained prominence.

What Works for Students At-risk?

Students who are at-risk, and are still able to successfully complete school, may simply have more relationship resources. A network of caring adults has been shown to have a high impact on school success, reducing the likelihood of at-risk students dropping out by 50% (Croninger & Lee, 2001). Qualitative studies dating back nearly 30 years have described the importance that caring relationships with teachers have for at-risk students (Comer, 1980; Rutter, 1979). These studies in particular point to the benefits students receive from additional time and attention from caring teachers (Gutman & Midgley, 2000, p. 228). In spite of these studies, questions remain about what caring teachers do.

Students' Descriptions of Caring Teachers

Many studies have looked at students' perspectives on what constitutes caring teaching and how these teachers contribute to effective classroom climate and effective instructional strategies (Howard, 2002; Labonty & Danielson, 1988; Miron & Lauria, 1998). This work is valuable in that it prioritizes the previously marginalized and discredited voices of at-risk students on this topic (Fine, 1987; Nieto, 1992; Weiss & Fine, 1993). Caring teachers as described by at-risk students, were those that exhibited a

egalitarian style of interaction, had varied expectations for students based on individual differences, exhibited a caring approach to their own work, and gave students constructive feedback (Wentzel, 1997). This emphasis on respect, democratic interactions, and an emphasis on individual differences are found throughout the literature.

A more specific explanation of the differences between what parents and caring teachers do points out that dialogue is the significant factor. Teachers are able to indicate caring to students through engaging in dialogues with them. Students were able to identify caring teachers as those that knew them, talked to them, explained things, and listened (Pomeroy, 1999). This highlights the reciprocal communication that at-risk students seek from teachers. Rather than just lecturing, teachers who helped at-risk students were described as being able to engage with students in a dialogue in which both parties talked and listened. At-risk students were able to identify these interactions as increasing their positive feelings and contributing to them putting forth additional effort in school (Howard, 2002).

In another study, at-risk students identified several instructional strategies that positively impacted how much effort students put forth, how engaged they were in the content of the curriculum, and their level of academic achievement (Howard, 2002). These three strategies employed by teachers were the establishment of a classroom that had family, community, and home-like characteristics, the inclusion of cultural connections in teacher-students relationships, and verbal communication and affirmation (Howard, 2002). One student described a teacher who used these techniques as follows, “You can tell Baba Jones cares because he does stuff that our other teachers don’t. He

asks us about stuff that's going on at home, things we like and don't like. He does a lot of the things that elementary teachers used to do to get to know their students. And because he cares so much, all the students like him and want to do good work in his class" (Howard, 2002, p. 435). These findings point to the ways in which a teacher's contributions to the sense of community in the classroom impacts the perception that the teacher is caring.

It is teachers that are able to establish meaningful relationships that at-risk students identify as being good teachers (Pomeroy, 1999). The teachers able to develop meaningful relationships were those, who had a philosophy that prioritized relationships with students. These teachers dismissed, "a more distant teacher-student relationship model to establish a certain type of friendship with the students" (Pomeroy, 1999, p. 472). According to Pomeroy this less remote relationship more clearly demonstrates, "care and concern" (1999, p. 471). Teachers were able to demonstrate their willingness for connection by taking time and having conversations with students and listening to them. Specifically, the interpersonal style of teachers that helped teachers develop relationships with at-risk students included taking time to listen and talk to students and engaging with students in a friendly way and using humor. Academically, teachers efforts to teach the material in an interesting and effective way that imparted the teachers knowledge and skills was important (Pomeroy, 1999).

The emphasis in this chapter is on the important role that teachers can play in helping at-risk students. The literature suggests that teachers are able to help at-risk students by providing a more personal connection to school through individual relationships with students, a caring classroom, and by providing social capital that may be lacking in

students' lives. These efforts take enormous resources. One suggestion is to increase the amount of money invested in helping teachers to improve their relationships with students (Becker & Luthar, 2003). School reform in this country has primarily been focused on raising academic standards. While this is a very important area of reform, it will be unsuccessful, particularly for at-risk students, if not coupled with attention to "social-emotional factors associated with achievement motivation and performance" (Becker & Luthar, 2003, p. 200).

As Demaray et al., (2005) suggest, it is important to make school staff aware of the impact that the environments they create and the support they offer students can have. This includes not just teachers, but administrators and others in the school who, by valuing and empowering teachers, help create a school environment in which teachers feel able to support both students' academic and social needs more effectively (Hoy & Tarter, 1997). "Educational efforts are needed to provide knowledge to teachers about the impact of their social interaction with students coupled with programming to develop teacher skills and school policies to support those efforts" (Woolley, 2006, p. 101).

There is a lack of clarity in the literature about what caring adults in schools do. Questions also remain about what it is like to work for caring relationships with at-risk students. Noddings (1992), a philosopher who has written about the need for schools to be caring places suggested that caring teachers model caring behavior for students, engage in ongoing conversations with students where perspectives are shared, and both expecting and encouraging the highest attainable expectations for student. While researchers and theorists suggest it would be worthwhile for at-risk kids to receive an

education in which increased academic expectations and a caring school were a priority, more needs to be known about how to facilitate this.

Teachers' Role in Student's Development

Parents play an important role in their students' development. However, as children get older, adults in other settings such as school play a greater and greater role (Miller, Cowan, Cowan, Hetherington, & Clingempeel, 1993; Woolley, 2006). In fact, teacher support ends up being more predictive of problem behaviors in school than parent support (Brewster & Bowen, 2004). Croninger & Lee acknowledge the importance of other adults for children, but in improving educational outcomes for at-risk students, they return to teachers as the primary source of change. There are many identified sources in schools of social capital for students. These people can provide advice, guidance and support that can assist students. These are people in more commonly thought of roles such as guidance counselors, teachers, and coaches, but can also include clerical workers, administrators, custodial staff, and even peers (Croninger & Lee, 2001). Among the adults though, it is teachers that have been identified as having the most impact (Croninger & Lee, 2001).

At-risk students are often the identified recipients of interventions in schools. Given the significance that school climate and relationships have on at-risk students, it makes sense to also understand the role that adults in the schools have in creating an environment that is more responsive to the needs of at-risk students. The responsibility for the school climate rests with the adults in the school, (Woolley, 2006). Pointing out the that not all students have equal access to support from teachers Croninger and Lee

state, “ we believe that those who do are more likely to succeed in school than those who do not” (2001, p. 558).

There exists a need for additional training or support for teachers attempting to create more caring classrooms in their work with at-risk students. Research has shown that “novice student-teachers become disillusioned quickly when confronted by children who exhibit the characteristics of at-risk students” (Henderson-Sparks, Paredes, & Gonzalez, 2002, p. 82). Ill equipped to face the unique demands of this population, many of the most promising teachers who begin their careers in at-risk schools burn out and transfer after a few years (National Commission for Teaching and America’s Future, 2002). The most common reasons cited for these transfers are desire for a higher salary, smaller class sizes, better student discipline, and greater faculty authority—all available in more affluent areas (Ingersoll, 2004).

Gaps in the Literature

Several gaps in the literature currently exist around the idea of what caring teachers do. While at-risk students have been asked about their perceptions of caring teachers as well as the implications this has for their learning, caring teachers have not been asked about their work with at-risk students. The social capital that teachers offer students has rarely been the focus of research (Croninger & Lee, 2001). The lack of information about this topic has meant that there is little understanding about what a caring teacher is and the circumstances surrounding these teachers (Gutman & Midgley, 2000). Because of their substantial impact, attention to specific interactions between at-risk students and teachers such as the quality, frequency, and scope of the support and guidance teachers provide to students is important (Croninger & Lee, 2001).

While much research has been done to identify the risk-factors and negative outcomes for at-risk students, less attention has been paid to changeable factors that can increase students rates of academic success (Becker & Luthar, 2002, 2003). Questions still remain about how adolescents access and use the interpersonal relationships they have to enhance their success in school (Croninger & Lee, 2001).

Chapter 3

Research Methods

This study utilized an instrumental multiple case study design. Case studies are good for describing and expanding the understanding of a phenomenon and are often used to study people and programs particularly in education (Stake, 1995). A case study can offer a refinement of understanding (Stake, 1995) of the context in which teachers care. "We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does" (Stakes, 1995, p. 8). This is done in part to be able to create thick description of a case in order to convey what the reader would have experienced if he or she had been present (Stake, 1995).

As opposed to other forms of research, case study places the researcher into the field in order to observe and record, "objectively what is happening but simultaneously examines its meaning and redirects observations to refine or substantiate those meanings" (Stake, 1995, p. 9). This focus on interpretation is fundamental and relies on data analysis as well as the researchers own understanding of his or her experience and the existing literature (Stake, 1995). The end result is a constructivist understanding of the cases. A multiple case study will be used in order to offer multiple perspectives on this topic.

Case Selection

In order to maximize learning and "preserve multiple realities" (Stake, 1995, p. 12), participants will be selected based on their unique perspective. Stake asks, "which cases are likely to lead us to understandings, to assertions, perhaps even to modifying of generalizations?" (1995, p. 4). In order to get a sampling of several caring teachers,

while allowing for an in-depth study of each one, four teachers were asked to participate. Teachers from both middle school and high school were selected to allow an analysis of the roles that development and school structures play for caring teachers. The teachers were selected based on several criteria. I identified middle schools and high schools that serve a large number of at-risk students. Based on the definitions used in other research (Henderson-Sparks, Paredes, & Gonzalez, 2002), at-risk students are those that are minorities, from low-income backgrounds, and who have had academic difficulties. Schools that serve at-risk students are defined here as those that serve a large percentage of minority students, low-income (identified as those students receiving free and reduced meals) students, and students who perform below the district average on standardized assessments. I then contacted several administrators at the district level to ask if they had ideas about awards given to teachers that care about students, or those who were thought of at the district level as being caring teachers who work well with at-risk students. At individual schools, I contacted counselors and asked them to also identify teachers they perceived as caring. I asked counselor several questions about the teachers they identified including what students say about the teachers, whether the teachers prioritize relationships with students, how the teacher works with at-risk students, and how important is it for the teacher to connect with students. These questions were asked in order to get a sense of whether the teacher they mentioned fit my criteria. I looked for teachers who see it as part of their identity that they are caring teachers.

I was also looking for teachers who would be open to being observed and interviewed and having someone else in their school interviewed about them. No distinctions were made in the gender or ethnicity of the participants. Based on the

information I solicited from counselors and district administrators and the willingness of teachers to participate, I chose four teachers that prioritized relationships in their work with students and had caring connections with at-risk students.

Data Collection

Data was collected through interviews and observations. Four teachers were identified and initial interviews were conducted with them. Multiple 2-hour observations were conducted with each teacher after the initial interview. Each participant teacher was asked to identify an adult in the school who could talk about the teacher-participant's work. This referred adult was then interviewed. The participant teacher was then interviewed a second time. Since I was conducting the interviews and doing the observations, and analyzing the data, my knowledge about the subject increased as I progressed through the study. This evolution due to new experiences ensures that the process develops along with the study, and is what Creswell refers to as an emergent design (2007).

Interviews

I interviewed the teachers in their classrooms. The first interview lasted from one to two hours. Before the interview I presented the interviewee with a list of questions that I would be asking. Notes were taken during the interviews and a transcript of the interview was produced. My reactions to the interviews were written immediately following the interview. Participants were informed about their rights as a participant in the research, including the opportunity to discontinue or take a break at any time. The participants and I discussed the limits of confidentiality and the use of a pseudonym.

Two interview protocols were initially developed for this study. The protocol that went with the first interview with teachers consisted of five questions asking the participant about their experience of caring for at-risk students. The questions asked about (1) the role of caring in the teacher's work with students, (2) the teacher's definition of caring, (3) how they developed this style of teaching, and (4) what encouraged them to provide support and assistance to students. The second protocol was created for the second interview with the teacher participants. This protocol was shorter and consisted of four questions and was based on the first interview and observations.

At least one other adult in the school, either an administrator or counselor was interviewed briefly because, "The qualitative case researcher tries to preserve the multiple realities, the different and even contradictory views of what is happening" (Stake, 1995, p. 12). This was done in order to get a sense of the variability among teachers, in order to add complexity and richness to what is known about teachers that are able to provide social capital for their students. These interviews were semi-structured and based on the information received from the first interview with the teacher from that same school. Questions were created that sought anther perspective of the teacher participant's work. Participants were informed about their rights as a participant in the research, including the opportunity to discontinue or take a break at any time. The participants and I discussed the limits of confidentiality and the use of a pseudonym again. I took notes during the interviews and a transcript of the interview was produced. My reaction to the interview was written immediately following the interview.

The second interviews with the teacher participants were conducted after the observations were complete. These interviews were shorter, lasting at most one hour.

Again, I presented the interviewee with a list of questions that I would be asking. Participants were informed about their rights as a participant in the research, including the opportunity to discontinue or take a break at any time. The participants and I discussed the limits of confidentiality and the use of a pseudonym again. Notes were taken during the interviews and a transcript of the interview was produced. My reaction to the interview was written immediately following the interview.

Observation

Observations were conducted in order to create a "relatively incontestable description" (Stake, 1995, p. 62) of the teachers' work. It also provided an opportunity to gather information to develop "vicarious experiences for the reader" (Stake, 1995, p. 63). These multiple sources of data add to the richness of the description of the context of the teachers as well as offer a means of triangulating the data gathered in the interviews. I did the observation in the participant's classrooms after the first interviews. The observations took place over several weeks in order to minimize the observer effect (Creswell, 2007). Each participant was observed on several occasions for several hours each. The participant's students were present for the observation. A checklist was created for the observation. This was used for the observation and notes were taken as well. Directly after the observation, a write-up of both descriptive and reflective notes was written (Creswell, 2007). This was later checked with the participant during the second interview for accuracy (Stake, 1995).

Data Analysis

I created documents from the notes from each interview, write-ups of my reactions to the interviews, transcripts from the interviews, notes from observations and

write-ups of observations. These were done as soon after the event as was possible. These were typed on my computer and a password set for each document. All files were saved on my portable computer.

The study followed Creswell and Stake and Yin's models of data analysis, by which the data is analyzed by both direct interpretation and aggregation of instances in the form of codes. As Stake says, "some issues call for categorical analysis, while others may only occur once and require direct interpretation" (1995, p. 74).

In order to best address the research questions, the analysis was conducted over all the cases. Individual cases were described, but not analyzed (Yin, 2003). I initially conducted a preliminary exploratory analysis (Creswell, 2005) with all the documents. During this stage in the analysis, the texts were read through and notes were made in the margin and initial codes were formed. The research questions during this phase of analysis were set aside so that the participants perspective could be attended to (Creswell, 2007).

After gaining familiarity with the documents and searching for general ideas, coding was done with an eye for both descriptive and thematic data (Creswell, 1995). The descriptive codes were used to create a vignette about each case that introduces the readers to the cases. Next, the in-vivo codes created directly from the language of the participants were aggregated to establish themes for each case. "For more important episodes or passages of text, we must take more time, looking at them over again and again, reflecting, triangulating, being skeptical about first impressions and simple meanings" (Stake, 1995, p. 78). This holistic analysis was conducted using the qualitative analysis software Atlas-TI. These themes were built around answers to the

research questions that arose from the thematic codes (Creswell). Themes were compared across cases for similarities and differences. Interpretations of these contrasts were then made. These interpretation took place using both direct interpretation or "drawing meaning from a single instance" (Creswell, 2007, p. 245) and the development of naturalistic generalizations or, "making the case understandable and its application to other cases" (Creswell, 2007, p. 246). After themes were developed, patterns were sought amongst the themes in order to establish a smaller number of categories (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995). The narrative structure used to convey the information gathered in the data analysis is based on the analytic strategy of developing a descriptive framework for the case (Yin, 2002). This included vignettes about each case, as well as a cross case analysis of the codes, themes and categories. After the narrative structure was established for each case, the four cases were coded for themes that existed across cases. This meant reading through each case and looking for ways in which the case was both unique and similar to the others. Triangulation was used at this juncture to ensure that there was validity in the themes that were arrived at across cases. Discrepancies were discussed and adjustments were made to the interpretations based on what myself and the other coder of the data mutually arrived at.

Validation Strategies

In order to insure that I did not acquire a skewed view of the situation and circumstances surrounding my case I engaged in several methods of validation. These include triangulation, in which both consistency as well as multiple perspectives are sought amongst the various forms of data. More specifically, data source triangulation (Stake, 1995) was be used. This involved looking at the data from a case and seeing if

there is some consistency across different data sources, time, and in different situations. Methodological triangulation (Stake, 1995) was also used, this meant asking another adult in the school about their interpretation of the participants work (Stake, 1995). Member checking, or sharing preliminary write-ups and soliciting feedback from participants after all the data was collected (Stake, 1995) was another source of validity in this study. Thick description (Stake, 1995) and reflexivity on the part of the author was also used (Creswell, 2007) to ensure validity. This meant that I located my own experiences and beliefs on this topic in relation to the information I gathered. For example, I was open about my own experiences and beliefs about caring teachers. This was done in order to provide an opportunity for the reader to come to their own conclusion about the information presented and construct their own perspective of how teachers care in schools (Creswell, 2007).

Chapter 4

Results of the Case by Case Analysis

Lisa

Classroom Setting

Lisa, a petite teacher of 37, met with me in her classroom. She came highly recommended by the counselor at her middle school who said she was, "adored by students and staff, runs a very organized classroom, has high expectations for students, and a great sense of humor." It is Lisa's first year at the school, where her husband also teaches, though she has taught for 12 years in other settings. She described the kids at the middle school where she works now as being, "at-risk."

On my first visit to Thatcher Middle School, I check in at the office and make my way to the classroom. It's at the far end of the hall so I pass many classrooms. Each one has a window to the hallway, and I glimpse many faces from a variety of cultures as I pass. When I get to Mrs. Adams's class though, it's empty. The overhead is on and the PowerPoint says: Ssshhh…Wisdom Wednesday!

1. You need your personal reading book.
2. Please be in your seat when the bell rings.
3. We're going to the library first and then we'll come back and read!

I go to the library to catch the class there. There are 14 students in the group.

Lisa's classroom is decorated with stars and plastic twists hang from the ceiling. Tinsel lines the unused chalkboard. For lessons, she often uses her computer and a projector. The desks are arranged in a circle, but Mrs. Adams doesn't require students to be in their seat. After returning from the library, the class gets settled in to read. Her

reading classes are a mix of special education students, English language learners, and students with low reading test scores. Some students choose to sit at their desks and others find seats around the room at Mrs. Adams desk, under a table, or on a ledge, and begin personal reading time. A latecomer, Tammy, opens the door and announces loudly to the class, "Oh my lord, I can't find my book." Tammy asks Mrs. Adams for some tape. Taking the tape, she runs it around her waist four or five times. When Mrs. Adams goes up to her and whispers, Tammy puts the tape away. Mrs. R whispers throughout the whole class period when anyone talks to her. Tammy asks to get a drink, gets permission, leaves and returns. Moments later she returns to the desk and is now reading. Most of the kids are reading. Tammy opens a file on the computer. Mrs. Adams notices something is different on the overhead and goes over to the computer. Tammy closes the file, the screen returns to normal and she returns to reading.

In 15 minutes Lisa has been in two seats around the circle of chairs in the room and walked around to talk to many students. About half the students are reading the newspaper and the other half are reading books. It seems just now that the first quiet, settled moment has come. Five bathroom passes mean a stream of students is passing in and out. Mrs Adams is now typing briskly on her laptop while the students read. She strolls around the classroom 15 minutes later and gives an encouraging pat on the shoulder to one student who has stopped reading. She catches the attention of a student who appears bored and has not been reading and has a whispered talk with him. When class is over she says to everyone, "Once you got calmed down and settled, you did a good joy. Tomorrow we'll finish up."

The bell rings and three new students immediately appear. "Hello Mrs. Adams"

"I won."

"What'd ya win?"

"Basketball"

"Cool."

"Hello Mrs. Adams."

"Hello _____"

"We're going to the library today for ten minutes. You can play on the computer if you already have a book." The students start heading to the library and the teacher next door comes out and says, "I have my door open and all I'm hearing is "shut up." That's not appropriate." Mrs. Adams tries to quiet the class, which energetically keeps heading down the hallway.

Once in the library Mrs. Adams checks in with each student and asks them if they have a book. Two students are playing a driving game where they move a triangle through some cubes with the arrow keys.

This was my first observation and my first time in a middle school in 15 years. I was unprepared in some ways for the flurry of activity and the amount of redirection that Mrs R had to do to get individuals on task. I saw her consistently respond patiently and quietly to behaviors such as the girl taping herself.

Emerged Themes

"Really Produce Really Good Work"

Lisa began college wanting to, "make the big bucks" as a CPA. Taking an English class she found that she challenged herself in new ways and produced "really good work." Because of this English class she changed her major and decided to teach.

Lisa brings this desire for creative good work to her classroom. One way Lisa does this is by finding ways to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of her students who are struggling in reading, "We have curriculum binders of worksheets and worksheets and worksheets and I just sometimes I use them and sometimes I just go my own way and find other ways of getting at the same thing and so…I just think sometimes if I can get to the same goal by just going out around a little bit and it gives them a variation."

Working with at-risk students Lisa is also able to tap into her desire to make progress and see large gains, "if you see a south side school like Fance, 98% at the end of the year. Well, at the start of the year they probably started off at 94% and so they gained 4%. Our scores started off at 70% and now we're at 90%. We have gained 20%. I think with at-risk kids, at times you make more gains on paper because they have built that relationship, and they trust you and are willing to learn from you and they just soar." Instead of making big bucks, Lisa is able to see big changes in the students she works with.

"I Pick My Battles"

Lisa describes one of her approaches to being a successful teacher as picking her battles. There are many situations in which this mantra is relevant in Lisa's classroom. Lisa gives students, "a little leeway." One example is her tolerance of students working out of their seats: "When we're [doing] personal reading I let them lay on the floor, I let them put their feet up, or lay under the table and be completely covered by my tablecloth. They think they're winning something (Guffaws). So be it if they think they're winning, then fine." Instead of approaching each student who is out of their seat as something she needs to reprimand them for, she removes the traditional rules that for her are

insignificant. Lisa sees this leeway as leading to a smaller number of difficulties for her, "I don't have a lot of referral problems, I don't have a lot of discipline problems. But you see that's a little bit relative. Because this same person coming into my classroom would see some discipline problems, but because of some of these things that I've told you because I wait, because I'm patient; I don't think they're problems."

In spite of all that is happening in her classroom, Lisa rarely appears frustrated, and doesn't scream or yell at the kids. Lisa reports that this has led some students and teachers to believe that she is being taken advantage of. "They'll be talking and I've had to ask them four or five times and finally I'll say you guys you need to stop, I've asked you. They can tell I've reached my limit and somebody will go, 'Ohhhh, Mrs. Adams's mad.'" The other teacher I spoke with about Lisa's work, who spends one period each day in Lisa's classroom, said, "Lisa is very respectful of students, even when they aren't always respectful of her." Lisa interprets these interactions differently though and says, "they think they're taking advantage of me, but I don't see it, I don't see it in that way. So if other people interpret it in that way, who cares? But I don't, I just pick my battles and that's not it."

In contrast with other teachers, Lisa sees how she has different priorities about what needs her attention in the classroom. "Whereas some teachers may see it as a battle that kids don't come to class with a piece of paper or a pencil, um, I just think sometimes that's not my issue, that's not the biggest issue I've got to deal with today. If some kid can't stop talking, it's not the end of the world. It's the age, it's just the setting and people sometimes blow it out of proportion I believe." Lisa said she believes she would have more difficult "hoops to jump through" if she confronted students about every

missing pencil. As a result of this approach, Lisa has more energy and time to devote to things that she does value in the classroom.

Consistency. One of the values Lisa holds for her classroom is being a consistent presence in her students' lives. One of the first things she thinks about in designing her students' experience in her classroom is the structures that she repeats each day and week. In working with at-risk students Lisa has seen how she is often one of the only sources of consistency in her student's lives. Many of her students rely on school as their only stable source of food. Speaking about the importance of this Lisa said, "You are their consistency and they know that. After you gain their trust and after you gain their respect, you're in. You can do very little to upset that apple cart. So, the relationships you build with them are sometimes much stronger because they don't have other things going on with them. So, you're the one."

This responsibility impacts how Lisa perceives her role as teacher, "Not changing things up, not being flakey when it comes to my expectations. But being very solid and knowing that even if they don't want to they can count on what I'm going be doing. Or count on what's going to happen when they get in here. Even if every day they come in here and go, 'oh this again.' They know that that's what we're doing. You know the one day you switch it up, you have some assembly or something, it goes haywire."

Patience. One of the most unique aspects of Lisa's classroom was that she acknowledges everything students say. Every question asked to her is answered. When observing I heard students ask repeatedly for permission to use the bathroom, the phone, ask if she had any food, ask her what they were doing today, tell her they were tired, etc. Lisa cites her parents as being a major influence in her style of communication with

students, "They always were very respectful and put me first and listened to what I was saying even if I didn't get the answer I wanted. They would stop and not try and argue, and they weren't up for a lot of conflict. They would stop and listen and then come back or they would say – 'go to your room and we will talk about this later.' They were very patient." With two small children of her own, Lisa recognizes how her expectations and her own behavior differs between her children and her students, "Here (at school), I think I am more patient because these aren't my kids. The expectations I can present to them are in class and some of their behaviors aren't a direct result of everything we are doing in class. It is things that are okay to do at home.…So, I kind of have to take a breath and slowly move them to what I want them to do in class."

Flexibility. Lisa's supervising teacher when she was student teaching was a role model as well. "To the untrained eye, you would think she was laid back – but she really wasn't. She was just very rigid internally and how it came out was just very calm." Lisa too has a strong internal sense of order and plans extensively for her classes, "When it comes to myself and anything that I can control I'm really not flexible. I plan and I organize and I'm ready and I'm ready. When it comes to the students and how I view them and how I interact with them, I'm totally flexible. I think if you're too inflexible you miss the boat, because you're not seeing what you need to see within the classroom." One aspect of this flexibility is that Lisa addresses issues that arise within her classroom related to their readings, or what is going on in the school or the classroom. "Lisa has adult conversations with the students" said the teacher I talked with about Lisa.

One day I observed, she spoke with the students about not shouting at each other after a conversation got heated. Instead of considering this a waste of class time, Lisa

considers these valuable teaching moments. "I think it's best in the moment. I can't just come in here and say OK, today randomly we're going talk about how to communicate. It works best if you have an example right there in front of you. You play upon that. You don't embarrass anybody, but you say, 'ok, let's think about how this could have been handled.' And the lesson could be one minute long: 'Ok, back up a second. How could you ask me in a better way?' The same lesson won't be in every period, I mean it will just happen when it happens and so you really have to take advantage of stopping what you're doing and saying hey, this is a good moment, let's use this."

Inequality

Lisa's school consists of 76% percent free and reduced meals, with a mobility rate of 24%; 23% of students are English language learners, and 50% are students of color. Compared with other schools in the district, this school has a disproportionate number of students that could be considered at-risk. Lisa sometimes feels though that sometimes students in more diverse, poorer schools like this one are not treated as well: "Some of the things that happen in classrooms – I would be angry if that happened to my kid – the way kids are treated. It makes me upset – almost so much I'm like rrrrrrrrrr right now. It is just – if that was my kid, I would be angry. And I think in a school like this, a lot of teachers get away with some of that treatment because parents aren't involved. So, their kids have no one to stand up for them. The kids don't even know it was the wrong thing for the teacher to do. That's just how teachers treat kids."

Lisa talks with her classes about fairly mature subject matters: "I think if you don't know about their household and their home life, you have to be very careful about the examples you give and what to say and what attitudes you give towards things at

home. Like we have a character who has a single parent. Well that better be a neutral topic or show the benefits of it. Because half of the kids in here have single parents." The person I spoke with about Lisa said that Lisa has, "adult conversations with students and doesn't baby them at all." Instead of not addressing controversial topics like gangs, or bullying, Lisa has conversations with students about these topics.

If They Have to Be Here

Lisa wants her students to have a positive experience in her classroom, and she describes herself as "positive at school" too. "First and foremost" Lisa says, she strives to "get along with the kids." She does this in order to create a place where students might think it's okay being there: "That if they have to be here for fifty minutes it wouldn't be all that bad." Lisa's rationale for why this is important relates to her understanding of the lives her students live. "I keep in mind, I always tell myself, you know what? Just being in this room might be the best thing that happened to them today, even if they don't say a word. So I always try to put myself in the worst possible case scenario. If I was coming from something that was not so pleasant, would I care about reading? No. So I also take myself down a notch in that regard and say reading is not the most important thing for about half these kids. They don't care if they read well, because nobody supports that at home, they have to help with their brothers and sisters, they're getting shoved into adult responsibilities when they should still be playing outside till the streetlights come on." Lisa realizes the importance of having pleasant experiences in school and the role that she can play in a student wanting to be there.

Lisa takes the same approach with parent-teacher conferences, "If they go from teacher to teacher to teacher and all they hear is 'wow your kid can't function in my

classroom, he's not sitting down, he can't stop talking, he can't do this,' why would they ever come to school again? So I focus on anything positive I can think about the kid or we talk in general about plans for high school or you know something that we can talk about and not feel like the parent shouldn't have come." When a kid isn't excelling in her class Lisa works to find something positive to say to parents, "even if it's as stupid as 'your kid comes prepared' – he always has a pencil. Which, as you have seen in class, is a miracle. It's a good thing. Even if it is something as silly as that, there is something good to be found in each of those kids." When I asked her more about this later Lisa says she believes that if she has this good interaction with the parent that then she can talk to them if there is a problem in the classroom and receive some home support, "So, you have that positive connection that then it has just not always been bad coming from you." Lisa has found that a positive approach to parent teacher conferences can also boost her interactions with students, "It's twofold. I think I get the parents' support but I also get the kids' support. Because when they are there with their parents and they know what they have been doing in class because they are not dumb, by any means, and they hear me saying the good things, there is a little bit of a bond built there and sometimes reminding them of that good times then buys you some leverage." Lisa's belief is that parents' experience in school influences their children's attitudes and behaviors towards education. "The parents have had terrible experiences at school – some of them. So, they send their child to school believing that teachers are out to get them and so for me to say to them – you have to respect me because I am the teacher – to see that kind of behavior, you can't expect that."

Golden Rule

One of the things Lisa thinks about when students make requests (to use the bathroom, or her telephone) is what she would want a teacher to do for her child. Thinking this way has led Lisa to, "treat students differently." "If I had a situation where my child was sitting in her classroom, (and my child) was saying I need to use the phone, I want the teacher to honor that request. So, I try to do the same thing – if this was my kid – what would I do?" This belief extends beyond requests and impacts all aspects of her teaching. "How would I want a teacher to act with my own kids. How would I want a teacher to teach my own kids. How would I want a teacher to act if my kid really thought they had something important to say? Would they just dismiss it and go on or would they stop? You know whatever I would want for my kids I would want for the kids I teach."

"Who is Responsible?" In Lisa's career she has worked on the side of town that has traditionally consisted of more working class and diverse families than the wealthier whiter south side of town. Her experience at these schools has led her to wonder "who is responsible" for student growth and learning. Lisa has decided that responsibility for students educational success is too often misplaced: "They need to have from somewhere the skills, and it seems to me that a lot of places even in our schools are not patient enough to take the time to teach those things. We just tend to expect that oh elementary taught that or if you're in high school: middle school should have taught that. Well, they didn't, so what are you going to do. You're gonna need to stop and somebody's gonna need to teach them that or they're gonna end up unsuccessful and so behind their peers that they're just gonna have this downward spiral." Lisa described an example of this type of teaching negligence. She was seeking math for a student in an after-school

program. Looking for additional resources for the student they went to see his math teacher who said, "Given _____'s attitude in class, I don't believe I can help him." Lisa was stunned, "Are you kidding me? She literally refused to help him." Lisa's determination to support this student led her to say, "Well, he is really trying to do it here after school so I am going to go find another teacher to help." Lisa and the student found another math teacher and got him hooked up. Lisa realized though the hurdles some student have to overcome to access the resources they need to be successful, "I was just like, wow – if I had not supported him right there, I think that would have been wrong. Why bother doing math?" Lisa said that later that teacher did come explain herself and said that the student had "lost more math books than any student and he is never prepared in class." Lisa continued, "I was thinking – why don't you do something to help him? Some teachers feel that it is the expectation that they are ready to learn at your request. They are not. Some kid might need help with organization before he can EVER think about learning." Lisa believes, "you've got to find some way to get this kid up to the point where he's ready to learn."

Think Time. The discipline program at Lisa's school involves using "think time." When a student is doing something inappropriate a teacher can send the student to another classroom. In the new classroom they fill out a sheet saying what they did, what they should have done instead, and whether they are willing to do the appropriate behavior. Lisa's experience with think times is this: "In theory it is a wonderful idea to send a kid out to think about what they have done. In practice, what it becomes is a teacher has reached their limit and doesn't want to deal with the student anymore and doesn't want to work on negotiating and figure out how they can function in the room."

Lisa tries to avoid resolving problems in her classroom in this way, because she sees think time as a time that students both miss out on teaching and aren't actually learning how to function more successfully. Lisa likes to address problems with students without them leaving the classroom even if it means taking class time to talk to them about how to do that, "because your ultimate goal is to keep that kid in the class room and figure out how they can function in the classroom, not be kicking them out every other day to go to a think time." The way Lisa resolves this tension of whether or not class time should be spent on teaching behavior is to ask: "Is my curriculum more important or is this important? Really, if you teach the skills and those moments and how to adapt and how to be flexible and the skills, then they can learn any curriculum they want to. You have to get that foundation in place before anything else is going to happen and some kids have it and some of them don't."

Students like me. Part of taking responsibility for Lisa has been about realizing that the students she works with are different than she was as a student. "Sometimes I think that other people um come into this thinking that a teacher deserves respect. I think it has to do with the fact that…when a lot of us went to school that was the case. I mean your teacher was your teacher and you listened to your teacher and you did what your teacher told. You just gave the respect to that teacher and you valued your education and what they had to offer. I think the difference is the kids don't have that in mind. They really believe you need to earn whatever they give to you. Especially the at-risk kids. Lisa thinks of needing to work for the relationships and she doesn't expect that they will just be there. "I think some teachers approach relationships in the manner that they

should be there. That they shouldn't be a lot of work, that they should just come easily. What really happens is that you have to work at it."

It's a Game

Lisa approaches teaching from the standpoint of wanting to make it fun if it can be. She has found she encounters less resistance to learning if she approaches the material this way. When considering lessons Lisa asks herself, "How can I get in the back door without them knowing that's where I want to be? It's kind of a game, I mean you know where you wanna go, you know the skill you want, you know what you want to happen for them, or the goal you want for them. You can't admit it or they'll fight you every step of the way. It's like you have to come up with something creative that grabs their attention that they get involved in without knowing, 'oh my gosh she's got me doing something that's gonna get me right there.'" Lisa tries to find ways to make some parts of reading connect with students' interests. She has experienced some resistance to this in education circles however. The perception she has encountered seems to be that school can either be educational or it can be enjoyable, but it cannot be both.

Lisa has heard other teachers' criticism of her for only doing entertaining things in the classroom: "I have had parents saying I cannot believe my kid is coming home and talking to me about English." The next year he's got a teacher he didn't like and the mom and the grandma met with the teacher and the administrator and to not use names but a very prominent person, a civil rights activist here in town, and she asked the lady 'why can't your classroom be more like Lisa's?' and the teacher replied, 'all Lisa does is fun. They don't do anything to make a person ready for college.' And the mom and the grandma stood up for me and said that based on what we saw him bring home, we think

you are wrong. It's like are you kidding me? I work my butt off during the day to do fun? Like engaged doesn't mean high expectations."

Ready to Read

Lisa thinks about teaching from the standpoint that not every student when they walk in the door is ready to learn and that sometimes having a relationship with that student will help them be more successful in the class. She says, "If I were an 8th grader and if I thought someone wasn't going to be picking me up today and if I needed to call, I wouldn't be able to think about anything but that. So, just realizing that – I don't know how to explain it – the battles are not what you think the battles are. If you show them that you are attuned to their individual problems, and they will build that respect because they know they can count on you when they think something huge needs to be solved. Then, get that stuff out of the way and then they can concentrate on the reading or the worksheet or whatever."

Sometimes, though, other students may ask why someone isn't doing what Lisa has asked of them. Lisa responds, "Other kids ask, 'that isn't fair, why does he get to do that?' I am very honest and with everybody in the room, I will say, 'Well, you are ready to move on with reading. He is not. There is something going on right now.' And I don't say it in a negative way and I say that there is something going on right now that is preventing him from getting to the reading and we have got to find that. Then, sometimes I will go talk to that kid who asked the question: 'Listen, you are ready to learn and you are doing everything you need to move on and you will move on. Right now he needs something else.' I said that I am not being unfair. Sometimes I say for

them to think about it in terms of, if I force him to do that, what is going to happen, and they'll know him [in] another class and say he's going to blow."

The Importance of Success

Although some of her students may be struggling with difficult things in their lives, ultimately Lisa's goal is for them to function in school in spite of those difficulties. She wants them to be successful and part of that means that she goes beyond the provided worksheets to get at curriculum goals in order to access some students other skills and abilities: "Especially if that's not their strength they may never feel successful in school if all they ever have is worksheet after worksheet after worksheet." Two activities I witnessed were "Thumpin Thursdays" where they read through the lyrics of a song of their choice, talk about its meaning and then watch the music video together, and "weird news" where they read strange news articles aloud to adults. "I think we're sometimes, teachers are set in our ways and you like to teach it this way and these kids you're just not reaching them and Ooooh! It's the kids! But it's not, it's just they need to learn it in a different way and you need to change what you're doing it. You can't control the kids, but you can control yourself and not everyone remembers that. That's a hard one."

Lisa tries to instill a motivation to learn in her students by providing them with opportunities to be successful, "If they see something they're successful at they're gonna get it in here (points to chest). Rather than have to be told that yes you did a good job and the kids who have it in here, are the ones who keep going. I mean they don't give up as easy, they have confidence in themselves, they know what they can do well, I mean just, you know, more of the success is going to inspire them onward." Observing Lisa's class you will see students at different levels of readiness to learn, "Everyone is succeeding,

but some are succeeding at reading, some are succeeding at remembering to bring their pencil from their locker, some are succeeding at remembering that they need to sit and start to read. So, I mean they're all succeeding, it's just at different levels. It's like you've got 18 different classes going on at once."

The Building Blocks of Learning

Lisa believes that she is responsible for helping the students in her classroom be successful students. Sometimes though it is not reading that is hampering their progress, but something else. "So I feel like teaching sometimes is just more about communication, learning how to communicate and learning how to have confidence in yourself, more than about the book we're reading. If our goal is really to get these kids out into society and help make them successful after they graduate, or if they choose not to graduate, they still need to be successful. They need to have from somewhere the skills, and it seems to me that a lot of places even in our schools are not patient enough to take the time to teach those things." Contrasting her first year teaching to how she approaches interacting with students now, Lisa says, "I was always like – yeah, just a minute, just a minute, let's keep going with this, in a minute – and now I will stop and take care of it. My first year was like – we have to get through this, we have to get through this…Now there are some days we get through nothing. Nothing in the curriculum. It drives me crazy but I know it's more important than trying to push through the curriculum. Nobody is listening if you push through it."

Lisa works to find a balance between attending to her students' stated needs and her desire to move forward with the lesson. She does this because she considers attending to these things an aspect of being supportive, "Allowing their problems to be

more important even though you know they are not. Oh, I got a paper cut, I just……. Okay, for that moment you are more important than what I am doing, even if I really don't think so. Just giving the perception that they are more important at that moment but, at the same time, not letting them get away with not doing stuff that is going to help their reading. On one hand, you want to be, you want to be helpful and understanding. But, on the other hand you want them to understand that they still need to be doing the work, that they can't get out of the work because I think if you are supportive, you are not letting them fall behind in academics even though you are attending to their social stuff."

While combining curriculum with classroom interactions has been challenging, Lisa says that the combination comes more easily to her now. At the beginning of her career it was difficult for her to make connections between what she was trying to teach and what was happening in the classroom, "I think it was two different things – I think I had my curriculum and my classroom management." However she is now familiar with the curriculum and says she is able to infuse it into other conversations that she is having with students; the combination is more natural than when she first started. Lisa believes that some teachers she interacts with think their curriculum is the most important thing, "They view my class as lacking routine, lacking of expectations, easy, I let the kids do anything."

In addition to attending to students' requests and questions, Lisa believes that one of her biggest functions beyond teaching the curriculum is to teach students how to communicate, because she notices that they lack the communication and advocacy skills they need to be successful: "Some of these kids don't have what society expects to be

your typical fit in behaviors. You know, the ability to apply for a job, the ability to conduct yourself well in an interview, the ability to voice your opinion in a non-violent way. You know you just, not non-violent, but um, offensive, non-offensive way. And I just don't think some of these kids are gonna get that unless they get it here." Having taught at both the middle school and high school level, Lisa is aware of how small differences in ability become larger ones over time and says, "What I see happening, especially when I was at high school is there's a gap and it begins to widen with each passing year about how people know, how people that don't know how to function in a normal day to day society and people who really know what it's all about. These people who really know what it's all about and can talk and can be rational and can be reasonable and can voice what they need to voice are miles ahead of these poor kids who have the best of intentions and don't know how to talk about anything.

Cup Half Full

Although she gets frustrated at times, Lisa has learned to work on how she presents herself to students. To do this she uses a lot of what she calls, "self talk." There are times when, "they are just driving me nuts but I just try and take a breath and inside, think 'okay, okay, don't make it sound mad.' With some of these kids especially… if you charge at them, they will charge right back. So, sometimes it looks like you're losing but if you are maintaining control of yourself, in effect that is a win." Even though she is not always feeling the same way she is expressing herself, she believes that the exposure to a person in control of themselves in an important and perhaps new experience for some of her students. As a result of this, Lisa has made the decision at times in her classroom to spend time on behavior: "Today we all needed to learn how to not yell at each other.

So, the fact that we're spending ¾ of the period on that particular issue on that day. Some teachers view it as oh my god I didn't get anything done." Lisa does not see it that way and intentionally keeps a positive attitude about all the work she does in her classroom, "It's kind of like the cup half empty or half full. Are you gonna go home and feel negative about it or are you gonna just say that's what we needed to do today and maybe one person got it and there you go."

"I'm Big on Relationships"

Lisa is in her words, "big on relationships." When she began her teaching she didn't realize the extent to which she needed relationships with students to be a successful teacher, "I remember in student teaching my supervising teacher said you know relationships are important um but again there I had kind of a semi-utopic student teaching experience too. I mean it was, I did it out in _____ (small predominantly white and middle class town) and it was out there I saw kids who were like me. I mean I saw less of the at-risk students." Many of the students Lisa works with are not, "teacher pleasers" like she was.

One of the reasons Lisa is so big on relationships is their impact on her and her perception of her work experience, "Some of the teachers who I think burn out really easy they're either going overboard and trying to do too much all at once or they don't have the relationships with the kids and then all day they feel like they're just nitpicking and yelling and growling and giving directions and re-directing and re-directing and sending them to think time. It's just one thing on top of another and then the days gone and you're just ggrrrrrrr. If they don't have the relationships it makes it a tough day." Lisa observes that having a relationship in place with each student can in fact enhance not

only her experience as a teacher, but also students' productivity, "The relationship that you build are beneficial in that when they are in place, you can ask them to do things that other teachers who don't have the relationship can ask and you won't get a fight. Like, you're going to have to get out that piece of paper. They will do it. They may not want to and their body language will totally suggest to you that the last thing they want on earth is get out that piece of paper. But, they will do it. Because you have asked them in a nice way because they know that in a different situation – if they needed the phone. It's a give and take."

However having relationships with students can make some things difficult too. In particular it can be hard when students react negatively, "I said something to _____ and I said it just the same as I normally do and he was mad at something else and he said, 'You are such a bitch' and left the room. For a moment I was just ready to – because you work so hard at being so kind and being so patient and you get that word for no reason – no personal reason." Like many of the other difficulties Lisa encounters, she has developed a way of empathizing with the student so she can deal with the behavior proactively, "You just have to say, "okay, wait a minute, this was not me." To distance yourself from the bad behaviors – that it's not you but they see it for some reason that you are going to be understanding so they are going to be able to take it out on you." She likens it to how she deals with situations and even sees this as a sign of the emotional connection between her and her students, "kind of like my marriage – I've had a bad day – do I take it out on the kids? No, I go home and I get all growlly to my husband. And so, you unload on the people you know will understand. Or adults purposely do that. I don't know if kids realize that is what they are doing."

There are several things that Lisa does to develop relationships with students. One of those things is following up with students on things that they express an interest in: "One who I can think of in particular recently, she comes from a really troubled home life. She has some behavior issues, just very um flies off the handle at any moment. I find myself really trying to key in on anything she's interested in. So that I can say, hey, what about this, hey what about this last night, or did you go to the Lighthouse. Did you see that person you like at the Lighthouse? There's an adult there that she feels very comfortable with. I guess even more so, I try to pick up on what all the kids like, even more so than the general population I really try and pay attention so I have some sort of connection to pull out of my back pocket in case I need it.

Chuck

Classroom Setting

I found Chuck in graphic arts room. I was running late and apologized, but Chuck said it had given him time he needed to finish up other things. He seemed a little harried, but we found a place to sit in his computer lab. Chuck was moving his office and the tools in the workshop in order to allow construction to begin that summer. The whir of the computer equipment and an air conditioning unit for the room made the space loud.

Arriving to observe his Machine arts class one day I arrive to a flurry of activity, with students trying to get his attention at every turn. The class is huge or seems huge in the sense that there is a lot going around. This is not a classroom with desks. The announcements are being read over the intercom, but I can't hear a word. Chuck is in his office and meeting with the students that corner him in there. Students are responsible for signing themselves in. Most of the students are male, but there are 2 girls in the

class. There is also a student teacher working in the classroom. Chuck says to the students, “Sign in!”

A student hands something to Chuck. “Way to go _____ , this rocks,” Chuck says.

Students are trying out the tops they made.

“We need 3 or 4 more people to make these so we can have top wars,” Chuck says. “Here I’ll show you a trick.”

“Hey Chuck, your phone’s ringing.” One of the students says that regularly, he also spends time in his classroom over lunch.

“Grab it will you? That’s a good top _____.”

Ten minutes after class has begun the majority of students have gone out to the machine room and have started working

“All right I want you to try it, see if you can make it work, can you handle that?” says Chuck to a student struggling with his design work on the computer.

“That’s what I’m trying.”

“I want to see if you can make it work, because if you can’t it’s probably too hard and I’ll just toss it.”

“Do you have any of that stuff for clean up?” the student asks.

“Acetone?” Chuck replies. “Remember that. It’s in that cupboard over there and you need your safety glasses.”

Two boys leave the class to move things to Chuck’s new classroom.

“Don’t get yourself in trouble. That’s bad,” Chuck says. “Get me in trouble that’s worse.”

Chuck has been teaching at the same high school for 15 years, with the first two years spent teaching English. A 55 year-old Caucasian, Chuck came from the same mid-western town that he now teaches in. All of his friends in the building have either retired or left teaching, and he mentioned that he felt fairly unknown and therefore surprised when he had been nominated as a caring teacher by the counselors he thought did not know him that well. "What I am good at," he said, "is working with all types of students." He expressed that his goal was to ensure that all students were successful in his classes and described his approach to teaching as having been influenced by his own school experience. Chuck said that his parents' divorce when he was 16 had left him as he said, "Depressed" and as a result he had left school and hitchhiked to California. After that experience he found it difficult to return to school and delayed getting his high school degree until age 19, through an adult education program in the community.

Chuck has many interests and now teaches a wide variety of subjects: machine arts, guitar, and graphic arts. In addition Chuck spoke about how much he enjoys being a parent to his young daughters. Although he works at an urban high school, Chuck resides on a farm in the country where he raises chickens, sheep, and horses In order to insure that a wide variety of students are successful in his courses, Chuck implements two practices in every course. He allows students to work at their own pace, and he conferences with each student every quarter. Conferencing allows him to talk with students individually about their progress and plan their next course of action in the classroom. Allowing students to work ahead means that students are spread throughout the classroom asking for assistance or instruction on a wide variety of projects. During the class periods there is never a dull moment for Chuck. Between attendance taking at

the beginning of each 50 minute class and reminders to clean up at the end, Chuck is obviously busy in the classroom. In graphic arts this means that some students are still designing the image they will use on the computer in the lab, while other students are printing their t-shirts, and two students have moved on to the next project and are learning to operate a printing press to create notepads that they designed.

The first class I observed consists both of students who participate in the school's international baccalareate program and also others who are less successful at school. I noticed several students, males in particular, showing up in Chuck's classroom several times a day, signed up for machine and graphic arts, or guitar, who even stopped into his computer lab to eat their lunch and work on a project or talk to Chuck.

Emerged Themes

Classroom Model

In teacher education for over 25 years ago, Chuck learned the adage that you shouldn't smile before Christmas. However Chuck quickly threw this motto out the window and now is aware that, "I got kids that are coming from poverty background, broken homes. They have different mind sets and if they don't see that you are on their side, they won't do anything." He says that with students in his classroom over time he has found a new model which involves balancing respect with communicating to students that he likes them. He stated, "After you have been in this job a long time and you can juggle that tricky, tricky 'I am not your friend but I like you and you like me' kind of thing and 'I will be your friend as much as a teacher can be your friend.'"

Chuck believes this is important because he has found that the relationship makes a difference: "I have got all these kids that have been through my classes that have been

really unsuccessful in a whole bunch of places but they are not in my classes. They are successful in my classes because they really like me. They don't want to let me down."

From the start of the semester Chuck looks to establish a classroom where respect is mutual between his students and him. In order to do this he tells them, "I want to treat you with respect. I expect you to treat me with respect. I will treat you the way that I would like to be treated and I expect a reciprocal arrangement." This has worked well for Chuck and he has found that he has, "gotten performance out of kids that I didn't think I was going to. I thought they were just unsuccessful kids in a lot of areas. But, when they come in here, and I get them to actually come up with some work and, in that process, learn. If that is what it takes, I'll do what it takes. I don't care. If it takes me kind of bending that original rule that most of us follow right at the beginning. Then, that is what I will do. My job is to get those kids to learn and to do their work and that is how I do it." As evidenced here, Chuck connects a lot of the success he has with students to the type of relationship he tries to develop with them.

The other thing Chuck does is establish from the outset of a class what is in it for the students, "1. Am I going to like this class. And 2. Am I going to like this teacher? I want to answer those questions and if students aren't happy with either of those things, find a different class or find a different teacher because that is my day one exercise. I want students to have the feeling that there is somebody there that is going to have something of value for them. The question kids are asking is "What is in this for me?" I think that is pretty much human nature. So, I want them to think there is something in it for them. There is some reason to be there – something good is going to happen out of this."

Chuck teaches classes with students who range in ability from special education to International baccalaureate students to English Language Learners. He finds though that he makes the most progress, is successful where others weren't, with kids with, "low motivation, low skills." He makes his classes challenging for everyone by allowing students to work at their own pace, meeting with students one on one each quarter and assessing what they can do better and what they have accomplished. He also uses this time to connect with each student. "I spent three days – three days – sitting there at the front of the classroom calling up student one by one ... we talk about how are things going – how did it work. And I don't think other teachers have that luxury. But, as long I've got it, I'm going to do it. I talk with the kids about what is going on – not just with the machine but what is going on and how is it going. They'll say, 'I'm really, really tired.' 'Yeah, how come you're so tired?' 'I had to work really late last night.' For a bunch of my students, that is the case."

Finding out about students' lives and getting to a feeling level is something that Chuck does intentionally, particularly if he notices that a student's work has changed or they act in an unexpected way: "You have to know that background as much as you can. Usually that's not very hard to do. You just ask people, talk about what's going on. 'You seem really tired—are you sick today? I noticed you were gone? Are you feeling better today?' Those mundane little conversation starters just open the floodgates. It's real easy in a lot of cases, in some cases, nooo, they're not going to tell you anything. But you do what you can do." Chuck says working at a "feeling level" did not come naturally to him, but that through trial and error he found that, "working on a feeling level at least as much as I can – it works with these students."

Because Chuck doesn't teach courses that have criterion referenced testing, he is able to tailor the material to the individual: "I've got all these different kids with all these different needs and I try to treat everyone of them differently. So, I don't have anything that I HAVE to do that makes it that I have to treat everybody the same. I grade them differently too." Chuck admits this approach to creating his classroom leads to a lot of flurried activity with students working on different projects, but it also means that he is able to ensure that each student is successful in his class. Celia Ortega, the other teacher I interviewed in the school about Chuck's work, said Chuck is able to uniquely help ELL students: "He asks questions, he has come to me and asked how can I help this student or that student. But over the years working with them, he has learned to use demonstrations and gestures and pictures and show rather than tell. Some teachers say 'read this, read the third paragraph and tell me what it says.' He reads with them, talks to them, shows them pictures. He wants them to learn, that's more important than anything, and he'll work to that end."

In his classroom Chuck equates success with fun both for himself and his students. Success for every student is one of Chuck's classroom goals: "If I can't make a kid successful, he is not going to have any fun. If they don't have fun, I don't have fun. I have fun teaching. I'm relatively animated." Chuck says he has had extraordinary success with many students and that he wants to impact students' lives in this way. Keeping in contact with some of these students is something that he does, and as a result he knows because they have later told him that he played a significant role in "a bunch" of students' lives. While exploring such a measure of success is beyond the confines of this study, Chuck has at least found validation for his approach in the feedback he

receives from students: " I don't say that in a bragging way, but geez, if I wasn't doing that I wouldn't be doing my job. I must be doing something right."

Chuck believes in his ability to find a way for students to succeed whether it is in his guitar, machine, or graphic arts class. "If I didn't have fun doing it, I would be doing something else. Teaching English wasn't fun. The first thing I have to do is make somebody successful. So, even if they are not successful, by God, they are GOING to be successful – because nobody continues to do anything that they are not good at." Yet, just as Chuck has found it important to provide challenges that are pertinent to a student's needs, Chuck also measures success with different students differently. For some students it's providing a good experience. The group of kids that comes at lunch time and after school is a testament to this. "I've got a kid right now. This guy's got the ankle bracelet – he's on house arrest, and he is a bad guy. He's a gang type kid, I think. He told me today that he wants to come back and be my student assistant next year. He started the class with a chip on his shoulder and now he wants to be my student assistant. He's going to pass but I am really successful with this guy because he had a really good experience. He wouldn't want to be my student assistant if he did not have that good experience and feel like he was successful."

Chuck relies on his wife for support rather than relying on other colleagues at school. Through her being outside of the teaching profession, he says, she is able to offer more, "subjective" advice. Even with the students he struggles with, his approach is to resolve problems in the classroom. I observed this in his graphic arts classroom where kids were getting rambunctious and he redirected them to getting back on task. Chuck said, "The working with kids that are at-risk, kids that are hard to work with, I take care

of those problems myself. In the classroom, with the student the vast majority of the time. If that doesn't work I try and enlist the help of some parents; if that doesn't work I may have to get the administration involved. But by and large I am not looking for help with students that are difficult to work with."

This independence of Chuck's translates into his teaching style as well. He is looking to offer students the same type of experience that he seeks. He wants to teach to the point that the students don't need him in order to work the machines, play guitar, or do graphic arts. As he said, "I want to be a guide to help them get more confidence and be able to do more on their own without me. I 'm always pushing them towards independence. You should see some of those kids at the end of the year. There's a big tall kid in the machine class, he's real quiet. He can do anything. He is going to be so valuable to somebody—he's valuable to me."

Conceptualizing Students

It is apparent in talking to Chuck that there are several aspects of conceptualizing students that allow him to understand and work with them from that "friendship, but not friendship" place. Chuck uses many strategies, from trying to understand students' lives and where they are at developmentally to the role of power in relationships and not taking a student's anger personally.

The students that Chuck works with are more diverse, with over 50% of the students are non-white, and have over 50 % of students receiving free and reduced meals. Chuck is aware of the characteristics of the population he works with and the large group that have encountered academic difficulties throughout their lives: "Those kids are coming with a mindset that is different than at an affluent school." Similarly, he has tried

many things over the years and discarded the approaches that haven't worked, but above all he has learned to prioritize fair treatment: "If you are going to be successful with those kids they've got to feel you're on their side." Chuck says these students are aware when they aren't being treated fairly and "they have no qualms telling the boss to shove it if they're not being treated fairly or whatever. That's a mindset and it's handed down from generation to generation." One way Chuck is able to communicate that he is on the student's side is by allowing them to "save face": "I try really, really hard to allow students to save face. Because I've got a lot to spare. So, I can let something go. It is not a big deal and it doesn't hurt me. If you let somebody save face, then you have got somebody on your side and you've got an ally. But, you make them lose face and they are not going to do anything for you. You can give them an assignment and they'll do it – maybe they won't." Chuck believes that communicating that one is on the side of the kids depends on the teacher: "To be successful with those kids it requires a little different mindset on the part of the teacher. I tell student teachers that."

Chuck describes being very influenced by the ideas of Dale Carnegie's book, How to Win Friends and Influence People. Chuck reports using the following idea: "[not wasting] your time arguing and trying to get through to somebody through an argument that you are right. You can box somebody into a corner to the point where they have to agree with you because they don't have any other choice." This awareness of the change process plays out in his teaching: "I don't make students or try to make students see my way of thinking by arguing with them or belittling them or boxing them into a corner where they don't have any recourse."

In addition to working with students from different ethnic and socioeconomic

backgrounds, Chuck also has an awareness of where his students are at developmentally; he says, "I know that I am competing with all these hormones." Another aspect of this age group is that often they appear to be reacting to the teacher or the class, but after talking with the student a little Chuck is able to find out that's not the case: "What was really going on was a girl who had a fight with her grandma and it wasn't me. But, I could have taken that personally. It wasn't me. So, what I try and do is look at it from the perspective that I had at that age and figure some of the stuff is personal and it's not me and if I can help, then I will try and help, and that is my role with at risk kids."

Chuck's classrooms are large work areas with a separate computer lab that he explains work effectively for him: "So, I can go around. I can go from machine to machine or guitar to guitar or computer to computer. I can talk with students and see how they are doing." An ELL teacher familiar with Chuck's work said, "He takes every thing that a kid throws at him and he looks at it at a different angle you know? This isn't just a kid that's mouthing off and cussing, this is a kid that might have a problem, let's find out what his real problem is. Let's see if we can work from there. He does do those things, I hadn't even thought about it as much."

Back Door to Teaching

Chuck entered teaching through the back door. Having dropped out of high school, he found success in an adult education high school that allowed him to go at his own rate, much the same way he allows students in his own class to work. Chuck recalls asking his grandmother if she was surprised he became a teacher and she said, "Not at all. When you were a little boy you said to me you wanted a job where you would help people." This apparently lifelong desire is still present for Chuck who says,

"I'm trying to be a caring person. I think I've always had that in one fashion or another. I'm glad I have an outlet for that." Chuck recognizes himself as different from other teachers, however, whom he describes as "cut from the cloth of convention."

Chuck identifies himself as once having been an at-risk student: "I was at risk. I was more at risk than almost anybody would realize. Here I am a teacher. I dropped out. Hitchhiked to California." Although he tries to remember those days and apply that information to his current experiences with at-risk students, he says, "It buys me absolutely no credibility with students – none." What it does appear to give him, however, is a perspective that few other teachers have: "I don't expect them to listen to me any more than they listen to anybody else. On the other hand, that gives me a very different perspective on what I expect from them as a student. I've got a sympathy for them that other teachers don't have." Chuck remembers, "I came out of it. I think a lot of kids do too. It's a tough time. It's a very, very hard time in your life."

In addition to providing him with empathy for at-risk students, Chuck's own experience also provides him with an awareness that their status can be temporary: "It is difficult for a lot of people that didn't have a checkered past to look at kids that are in some kind of trauma in school and say that this kid is going to come out of it." This awareness contributes to Chuck's perseverance with students who have been unsuccessful in other parts of school or their lives. He explains, "What I think that does for me is that it gives me this perspective that I can understand this and I am not going to give up here." Chuck reports that students have come back after 20 years and told him that the fact that they didn't give up on them had made a difference: "They say that they appreciate what I did for them and I didn't give up where other people did and then they

get in the military and they are very successful or successful in a career or something else and they are doing fine."

Besides Chuck's understanding and support for his students, he also has a passion for the subjects he teaches, particularly guitar, "You know I love teaching guitar. Guitar has been my savior." Chuck began his career teaching English, but quickly switched to industrial tech, adding guitar and graphic arts later. The subjects that he teaches now are much easier for him to teach than English where, he says, "I got to know the students but it wasn't necessarily a very pleasant way because they hated being in English and reading. They resented that tremendously and then I was the symbolic person that put them in there even though I didn't and I was there."

I've Got a Lot to Spare

In his work with adolescents Chuck believes he is privileged and has "a lot to spare." This comes across in the effort he gives to connecting with and understanding students, in his intent to avoid putting a student in a corner, and in his attempts to make every student successful. It is an awareness that even impacts his own family, noting, "I keep telling my own children how lucky they are. They aren't capable of understanding it. But they really are lucky. We aren't rich, but we are not trying to keep the wolf away from the door like so many of our parents are. These kids are highly mobile, they are moving around all the time. In some cases their lives are really painful and that's hard to deal with sometimes....every now and then it kind of gets to you." This sense of wanting to help students is evident in Chuck and over his time in the classroom he has found ways of being successful.

Pete

Classroom Setting

Pete is a middle school science teacher. When I went to his classroom there were two students from the University there consulting with him. Peter and Amanda were getting their master's degrees in science (biology and entomology) and were in Pete's classroom as part of a grant. They spent 15 hours a week in his classroom contributing to the students' discussions with information from their fields.

Pete's science classroom was large. In one corner of the room were 7 aquariums with snakes, turtles, and hissing cockroaches. The display case had pictures of Pete with the students in the Native American caucus creating a rain barrel together. A COEXIST bumper sticker, and a framed paper that says

Top 10 things I learned from Mr. Cavalas

10. Always have a reason for what you do

9. One, one thousand

8. ABSOLUTELY!

7. Throw your lunch in the right garbage

6. Culture, culture, culture

5. Always follow through

4. Good, now I need you to take that idea and flip it

3. Folks

2. Be there for the sub

1. Make it happen!

Sincerely, _____ 2007

The school Pete teaches at is less diverse than the school Amy works in. Located in a working class section of town, where 12% of the students are not white and 34% receive free and reduced meals. His classes consist of about 25 students each. He teaches seventh grade science for five periods.

Last week Pete introduced an activity called the memory circle to begin each class period. The students get in a circle and each share a science related memory that they have from the previous day. A drum is passed and the student speaking holds the drum. The drum was made by someone from the _____ tribe in _____.

The bell rings and Pete says, "Let's do our memory circle, Lets all get in a circle. What did we do yesterday? Remember the way to be respectful is to listen, not talking. We have to listen to what everybody is saying. You can have the same memory as somebody else, but you have to cite them and then add to that memory"

"We learned about mutualism and we, we did a memory circle" says one student

There is a pause as the next student tries to come up with a memory from the previous day. After a moment the student says, "We finished doing a worksheet" and passes the drum.

"We talked about parasitism and all the differences about them"

"Yesterday was the first day we did this and we had a milk for lunch"

"What about science? What was gross about yesterday?" Pete asks a student who has difficulty coming up with a memory.

"I wasn't here yesterday"

One student is sitting down and appears unwilling to participate. Pete says to him, "what did you like or not like about the movie, what was something you didn't know before watching it? How about this, did you like the movie or not?

"no"

"How about this, what movie would you rather see?"

"I don't know"

"Come on man" Pete says.

"I remember the hyenas had fleas so bad they had to move and create a different den"

"I like your memories. I hope you try to participate next time" Pete says to him.

Emerged Themes

Identity

Growing up, Pete felt isolated at school, "I really didn't feel like I fit in." This experience motivated Pete to want to provide a classroom environment in which every student has a place, "it gives me a desire to make all these kids feel like they fit in and they're part of the system and they're accepted and valued and honored."

Pete feels this desire stemmed from his experience as a student in public schools. The son of a mother of Irish descent and a Lakota and Cherokee father, Pete stated that his education never helped him understand himself, instead it focused on rote memorization, "With worksheets, a lot of memorization and regurgitation and not really a lot of freedom to explore who you are and any of those sorts of things. As an individual with a diverse background, I wish I would have had those opportunities to try and investigate and understand identity you know. What it was that, what it meant to be a Lakota, or a Cherokee."

Pete identifies a desire to work with all different students as helpful to him in his work with at-risk students. For Pete, this desire originates in his own experience in school.

Pete's experience in graduate school was transformative. He speaks openly about the impact that it had on his confidence and sense of self. Speaking about his work with his mentor in graduate school he stated that she, "gave me the confidence to keep doing things…I never thought I was smart until I came across her. It's weird. I never learned to write until I got into her class, either." In addition to his goals of ensuring that every student felt a sense of belonging in his classroom, he now realized he now aspired to, "do what she did for me for the students in this classroom."

Training

Having this desire led Pete to seek out training that would enable him to be able to carry it out, "gave me methods to carry out that desire to have these kids feel comfortable and part of what's going on in the classroom." Going to graduate school in diversity was a growthful experience for Pete, who learned about research that reinforced the beliefs he had arrived at through his own experience. Gaining this knowledge was empowering in that, "I have always felt this way but I have never had the language to express it, good reasons why to back it up until I got my Master's degree and then, boom."

In terms of content, Pete's Masters degree focused on developing conditions that facilitate learning, where, "teacher is not a teacher, but a facilitator. It's just through, it's the experience, participating in the experience that the learning comes from. The learners themselves kind of learn because they're interested in the experience, it makes sense to them, therefore they want to participate in it." Pete has noticed in his classroom how the

better the lesson plan is, the fewer behavior problems there are. To that end Pete describes trying to find the perfect lesson plan, coming up with that, "magic thing that is going to involve every single student in the classroom every day".

An example Pete gives of before and after this transformation is that in his first year of teaching, before he had gone to graduate school, he had met with his principal to talk about his goals for the year. Pete indicated to the principal that one of his goals was for students to think**,** " I can relax a little bit and be myself." Pete recalls that the principal's reaction was that Pete, "did not have high expectations for my students and it was mess around-play time." Since then, Pete feels conscious of walking that line between high expectations and students being themselves. Still though he says he continues to be conscious of the noise level in his classroom, "but then again now I've got the language to – if anyone questions me – to fire off all the [empirical support] for it."

"Some students wonder what culture is"

Pete finds it easy to incorporate culture into his teaching of science. Some students he says feel they do not have culture. Pete shares with his students his own cultural identity. This takes place in many ways, from pictures of Native American chiefs displayed around the room, to his use of the talking circle in which each student shares their memory of science the previous day. He also encourages the visitors to his classroom to share their identity with his students.

By starting dialogues with the students about culture, Pete is able to bring a critical consciousness to the conversations so that an exploration of the textbook is an opportunity to examine stereotypes and misinformation, "we talk about why there seem

to only be males highlighted in the textbooks and how everybody can do science." Even lessons can expand from the seventh grade science curriculum to an opportunity to increase students' awareness of culture. Pete gives an example, "the other day we had a conversation about immigration and emigration within populations because we're talking about ecology. Students brought up immigration as far as um they started talking about illegal aliens. I let the students know that I found that term to be offensive…humans aren't illegal. There might be some undocumented individuals in our country (phone rings) but maybe that's a more respectful term to use when speaking about those individuals."

Pete believes that having a greater sense of one's cultural identity will be beneficial to students. Specifically, Pete sees it as contributing to students' resilience. To this end, Pete is intentional about including this content in which his other material, "I feel that its equally as important to learn about who you are and your sense of self as it is to learn about the science facts that I'm having the students explore." While the dominant cultural perspective pervades, Pete tries to expand this and encourages students to notice the missing voices that even impact something as "objective" as science, "here is an example of the new textbook – that is what I teach out of. 'Imagine how the European explorers must have felt when they saw the continent of Australia for the first time?' "I find that this textbook is from a particular point of view. What about the individuals who had been there for as long as that continent has been there? I wonder how they felt when the Europeans first came over there. What is their particular understanding of this idea also? So, when we read this in class, we have a big conversation about it. This point of view is missing in life."

Part of this means that Pete sees it as important to not enforce his idea of who students should be onto them, "it's the students right to create their own identity and not have one imposed upon them." Instead of finding out about kids at the beginning of the year, Pete prefers to learn about the kids from interacting with them, "I think people may have a preconceived notion of what this student will be from now on and I don't want that. I want to go in with a student as a new experience, new school – this student will not be like that anymore and they were only like that because that is the identity they had at that school that they created for themselves and then they had to live up to their reputation. So, here they have a chance to create a whole new reputation." In addition to that, Pete does not ascribe a lot of meaning to the diagnosis and labels that are given to the children in his classroom, "I'm not one that understands that oh this kid has a label so I better keep my eye on them."

When working with students who are at-risk Pete's approach is to show them "acceptance." He reflects that this is consistent with his approach to working with all students, and states that he does all he can to keep all the kids in his class in his classroom. "When they're successful and or making positive behavior choices I try and reinforce those good decisions they make."

Talking with Pete, he brings a lot of energy to his thoughts about identity. It is clearly an area that is exciting to him. When I asked if he had wanted to work with at-risk students he stated that his first preference was to teach in the most diverse and poorest middle school in the city. He had done his student teaching there and found that he enjoyed the energy the students had. At his current school Pete runs the Native

American Student Caucus, but only a few students in the school identify as Native American.

Multiple Perspectives

Whether meeting with the other teachers that comprise his team, or talking with difficult students in his classroom, Pete is attentive to the collaborative nature of their interaction, "you take the best piece of each person's idea, throw it together and you got a much better solution than you could have come up with by yourself. It's just, you gotta be flexible, you know? They're kids. You got an idea, the kids got an idea of what they're gonna do. Somehow its in the middle somewhere."

This understanding of multiple perspectives translates to his experience being the team leader of his teaching team. The teachers he works with have been in the profession for decades and, "that is why I try to understand their thinking too." Pete notices that in comparison to them he is less punitive but, "When you come to a team meeting, it is take the best piece of what I think and take the best piece of what other people think and then put the best pieces together and come up with a decision. I can't ever and I won't ever force my team to do something because I think it is pretty good. If I really know that is the way to do it, I still in the long run have to work with these people so it is better to maintain a working relationship – positive relationship. If it gets sour, it's just not going to work. How does a person know when they are right? Maybe somebody else is correct." Pete indicates that his approach is to "stand back."

Working within his school, Pete has tried to introduce new ideas about discipline. "You've got other teachers with other philosophies and other styles of teaching and when you try and collaborate on like a big policy program with them, then that it becomes

difficult trying to negotiate." One of these difficult negotiations for Pete revolves around the school's discipline system called "think time." In his schools approach, the students who do not get a "think time," go to the gym and celebrate. The kids that received a think time during that week, they speak with a counselor and come up with a plan to not get a think time the following week." After trying that for a while Pete stated, "we're looking at the data and we had this policy in place, but then there was a rise in some of the think times from some of the individuals that are some of the teachers that are participating in this program. So, is you know, I don't know, what's that say? What message is that sending? I don't know, you know? Am I being biased by thinking maybe this teacher is kind of "hey-I got a way to get this kid. I'm going to show this kid that this behavior, I'm going to take this pop and cop, this celebration away from them." I don't know, how does one interpret that data?" Given his perspective on power, it is easy to see how he has this insight of which other teachers may not be as aware.

Attentive to the power differential that exists between himself and students, Pete tries to think about how his interactions are perceived by students and how to improve upon them, "if I start to feel bad about how I respond to a student. That makes me think, well wait a second, am I being fair? Or am I being a bully with that kid? It's a give and go and I learn from my mistakes and I try to do better the next time. You just try." In his work with peers, Pete is perhaps still building confidence in himself, "I'm kind of not like aggressive or whatever. Not ------ confrontational, you know. Let somebody say what they want to say. I'm not going to impose my perspective on that."

When struggling with the most difficult students, Pete focuses on persistence, "I don't know if I ever figure out a way, but the key is to keep trying new things over and

over and not quit. Maybe you're not successful but then again ten years, five years down the road maybe it will click with that student." This focus on the future means that Pete has a sense of the value of the work that he is doing in terms of its contribution to the future of society. When asked to describe why working with at-risk students is important Pete identifies the interconnection he sees between himself and his students, "Just a sense of community. You know, it's important to give time and attention to all these kids because they're going to be our age someday, running the show. We will be dependent on them when we're elders. It's just what you're supposed to do.

Pete says he appreciates the goals of No Child Left Behind in that teachers are responsible for ensuring that every student is engaged and learning, "the idea that you have to figure out if your kids are learning in the classroom. That is beautiful and I love it." However he bemoans the ways in which this is measured, because it means that there is a single perspective that is valued above others. This minimization of the validity of multiple perspectives puts Pete in opposition to standardized testing where, "there is only one correct answer to every one of those questions. You need to make sure that your students memorize those correct answers to all those questions.

In order to provide opportunities for students to puzzle about a science question, rather than try to recall a correct answer, Pete tries to provide opportunities for the students to work on assignments where he does not know what they will come up with. One example of this was the memory circle that he had instituted at the beginning of every class period, an activity he had found out about at the Indian Education Convention he had just attended. During this activity, "We all listen to what the students have to say. We're all on an equal playing field. We honor each others thinking. I'm not telling the

kids what to say, nor is anybody else. We all just share what we feel is important." Pete makes the point that the students need to experience some connection to the material and thinks that activities that do so are, "one way to empower the students." For Pete, "you don't sit there and um give them fill in the blank worksheets where you know exactly what the end results going to be. Cuz when you do that you keep all the power all the control and really I think you impose an identity upon them…if you are trying to craft them into what you think they should be. You come up with other ways. You try and find lessons where the students can negotiate meaning for themselves and create their own understanding and find out what's important for them."

Education's Fundamental Themes: Power, Control, and Identity

Pete can organize his ideas about education around an article he found in his graduate program. This article from the discipline of anthropology highlighted for Pete how education is about power, control, and identity. The way he describes his approach to teaching is, "Well, you've got its an equal partnership with the students. You know? You've got to give them power and control in the classroom. You can't just keep it all for yourself. Then you just come up with methods to turn that idea into reality.

Pete tries to conceptualize a student's behavior in terms of how they have been treated in their life. He believes that often the behavior at school is, "just a reflection of how they're, the respect they receive in the classroom." Putting it bluntly he says, "You gonna back a kid up into a corner, you're just asking for trouble. You know? Cuz you know what would you do if you got this adult bullying you and pushing you into a corner and trying to make you do all these things you don't want to do. I know how I'd react in that situation. So, I try to stay out of that with students."

Alice

Classroom Setting

For our first interview Alice invited me to her home, where we sat in huge armchairs in her living room, with a fountain in the corner, as she told me about her approach to teaching. The next week, at her school, I observed how she had turned a portable classroom into a space where students who had been unsuccessful at other high schools could find a way to persist in school. On a day I visited, one student stayed after school and told Alice about all the food he had been able to purchase now that he was receiving food stamps. Alice had helped him arrange for these, and their after-school conversation had started when she playfully told him that there were thousands of calories in the 2-liter bottle of soda that he carried with him from class to class. While she organized papers from the day he talked about having spoken to his father.

Alice works at an alternative high school that students attend because they have not been successful at the city's traditional high schools. Of Alice's students, at least eight are mothers, many work to support their families, and many have struggled academically their whole lives. Alice says, "We have kids in here that know they haven't done well in school, they want to be successful, they just don't know how. That's hard when a kid says to me, 'I'm dumb.' Some of them really do struggle." I spoke with Alice about which classes to visit over the next weeks. She was most excited about the Holocaust literature class that she teaches every year. A table in front of her desk in the portable holds boxes and boxes of chips and candy she sells to make money to contribute to the class's annual visit to the Holocaust museum in Washington D.C.

Classes at Alice's school are usually not larger than 12 students. Alice has to remind students to put away cell phones and not sleep during class, but she does so gently; besides these reminders there are few comments about other behaviors, such as wearing hats or eating. When I visited the Holocaust class they were discussing a recent article, Alice had brought in and read about a former SS guard who had been found in Iowa and brought to trial in spite of poor health. The class discussed their thoughts and reactions to this event.

In another visit, Alice's class was discussing hazing. They had recently read Lord of the Flies and were discussing a local incident of hazing in relation to what had occurred in the novel.

"Hello _____ I missed you yesterday, didn't have to wake you up 8 times," Alice said to a student.

"It was my birthday," he replied.

"That's right you did tell me that, how old are you 16?"

"18."

"18, wow. With that baby face?" Alice said.

"Before we get to our reading, I found a couple of things in the news I wanted to share with you related to what we are doing in here. But before we do that, oh I forgot to change the calendar, but it's May 1st and there are 4 weeks of school left. And if you aren't happy with school, it makes sense to get all your stuff in and be here everyday. I want to read you a story about the hazing at the fraternity here in _____. You know what fraternity's and sororities are right?"

"Yeah and hazing is making them do tasks" said one student.

"Right, my initiation wasn't bad. We had to tie dye granny panties with wine and tank tops blue and go into a store and buy one condom. This was 1974 and no one had sex back then. It was really embarrassing. In the long run it wasn't a big deal. Now the problem is I don't think the women's sororities are as bad as the fraternity. That's just my opinion. They may lose their charter," Alice said about her experience.

"I thought they wouldn't be the fraternity" said one student.

"Yeah that's what that [losing their charter] means. What the fraternity did here reflects on all _____ [of that fraternity] nationally," Alice said.

"Here the headline is "hazing has gone way past pranks." You know what pranks are? Remember when I brought in _____ , she came in here in February? This is her. She wrote this article. One student was allegedly sodomized. Do you know what that means?"

The class said no, and Alice defined it and then read the rest of the article.

"When you guys were on sports teams did you ever experience hazing?" Alice asked.

"No" the class replied.

"My son did," Alice shared with them.

"Taking this back to the book, was that a form of hazing that he had to do in room 19?" she asked the class.

Emerged Themes

"Community and Caring and Trust and Respect"

Alice describes her school as working from the principles of "love, giving, and respect." These guiding principles and the sense of support from her administration and fellow staff members make working at this alternative school a great job for Alice. The positive culture Alice experiences at work contributes to the energy she brings to teaching here: "The whole building is such a positive place to be that it makes you want to do better." In observing Alice's classroom I saw her bringing in articles, taking students to plays, inviting actors to do in-services with her students, and planning for her class trip to Washington D.C. Alice says, "When you are supported with what you want to do with the kids – like those kinds of things. No one has ever said to me even though they are a teacher, 'Oh, my God, you are trying to do what?' They just don't do that. So, it makes you more willing to say, what else can I do? What can I do to be a better teacher? What can I do to better reach these kids?" At Blake, teachers frequently email each other positive comments they hear students make about other classes: "Just little emails – we do that for each other. It makes you want to do better. You want to be more creative and to put more effort in. It is a place we are all proud of…. We want it to be the best place it can be. This is a great place."

The enthusiasm Alice feels for her school is something she believes students feel as well. As an alternative high school, all students originate from another school in the district and maintain some relationship to that school, but according to Alice students choose to graduate from Blake instead of their home school and to Alice that says, "They are Blake kids. That is what they are proud of. They don't want to be a Firethorn (a traditional public high school) kid. They want to be a Blake kid. That is amazing – when the kids want to be recognized as a kid from an alternative school. Not embarrassed or

afraid – they are proud of it. They are proud of being in that school and that is amazing. When you think of kids that are proud to be at the dummy school or the at-risk school or the alternative school – they are proud of that school." For Alice the physical environment of the school is another example of the pride everyone feels, "We have almost no graffiti ever. We have clean classrooms. I don't have kids writing on the desks. I just don't. Maybe the first week or two when they are new, and then pretty soon, that climate and culture takes over and they just don't want to do that."

The kids that Alice works with come from a variety of backgrounds. In any of Alice's classes there is usually a combination of students who qualify for special ed, students with children, students whose families live in poverty, students who struggled socially in high school, as well as gifted students. Alice is comfortable having visibly different expectations for each student, and after the first week the students also apparently have no qualms about that. Alice says, "Kids are smarter than we give them credit for sometimes as far as knowing other people's abilities and capabilities. . . I think sometimes adults forget that kids are smarter than we are with each other, and they know that he can't read as well as I can, and they don't really care. We think they care more than they sometimes do. I don't know if that's what it looks like. Because our classrooms are small, there's a lot more personal interaction than in a bigger high school. There is more individualization."

Alice frequently wanders around the classroom while students are doing individual work. She says, "Sometimes it's just an academic check. Like, does it make sense, do you know what you're doing, is it too difficult? Sometimes it's an emotional check. If a kid has their head down, I go over and talk to them and you don't hear

because I don't want the other kids to hear. Then it's usually me on my knees sort of leaning in saying, what can I do? What do you need? So it kind of depends. I mean . . . the class usually starts with a group thing. We do instruction that way. If I'm doing a one to one, like going to a kid, often it's to make sure things are okay, that they know where we are and what's going on. If they're working on something, you know I may go over and say to Allie who has a little girl. I may go over and say 'oh my gosh, Vanessa looked so cute this morning, I loved that little shirt.' So it just depends. Mainly if I'm going around . . . it's just a check up to see where they are and make sure that they know what we're doing. I'll just look over and sometimes it will be 'do you mind if I look at your answer' or 'hope things are going ok' or 'do you get that part, it was a little confusing, or 'are you ok with the concept of what they're talking about here with the sherpa, do you understand?' So it's just a lot more of feedback kinds of questions you know? Every kid's different."

"You Look Awesome Today"

When students reach Alice's classroom portable classroom Alice greets them by name. This isn't just Alice being friendly, she does it intentionally. "It's not a big deal. 'Hi Bob', or 'Sue that's a hot dress you got on,'" Says Alice. "I make sure I acknowledge every kid. I think that just makes a huge difference to them, they feel like they're welcome, they feel like they're part of the class. They feel like I really, I mean I do care about them, but it makes them feel special for that 10 seconds, and that's sometimes, that's a lot. For me that's just something that I've done, that I think is important."

Alice's focus on individualized attention goes beyond greeting students; she works hard to connect with each student around something that's important to them. For Alice teaching is a combination of teaching and relationships. Her reason for this: "It's like having a friend that doesn't care about you and you are spending time with that friend. It should be the same with a teacher. You want to be with people that value you and think you are important and that is my mandate." When describing her experience with at-risk students Alice says, "My kids especially come from some pretty tough situations where they haven't had a lot of respect, they haven't had anyone to say to them, 'you look awesome today' or 'god I love that pink eye-shadow."

Alice thinks it is important to find out what "makes each student tick." "For them to have someone that actually shows that kind of respect and caring I think is important in the relationship and sometimes it's a pain because you have to sound excited about motor cross or sound excited about big truck racing... Say, 'wow, where in the world did you get that t-shirt, if you're ever tired of it, I want to wear it.'" Knowing something about the difficulties in some of her students' lives makes her aware of her students need for caring relationships at the same time it cultivates a sense of her own privilege. She notes, "It's heartbreaking. It's heartbreaking to see. I think my life's terrible because I run out of Oreos. You talk to kids who really have a crappy life. You know, you realize what's really important. For them, having someone outside the family that's willing to say I care about you." Alice has noticed she has more success with students if she is able to communicate to them that her care for them does not come attached to the strings of their success in her class. She says to students, "Yeah, I want you to get through school, but I care about you. Not whether you know this line from Shakespeare, but I care about you."

A lot of the students Alice works with do not have access to, in her words, "adults in their lives that they feel comfortable with, that they feel have time for them, that care about them." So Alice works to be someone her students feel comfortable with: "It is important for me that they feel that some adult in the world cares for them." According to Alice, "a lot of people can stand up and deliver information at the front of the classroom," but she doesn't think that approach works.

In Alice's case caring for students does not mean that she always approves of what students do: "It doesn't mean that I like that they use drugs. They know that. It's not that in my caring it is – oh, go ahead and do whatever you do. They know that I get mad at them." Permissiveness is not what Alice is trying to convey, instead she often offers advice or her opinions about things: "There are girls that are dating boys in jail that I talk to every day to the point that it is now a joke. They walk by and are like, 'I will pick another boy' and I say, 'that's right. Pick a different boy.' But that is caring in a different way. Even when they joke with me about that, they know it is because I am not picking at them. They know it is because I know there is a better boy out there for them. I just think it is important. I just can't imagine being a good teacher without caring about your kids."

Because of the circumstances of many of her students and her own willingness to be involved in their lives, Alice sometimes plays significant roles in her current and former students' lives. For Alice this is one of the rewards of her work. She says, "So if I take 5 or 6 minutes out of a 45 minute class, so what? To me it's worth it. I think, I know, I see the payback all the time. We get named godparents, we get invited to weddings, we get those things. I've done eulogies at funerals, which is very hard to do."

In addition to her roles in students' lives outside of the classroom, Alice talks about filling many roles during the school day as well: "you have to be the instructor, I mean, they're there to get an education. That's a primary role…. We're also counselors, we're also advocates, very strong advocates for our kids. They don't have a lot of advocates in their lives. Even if it's a case of getting a FAFSA or enrolling at SCC. You know my kids bring home a note and we sit down I do it with them or for them half the time. These kids don't have an advocate. Friend, sometimes a trusted adult…. There are days I feel more like a counselor than a teacher, or more like a parent than a teacher. We wear 10 different hats with each kid. Every day, it's a different hat."

"Every Wolf is Important to the Pack"

Alice uses the metaphor of a wolf pack in describing the way power works in her classroom. Alice talks about being the pack leader and says, "It's not like the other wolves aren't as important. Every wolf is important to that pack, every wolf has a job." This purposeful sense of teamwork is what Alice believes keeps class moving forward. She describes herself: "Yeah I'm very type-A. I want to be in charge, it's my classroom. I think that the kids, I mean I joke about it at first, but I think they understand if you can build that respect, they appreciate why I want to be the alpha dog, and it's because there are things that have to be done, and it's not going to be where you come in here and watch movies everyday." Alice says of this works with students: "As soon as they understand that I'm not teaching because it…yeah it's rewarding to me, but it's rewarding to them that I have a job and I have a duty. My job and duty is to teach and their job and duty is to learn. I think once they understand that it's not me forcing it down their throats, but kind of a team thing…." Alice finds this power structure to be a

necessity because, as she says, "The classrooms I've seen that are the least successful are the ones where there's no one in charge or the kids are in charge."

Alice is careful to clarify that the power she has in her classroom is not created in a "menacing manner": "It's just a simple fact that it's my room and I make the rules. It's not done in a forceful manner." That type of threatening teaching authority Alice has seen and says, "There have been times where I think the mistake teachers make is that feeling of 'I have to be better than you – I am smarter and I have been to college and I am big and you are small and I'm smart and you're dumb and I'm the teacher and you are nothing.' I have seen that. Not those words but the same idea. I think you have to let them know that you are in charge but that doesn't mean that you are going to demean them. And you are not going to get in their face." This other model of classroom authority is one that Alice uses as a negative model to compare to her own style: "If a kid starts yelling at you, the worst you can do is escalate it. I have never yelled at a kid, maybe once in my life, and then realized that was a huge mistake. Most times when a kid reacts that way, especially in a really fierce way, there is something else going on. It is not because you asked them to read Chapter Two. Escalating it and getting in their face makes it worse. I just think it is one of those things that you kind of have to say 'okay, if I am in charge, how do I best deal with it?' There are times I have just walked away and just said 'I can't talk to you right now, I just can't. I will talk to you later,' and I walked away." While Alice does not consider those times ideal she says it is better than "getting into a verbal fight or getting into the 'I am big and you're small.'" Instead of getting angry Alice says she has found guilt to have more impact on behavior; "It is just like – do I get mad at kids? Yeah. But, I tend to use guilt more than anger. I do the 'I am

disappointed' rather than the 'I am angry at you – that is disappointing.' And that seems to affect my kids more than me being angry because they have heard anger all their lives."

Awareness of Power

For Alice being in a position of authority requires a sensitivity about how to use that power, particularly in situations where she feels angry at a student. She says, "There are times where I have been hurt. There is no question. But, I think, in the long run, what is important to me is – I don't know how to say it – but don't do something you are going to regret. It is almost that self-preservation too." Alice acknowledges that she does get angry, and says, "I know myself that if I do get angry, I am terrified that I am going to say something that is going to really hurt a kid – that is going to demean them and that is going to make a difference for the rest of their lives. I am terrified of saying something wrong – in anger. So, I don't say anything." For Alice she has a responsibility as their teacher and because she is in a position of power, "as a responsible adult – I mean, who is the adult in charge – it is one of those things where it always hurts me more when a scout leader or a coach abuses a child rather than a stranger. Because there is that feeling that we have a responsibility to that kid. And we are in a position of power. . . . That is just an abuse of power." Alice identifies behavior that she does not want to exhibit: "Screaming in their face and saying 'I'm right and you're wrong and I don't care what you have to say, I don't want to hear it' to me is just so demeaning. I just don't want to do that to a kid. Have I wanted to? Yeah."

The school Alice teaches at also ascribes to this same awareness of power between students and teachers. Describing her school she says, "We go by first names at

Blake and that was weird. I mean I taught 21 years before I taught here and that freaked me out. I was like, oh my gosh. It was really hard for me, I mean that was one of the big no no's. You never call a teacher by their first name. It took me some time to get used to it, and now I don't think about it. And when you talk to the kids, they will tell you that's one of the coolest things for them to feel like we're not just unreachable icons that we really are just people who happen to be teachers. . . . It brings us down a little, it doesn't affect the respect, I thought it might, it doesn't. But it just lets them see us as people not just, you know, these teachers."

Teacher training years earlier for Alice had imparted very different understandings about the classroom: "The myth of teacher training when I was a kid was "don't smile until Christmas." That was the myth. You have to be the alpha dog, but not in a good way. We were still – it's a mold – we were just past 'hit them over the knuckles with a ruler' stage, which is what I grew up with and the 'nose on the chalkboard' and 'in the corner' and 'the dunce cap.' That is what I grew up with and so we are not that far past that. This was 1974/1975. It was a long time ago." In her training she found there was little awareness of the role that relationships and caring might play in teaching: "There wasn't a lot of time spent on class rapport. A lot of organization stuff. But, not really class rapport. They expected you to be boss. That was all there was. Be in charge - just be in charge. Don't let those kids get away with anything. That was the attitude."

For Alice her big change moment came when she began teaching in a poorer school. She describes the transition: "My student teaching was in this perfect little, tiny little school and every kid was – it was a very rich part of town and it kind of fit with

everything that I had been taught. Then I got my job, and I got a job in the worst part of the city with probably the second or third poorest school. That was when the whole cookie cutter thing went out the window. That is when I realized that if a kid has no breakfast and they didn't have much for supper last night, they are not going to care about reading. There are basic needs that need to be met first. After a while the old model of just being in control just didn't feel right to me that. It just didn't feel good. I didn't feel like I was being the kind of person I should be with these children."

Alice describes her new model of classroom management: "There has to be order – there is no question about that and people will tell you that. But, there also has to be caring, and you have got to see them individually instead of just this group of numbers. . . It took me time to realize that that method of total authoritarian just doesn't work. I mean – am I still the boss? Yeah, but it is done in such a different way now." Alice has found her style evolving over the years, and she has benefited from watching other teachers, attending in-services, and reading. Now that she's been doing it for so long though, she finds it difficult to describe her management approach to others and says, "I have some dear friends at school that I think could be better at that but I don't know how to tell them how to do that. I think some of it is who you are and some of it is the kind of person you are – I don't know. I don't really know how to explain how to do that."

One thing Alice does is give her students choices or at least acknowledge the spirit of their request. "Would you rather your kid get a tattoo that is permanent for the rest of her life or . . . that she dye her hair green and it is going to grow out in four weeks? I mean it is almost that same thing. It is like – 'no, you can't get a tattoo but let's do your hair green.' Then, it is like 'Oh, okay.' It is one of those things that you kind of have to

work with kids. You know, 'I won't tolerate that but if you want to work on the puzzle for the first and last two minutes of class, go ahead.' There has to be some give and take. You have to be prepared to do that. Some teachers are not prepared to do that at all. 'It is my way or there is the door.' I just don't kick kids out very often. I just don't. I have, but I just think that there has to be a way, there just has to be, without letting them walk all over you. It is a fine line. I don't know how you teach that."

Teaching for Alice means authentically caring for students, even ones that she finds difficult. She has tried to explain to other teachers how she conceptualizes her work with students that are challenging: "But, I don't know how to explain to somebody – and I have tried – that this kid is a pain in the butt but there is more there. You have to give him credit. It's like if he sees you care and really believes – you can't fake it. But, if he really believes you care about him as a person and not just a student, he will help you out. He really will." In Alice's experience, however, some people are unable to express that kind of authentic caring because of their own discomfort: "They are uncomfortable with that. They are uncomfortable letting their guard down a little bit. Because you do have to - a little bit. You have to let them in a little bit. Some people don't want to do that. They still see themselves as being in charge. So, there is a point where nothing – they are not going to bend at all."

"I Kind of Like the Emotional Part…It's an Ego Thing"

While teaching is a large part of her job, Alice considers the emotional stuff another important part of her work. Alice says, "I like my kids needing me, but I kind of like needing my kids too. It's nice to have a kid come up and say things like no one's ever told me I'm smart before. When they're 19 years old. Yeah it's a little ego-

stroking, but it just is. You know with really smart kids it's very different. Your job is very different." Alice started her teaching career working with high achieving kids who had all of their basic needs taken care of by their parents, "I didn't like it as much to be honest."

Alice believes she has in part been successful as a teacher because she sees students as people first. She describes herself as, "a goody two shoes" who wants her students to be happy: "I want them to be successful. I want them all to leave with a smile on their face. I want them to have good lives. I want to do everything I can to make these kids remember high school and say that was a turning point. I did it!"

Alice says she likes being needed: "Very rarely does a day go by that I don't see something good. It's different kids and it's different songs. But, it is a nice feeling. I will admit it. I love being able to have a kid come back and say, 'I never would have graduated without you. I never would have done this.' And, it is not me – it's our school. It's not just me but . . . I guess I need that too. I tell my kids, 'I need your emotions just like you need mine. I need to know that when I am here, that you appreciate what I do.' And, they do. Some of the kids that can't stand me still appreciate what I do. I guess I am selfish in a way. I like that feeling. I like feeling like I have done something good today. I like leaving at the end of every day feeling like, 'Wow, that was cool, so and so smiled at me, or so and so didn't throw a pencil, or so and so finished a chapter and was excited, or so and so finally got the idea of altitude sickness.' It is just so cool to be able to – I mean I went into teaching because I want to touch kids' lives and there, I do. I feel like I do touch kids' lives. So, it is kind of this egocentric thing."

While Alice gets a lot out of the emotional aspect of her work, she acknowledges that the emotional demands of her job are quite taxing. Additionally, she is aware that she has more to contribute than the lesson: "You give much more of yourself. You have to give a little bit of your soul to every kid, because they really don't have that. They have a lot of holes and they're not just all academic holes. They have a lot of emotional holes. If a kid watched mom get beat by dad last night, how important is Pythagorean's theorem . . .hey need us emotionally, they just do. It isn't very different, it's a very different job." Alice believes that her students require a certain amount of consideration and flexibility: "I think you have to understand there are days where if a kid puts his head down on his desk, as long as I kind of have an idea why, I don't hassle. I may keep them after, I usually will. I will talk to them, or to the school's counselor. We have people that can deal with that. You have to be a little more flexible with kids. You have to be a lot more giving. You have to be able to have compassion for these kids. You can't just walk in and say, open your textbook and you know, let's get started and do page 5, 6, 7, and 8, and sit at your desk. It's just, I mean you can, but it's not successful. So yeah, it's very different. It's much more emotionally tiring than you know teaching the IB kids. That's probably more academically tiring. What we do is more emotionally tiring, but I love it.

Chapter 5

Results

Cross-Case Analysis

Multiple case studies provide an opportunity to examine the phenomenon of caring teachers and explore the differences and similarities that occur among individuals and various contexts. A multiple case study allows one to look beyond the individual case, to the phenomenon, in this case caring teachers. According to Stake, (2006) the cases provide an opportunity to examine this phenomenon by bringing the findings from the individual case experiences to the research questions. By attending to the activity and context of the case, one is able to make observations about correlations between events that are occurring together (Stake, 2006). While emphasizing the uniqueness of each case less, the cross-case analysis retains, "the most important experiential knowledge" (Stake, 2006, p. 44).

The cross-case analysis involved determining the presence of the themes from the research proposal in the cases, and moving from this data to assertions, with attention to the strength, usefulness and importance of these assertions. Instead of being about comparisons, this analysis relies on thick rich description (Stake, 2006) in order to get a better understanding across cases of what a caring teacher is and does. This varies from teacher to teacher, with each teacher's case contributing to the understanding of what the concept of a caring teacher means. By drawing on the important findings from each case report, assertions could be made about caring teachers.

The cross-case analysis suggested that six themes were consistent across the four teachers that participated in the study. These themes are *the role of relationships,*

perspective on at-risk students, providing opportunities for students to develop a positive sense of themselves, the value of a positive classroom experience for both students and teacher, negotiating power, and flexibility. For each theme, examples from each teacher are included to give a sense of how that teacher expressed that theme. This serves to highlight the ways in which each of these cases share commonalities.

Table 1. Themes Across Cases

Themes	Quotes
The role of relationships	"I have got all these kids that have been through my classes that have been really unsuccessful in a whole bunch of places but they are not in my classes. They are successful in my classes because they really like me. They don't want to let me down."-Chuck "This kid is a pain in the butt but there is more there. You have to give him credit. It's like if he sees you care and really believes – you can't fake it. But, if he really believes you care about him as a person and not just a student, he will help you out. He really will." -Alice "You know, it's important to give time and attention to all these kids because they're going to be our age someday, running the show. We will be dependent on them when we're elders. It's just what you're supposed to do." –Pete Some of the teachers who I think burn out...feel like they're just nitpicking and yelling and growling and giving directions and re-directing and re-directing and sending them to think time. It's just one thing on top of another and then the day's gone and you're just ggrrrrrrr. If they don't have the relationships it makes it a tough day." -Lisa
Perspective on at-risk students	"It's difficult for a lot of people that didn't have that checkered past to look at kids that are in some kind of trouble in school and say that this kid is going to come out of it."-Chuck

	"I think you have to understand there are days where if a kid puts his head down on his desk, as long as I kind of have an idea why, I don't hassle. I may keep them after, I usually will. I will talk to them, or to the school's counselor. We have people that can deal with that. You have to be a little more flexible with kids." -Alice "I don't know if I ever figure out a way, but the key is to keep trying new things over and over and not quit. Maybe you're not successful but then again ten years, five years down the road maybe it will click with that student." -Pete "I keep in mind, I always tell myself, you know what? Just being in this room might be the best thing that happened to them today, even if they don't say a word. So I always try to put myself in the worst possible case scenario. If I was coming from something that was not so pleasant, would I care about reading? No. So I also take myself down a notch in that regard and say reading is not the most important thing for about half these kids." -Lisa
Providing opportunities for students to develop a positive sense of themselves	"We all listen to what the students have to say. We're all on an equal playing field. We honor each other's thinking." –Pete "I was educated in a rote recall type of situation. With worksheets, a lot of memorization and regurgitation and not really a lot of freedom to explore who you are and any of those sorts of things. As an individual with a diverse background, I wish I would have had those opportunities to try and investigate

	and understand identity you know. What it was that, what it meant to be a Lakota, or a Cherokee or those things." -Pete "My kids especially come from some pretty tough situations where they haven't had a lot of respect, they haven't had anyone to say to them, 'You look awesome today' or 'God I love that pink eye-shadow.'" -Alice "I want students to have the feeling that there is somebody there that is going to have something of value for them. The question kids are asking is "What is in this for me?" I think that is pretty much human nature. So, I want them to think there is something in it for them. There is some reason to be there – something good is going to happen out of this." -Chuck "I think we're sometimes, teachers are set in our ways and you like to teach it this way and these kids you're just not reaching them and Ooooh! It's the kids! But it's not, it's just they need to learn it in a different way and you need to change what you're doing it. You can't control the kids, but you can control yourself and not everyone remembers that. That's a hard one."
The value of a positive classroom experience for both students and teacher	"You want to be with people that value you." -Alice "Very rarely does a day go by that I don't see something good. It's different kids and it's different songs. But, it is a nice feeling. I will admit it. I love being able to have a kid come back and say, 'I never would have graduated without you. I never would have done this.' And, it is not me – it's our school." -Alice

	"If I can't make a kid successful, he is not going to have any fun. If they don't have fun, I don't have fun. I have fun teaching." -Chuck "Everyone is succeeding, but some are succeeding at reading, some are succeeding at remembering to bring their pencil from their locker, some are succeeding at remembering that they need to sit and start to read. So, I mean they're all succeeding; it's just at different levels. It's like you've got 18 different classes going on at once." -Lisa "I feel that its equally as important to learn about who you are and your sense of self as it is to learn about the science facts that I'm having the students explore." -Pete
Negotiating power	"With some of these kids especially… if you charge at them, they will charge right back. So, sometimes it looks like you're losing but if you are maintaining control of yourself, in effect that is a win." –Lisa "When we're [doing] personal reading I let them lay on the floor, I let them put their feet up, or lay under the table and be completely covered by my tablecloth. They think they're winning something (Guffaws). So be it if they think they're winning, then fine." Lisa "There has to be order – there is no question about that and people will tell you that. But, there also has to be caring, and you have got to see them individually instead of just this group of numbers. . . It took me time to realize that that method of total authoritarian just doesn't work. I mean – am I still the

	boss? Yeah, but it is done in such a different way now." –Alice "There have been times where I think the mistake teachers make is that feeling of 'I have to be better than you – I am smarter and I have been to college and I am big and you are small and I'm smart and you're dumb and I'm the teacher and you are nothing.' I have seen that. Not those words but the same idea. I think you have to let them know that you are in charge but that doesn't mean that you are going to demean them. And you are not going to get in their face." -Alice "You gonna back a kid up into a corner, you're just asking for trouble. You know? 'Cause you know what would you do if you got this adult bullying you and pushing you into a corner and trying to make you do all these things you don't want to do. I know how I'd react in that situation. So, I try to stay out of that with students." -Pete "I try really, really hard to allow students to save face. Because I've got a lot to spare. So, I can let something go. It is not a big deal and it doesn't hurt me. If you let somebody save face, then you have got somebody on your side and you've got an ally. But, you make them lose face and they are not going to do anything for you. You can give them an assignment and they'll do it – maybe they won't" -Chuck
Flexibility	"You have to be a little more flexible with the kids. You have to be a lot more giving…You can't just walk in and say, "Open your textbook."" -Alice

	"When it comes to myself and anything that I can control I'm really not flexible. I plan and I organize and I'm ready and I'm ready. When it comes to the students and how I view them and how I interact with them, I'm totally flexible. I think if you're too inflexible you miss the boat, because you're not seeing what you need to see within the classroom." -Lisa "I think people may have a preconceived notion of what this student will be from now on and I don't want that. I want to go in with a student as a new experience, new school – this student will not be like that anymore and they were only like that because that is the identity they had at that school that they created for themselves and then they had to live up to their reputation. So, here they have a chance to create a whole new reputation." -Pete "I've got all these different kids with all these different needs and I try to treat every one of them differently. So, I don't have anything that I HAVE to do that makes it that I have to treat everybody the same. I grade them differently too." -Chuck

The Role of Relationships

Each of the teachers spoke of ways in which they integrated relationships into their management of the classroom. They spoke of how this helped them get academic goals accomplished. The teachers explained that if they went into the classrooms they work in and just said "Let's get started," then they would not be successful at their jobs. Though the teacher participants interviewed identified that building relationships with

their students took work, there was a consensus that this work paid off in terms of student progress. Chuck described students who are successful in his class because, "they really like me." For Alice, caring is not contingent on students' performance and she is no less friendly to students who struggle in her classroom academically.

The teacher participants identified ways in which they value the relationships they build with students. For these teachers, being in relationship means being honest and straightforward with students. It means wanting a good outcome for students, and not just in school. Valuing relationships with students means that teachers honor the students' contribution to the classroom. By employing empathy, teachers are able to suggest to students an understanding of their perspective.

Each teacher participant had a different way of explaining this process, but all identified that they do not make a distinction between the content and the process. Rather than only teaching the curriculum, these teachers also dealt with students on a personal level and valued that aspect of the work. The seamless connection between how they manage their classroom and the content is something that each teacher has developed over time. One teacher reported that she saw delivering the information as being only half of her job as a teacher, with relationships with students comprising the other half.

The results of the cross-case analysis indicate that most of the teachers participating in this research came to teaching with no idea of the role that relationships would play in their teaching or classroom structure. The two more experienced teachers both heard the motto, "Don't smile before Christmas" in their teacher training. For these teachers, there was a process of moving from this non-relational place, to believing that the teacher is responsible for communicating that they are on the side of the students.

Lisa describes some teachers as being where she used to be, "I think some teachers approach relationships in the manner that they should be there. That they shouldn't be a lot of work, that they should just come easily. What really happens is that you have to work at it."

Perspectives on At-risk Students That Increase Empathy

The participants in this study each discussed their perspectives on the at-risk students with whom they work. Each teacher identified ways in which his or her own academic experience was different or similar to the students with whom they work. Two of the teachers described themselves as being successful students who did as they were told. For these teachers, there was an awareness of the privilege they feel in contrast to their students. This sense impacts their perspective when working with at-risk students. Specifically, one teacher talked about how her idea of a bad day was running out of Oreo cookies, whereas some of her students do not have enough to eat. For her, the awareness of her own privilege helps her gain perspective on the students she works with. The other teacher who had grown up a successful student described thinking about her students and imagining how she would want a teacher to treat them if they were her children. Both of these teachers indicated that they feel many of the students they work with do not have adults in their lives that can advocate for them if they are treated unfairly. She said, "I think in a school like this, a lot of teachers get away with some of that treatment because parents aren't involved. So, their kids have no one to stand up for them. The kids don't even know it was the wrong thing for the teacher to do. That's just how teachers treat kids."

The other two teachers were not "cut from the cloth of convention" and had experienced some difficulties growing up and attending school. Based on his own experience of struggling in high school and then returning to high school and then becoming a teacher, Chuck has personally experienced the transition from struggling high school student to successful adult. Being in the position he is in now Chuck says, "I've got a lot to give." He notices though that some teachers that come from educationally conventional backgrounds struggle with being hopeful about at-risk students. "It's difficult for a lot of people that didn't have that checkered past to look at kids that are in some kind of trouble in school and say that this kid is going to come out of it." After not feeling like he was affirmed by his educational experience, Pete talked about wanting to create a classroom environment where learning was personally relevant and engaging. "As an individual with a diverse background, I wish I would have had those opportunities to try and investigate and understand uh identity you know…What it meant to be a Lakota, or a Cherokee or those things."

The participants in this study reported being hopeful about their students. Lisa indicated that she sees other teachers giving up on students, but sees that trend stopping with her. Alice's school is committed to helping students who have struggled elsewhere be successful. So while the students that she works with likely come to her with past failures and difficulty believing in themselves academically, Alice is hopeful that that will be different now that they are at her school and in her classroom.

Recognizing some of the inequalities and difficult situations their students come from was part of what three of the teacher's identify as assisting them in transitioning from the approach to teaching they learned, to the more relational approach they now use.

For some teachers this meant having an awareness that if students do not have basic needs met, that they would have less to give to their academics. Lisa talks about this in terms of evaluating a student's "readiness to read" and acknowledging what is currently going on for a student. Alice says about the kids that she works with that they have "a lot of holes, not just academic holes."

Opportunities for Students to Develop a Positive Sense of Self

While each teacher approached this differently, all four of the teachers in this study identified some way in which they create opportunities for students to develop a sense of themselves that would allow them to be successful academically. Each of the teachers spoke of a unique way that they create these experiences. Lisa is aware that some parents only hear negative things about their student and subsequently are less inclined to attend parent-teacher conferences. Because of this Lisa intentionally only shares positive feedback in this setting and relies on phone contact with parents if a problem arises that she needs their help with. Aware of the impact a parent's views of education can have on their children Lisa says, "If they go from teacher to teacher to teacher and all they hear is 'Wow your kid can't function in my classroom, he's not sitting down, he can't stop talking, he can't do this,' why would they ever come to school again?"

Pete talks at length about the importance for him of allowing students to develop a better sense of themselves as cultural people. He creates opportunities in his classroom that allow students to talk about their identity. Pete says he is intentional about not finding out about a students' reputation or expecting certain behavior from a student based on a diagnosis they have. Pete feels this is important because, "it's the students

right to create their own identity and not have one imposed upon them… So, here they have a chance to create a whole new reputation."

Chuck and Alice talk about how they orient their classroom so that each student can be successful. Chuck described how many of those students have never been successful in other classes. Both he and Alice have classrooms with different expectations for each student and they grade on an individual basis as well. This personalization allows every student the opportunity to be successful. This means that Chuck and Alice have a sense of where a student is at academically and help them from there to the next phase in their learning. However, Alice identified how it has been important in her work to find ways to communicate to each student that her care for them is not contingent on their performance in her class.

For each teacher, they have created some format for the students to interact with them and have a voice in the classroom. Pete created the learning circle in which, "We all listen to what the students have to say. We're all on an equal playing field. We honor each others thinking." Alice greets every student and checks in with them during independent work time, Lisa responds to every comment, request, and question, and Chuck has conferences with his students every quarter. Each of these activities provides an opportunity for the students and teachers to connect. It also creates a forum for the teacher to listen to the student. Being heard by teachers provides students with an opportunity to experience their perspective and self being valued in the school.

Flexibility

Whether through their flexibility in their interactions with students or in their approach to the curriculum, each teacher expressed flexibility. By addressing basic

communication skills or the lesson of the day or allowing each student to work at their own pace, each teacher in this study demonstrated flexibility in their approach to teaching. By being flexible, these teachers are able to be responsive to the needs of students. In observing Chuck as he raced around his classroom attending to the different projects students were working on, it was clear that students were also able to pursue the projects that interested them. He conferences with every student once per quarter in order to develop a plan with them for the next 9 weeks. He determines with the student what he or she can do based on what they have done. In this way his classes, which contain people with varying degrees of aptitudes for the given subject, can all be challenged. The other teacher in the school spoke with me about how Chuck utilizes whatever techniques he can (gesturing, demonstrations, etc) in order to communicate with the students in his classes who are learning to speak English. In this way, students who struggle to read directions or listen to him explain something are able to be more engaged with the subject matter.

For Pete, his flexibility comes up in terms of how he presents material as well. Whether he is bringing in researchers to share their experience of doing field research in Africa, or having the students describe what they remembered from science the previous day, Pete is looking for ways that the students in his class can participate and interact with the curriculum. When bringing in researchers, Pete is flexible in terms of expanding and deepening the material students are learning about such that it is richer. Whether interacting with students or forming a team plan with other teachers, Pete is looking for ways to collaborate. This collaboration requires flexibility, "You got an idea, the kid's got an idea of what they're gonna do. Somehow it's in the middle somewhere." With

this in mind, it seems that Pete is also indicating to students that he values their perspective as well as modeling flexibility as a possible reaction to conflict.

Like Chuck, Alice also has different expectations for students based on their ability and previous learning. She assesses periodically, both formally and informally how her students are doing with the expectations she has set for them. According to Alice, having these different expectations is not uncomfortable for students and perhaps is even appreciated in the sense that it is different from their experience in their prior high school, which may have suggested that they could not handle such distinctions between fstudents. According to Alice, this means that she is flexible if she understands they are having a bad day and put their head on their desk. She talks with them and finds out what's going on, but she says that showing this flexibility means that on most days, they will be responsive to her requests to engage with the material because she has shown them compassion. This individualization that Alice employs in her classroom is also a way that Alice reflects to students an appreciation of her idea that "Every kid is different." Because of the difficult situations many of her students come from, Alice also describes the experience of being flexible and serving her students in many capacities in her job as teacher. Sometimes, she says, "I feel more like a counselor than a teacher, or more like a parent than a teacher."

For Lisa, a middle school teacher, she takes advantage of opportunities that arise in her classroom to talk to students about good communication. Without embarrassing students who enter school with lower literacy scores, she nevertheless takes opportunities to address whatever issues arise. Lisa is flexible in terms of coming up with a lesson plan that engages students, and she thinks about what she can do to incorporate student's

interests. She varies the activities in her classroom because, "If (worksheets) are not their strength they may never feel successful in school if all they ever have is worksheet after worksheet." Her desire to have every student be successful in her classroom means that instead of eliminating her assistance if a student is not doing what is expected of them she looks for ways she can help that student so that they are better prepared to learn. As a result, students in her classroom are succeeding at different things and, "It's like you've got 18 different classes going on at once."

A Positive Experience for Both Students and Teachers

Each of the participants identified ways in which their own enjoyment of the teaching experience was connected to the students' enjoyment. Three of the participants spoke of wanting the students to be happy. Pete did not use the word happy, but described his initial desire in his first year of teaching was to have students feel they could relax and be themselves. This has evolved over the years and getting more training has allowed him to add complexity to his sense of what he wants to accomplish in his classroom. Now he describes his goal as wanting students to feel they can be themselves and be valued members of the classroom community.

For Alice, mutuality is important, "you want to be with people that value you." Alice wants her students to be valued and to feel her students value her. Chuck describes this mutuality when speaking about students wanting to know that there is somebody that is going to provide something of value for them. Lisa talked about how the relationships she has with students make her days easier. "Some of the teachers who I think burn out really easy they're either going overboard and trying to do too much all at once or they don't have the relationships with the kids and then all day they feel like they're just

nitpicking and yelling and growling and giving directions and re-directing and re-directing and sending them to think time. It's just one thing on top of another and then the days gone and you're just ggrrrrrrr. If they don't have the relationships it makes it a tough day."

Each of the teachers talked about ways in which they reinforce themselves in their work. This means that instead of focusing on what they did not accomplish, they look for ways in which they did succeed during their day. Chuck stated that he gets to see students succeed who fail in a lot of other places. Lisa indicated that one of the ways she derives a positive sense of her work is from seeing the large gains that at-risk students make in her classroom. Lisa described positively reinforcing herself, "It's kind of like the cup half empty or half full. Are you gonna go home and feel negative about it or are you gonna just say that's what we needed to do today and maybe one person got it and there you go."

Alice describes how part of her motivation for creating relationships with students is that it is rewarding for her to have those connections and to feel needed. Each of the teachers identified the significance for them of students staying in touch with them after graduation or opting to be their student assistant, asking them to participate in various functions (weddings, funerals, godparent, etc.).

Teachers can develop a number of explanations for students not engaging in their classroom. For the teachers identified in this study, there was an element of reflexivity in their approach to creating lessons and examining if what they had done had engaged students. The teachers discussed different ways in which they each reflect on how they can create a lesson that engages their students.

Negotiating Power

Each of the teacher's participating in this study identified how not all negative student behavior is in response to the teachers. Each teacher developed meanings around student misbehavior that did not identify it as a challenge to their authority. All of the participants identified strategies they use to recognize this. One teacher stated he tries to look at it, "from the perspective I had at that age and figure some of the stuff is personal and it's not me."

One of the other ways teachers in this study negotiate power is in the resolution of conflicts with students. All of the participants indicated that they prefer to resolve conflicts in their classroom, as opposed to using the "think time" strategy employed at the middle school level, or sending a student to the office in high school. This is a strategy that relies on the relationship between the student and the teacher.

In three of the classes I observed, the teachers were having or reported having what may be considered more "adult conversations" with their students. This is another way in which the teacher was sharing power with the students and demonstrating respect for the student as a person. Having adult conversations is building on students' strengths and what they bring to the classroom as well as engaging with students about real life. It suggests a level of trust and respect of students' ability to handle difficult or challenging material. In Alice's classroom this meant that she brought in local news stories about hazing at fraternities that corresponded to the classroom's reading of Lord of the Flies. By discussing hazing in the conversations on the literature, rather than lecturing the students, Alice appeared to be implying that she believed the students were mature and competent.

For Lisa, connecting classroom conflicts to the curriculum is related to a desire to ensure that the kids she teaches learn important skills about communication that they may not have gotten before. "And the lesson could be one minute long: 'Ok, back up a second. How could you ask me in a better way?' The same lesson won't be in every period, I mean it will just happen when it happens and so you really have to take advantage of stopping what you're doing and saying 'Hey, this is a good moment, let's use this.'"

Three of the teachers identified ways in which they observe other teachers struggling with power in their classrooms. Specifically, Alice said she notices some teachers who have the approach of, "I have to be better than you—I am smarter, I am big you are small." Pete stated that he has seen in his experience some teachers who, "look for ways to punish kids." And therefore make school less positive and welcoming. Lisa stated that she feels in particular that at-risk students in poorer schools are not treated well by all teachers. These same students also do not have access to as many adult advocates she noted.

The recognition of the need to collaborate to find a solution to problems was consistent throughout the respondents. Lisa stated that it, "looks like giving in, but it's about controlling yourself and not the student." She stated that even other teachers perceive her as losing battles with students, but she does not see it that way. Pete is explicit about his desire to share power with his students, and states that conflict resolution is about collaborating and finding that middle ground. Chuck stated that for him it's important to try, "really hard to allow students to save face."

Some teachers though are not comfortable sharing power says Alice, because they don't want to "let their guard down." Chuck describes his approach to sharing power as

wanting to ensure that students feel they have choices, "I don't make students see my way of thinking by arguing with them or belittling them or boxing them into a corner where they don't have any recourse." Pete describe a similar situation, asking rhetorically, "You gonna back a kid up into a corner, you're just asking for trouble. You know? 'Cause you know what would you do if you got this adult bullying you and pushing you into a corner and trying to make you do all these things you don't want to do. I know how I'd react in that situation. So, I try to stay out of that with students."

Unique themes

While many themes were salient across cases, there were several themes that were unique. An additional purpose of cross case analysis is to attend to these differences between cases. The three themes distinct to some cases included:

a) Alice described her school as supporting her mission of being successful with at-risk students. Her context in the school for at-risk students meant that there were structural supports in place to support her work with the students. While other teachers in this study indicated they felt support from their school, they did not describe their school as being focused on achieving success with at-risk students. To this end, Alice reported experiencing systemic support in the form of more awareness of how these students might struggle, a determination to address power differentials between students and teachers at a school level, and a desire to create a positive environment even for students that struggle. Ultimately in working with her students she received more support than what other teachers got in this study.

b) Pete was the only teacher to explicitly mention cultural identity as being relevant for students.

c) I observed two middle schools and two high schools in this study. The students at each age grouping were in developmentally different places and subsequently the teachers' and schools' expectations and rules were different.

Chapter 6

Discussion

How to positively impact the outcomes of students at-risk continues to be a legitimate concern. Previous research has called for additional exploration of the conditions which contribute to successful learning in order to improve the educational process. The context in which education occurs has significant impact on both academic and socio-emotional outcomes (Elmore & Huebner, 2010). The social, psychological, and economic implications of a student not completing high school are huge in terms of increases in incarcaration, poverty, and alcohol and drug abuse as well as decreases in tax revenue (American Youth Policy Forum, 2006; Dynarski & Gleason, 2002; Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay, 1997).

While it is known that a relationship with a caring adult in the school can be a useful component of an intervention intended to increase academic completion, less is known about the beliefs, attitudes, practices and contexts of the teachers that are perceived as caring. These were the areas that the research questions of this study sought to address. The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to increase the understanding of what is known about the contexts, beliefs, and actions of caring teachers. In order to accomplish this, four teachers were identified by their school counselors as "caring teachers that work well with at-risk students." These teachers were recruited to participate in the study, which consisted of multiple interviews and observations, providing writing they had done about their teaching if available, and interviewing the participant's peers or observing the teacher with their peers. The subsequent data was then analyzed case-by-case and then a cross-case analysis was done.

As a result of the cross-case analysis six themes emerged. These themes address the research questions that guided the study. These research questions are as follows:

1. What contextual factors support caring teachers?
2. What are the qualities or characteristics of caring teachers?
3. How do teachers view the role of caring in the work that they do?
4. What do teachers do to show they care?
5. How do teachers care?
6. Why do caring teachers care? What fundamental beliefs and values underlie their caring attitudes?

This study contributes to the understanding of how relationships with caring teachers are taking place beyond elementary school, with older students in middle and high school. The teachers that participated in this study spoke about many aspects of their work. This chapter will address the six themes that arose from the cross-case analysis and the relevant literature. Following that will be a discussion of the implications of this research. The chapter will conclude with an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the study and final conclusions.

Theme One: The Role of the Relationship

The teachers in this study discussed the beliefs they hold about the role that relationships with students play in their teaching. These participants describe those relationships as playing a critical role in the success they accomplish with at-risk students. They discussed feeling like this success benefits both students and teachers, as well as ultimately contributing to societal goals such as high school completion.

Consistent with other research on relationships in schools (Rogers, 1966; Ryan & Deci, 2000), an important characteristics of these relationships involved developing and communicating authentic care for students not contingent upon classroom performance.

Numerous studies suggest that students are able to ascertain whether a teacher cares about them through non-verbal behaviors (see review in Babad, 1993). This sense that students have about their teachers' negative feelings about them has also been shown to predict increased levels of peer rejection, loneliness, and lower grades in elementary school (Mercer & DeRosier, 2008; Taylor, 1989). Research has highlighted the impact of students' perceptions of their relationships with teachers and the academic impact of relationships. However, this research has primarily focused on how that plays out in elementary school (Davis, 2001). As students get older and need these connections even more (Eccles & Midgley, 1989) there is little known about *how* students are impacted by the absence or presence of these relationships in middle and high school.

Theme Two: Perspective on At-Risk Students

The teachers described many strategies they employed both broadly and specifically in helping them cultivate empathy within themselves for at-risk students. These strategies included hopefulness about students' futures, comparing their experience with that of their students, and reflecting on and reframing the meaning of difficult student behavior. Some of these strategies have been evaluated in terms of their usefulness to teachers. Previous research has looked at the explanations teachers have had regarding student misbehavior and how that can impact teacher's retention and job satisfaction (Hastings & Bham, 2003). Consistent with previous research that has found teachers attributing student misbehavior to home and student characteristics rather than

teacher or school attributions (Kulinna, 2008), the teachers in this study described reminding themselves that it was not always the teacher students were reacting to when confronted with student misbehavior. However, the teachers in this study demonstrated awareness that teachers and the school settings can impact students. The teacher participants in their own classrooms expressed a sense of competence they have about managing difficult interactions with students and wanting to ensure that the issue is resolved between them and the student, so they can move forward in a positive way.

Theme Three: Creating Opportunities for Students to Develop a Positive Sense of Themselves

These teachers talked about creating processes that honored students' thinking and identity. This was one of the ways that they demonstrated caring to their students. The teachers discussed their sense that all people want to be respected and valued and at-risk kids may not experience this in other aspects of their lives. The teachers also discussed communicating to students the idea that they deserve to find something of value in the classroom. The recent contributions of positive psychology have led to a shift towards creating optimal environments for learners rather than diagnosing and treating individual problems (Huebner & Gilman, 2003). This research, which explores the environment in which caring teachers participate, arrives at specific suggestions that address the question of what that optimal school environment might look like. Specifically, this research contributes to the idea of honoring students.

Another way that teachers spoke of honoring and valuing students was in terms of students' cultural and ethnic identity. The teachers spoke of being interested in how students were cultivating this for themselves and wanting to create opportunities for

students to share with the class or learn more about their own heritage. Research done with Mexican-American students demonstrated that these students' perceptions that teachers are ethnically biased contributes to students feeling alienated and uncomfortable in their school, factors which may increase student rates of leaving school (Tidwell, 1988). This research supports previous studies, in highlighting the importance of teachers offering support to the cultural identity of students and providing a richer description of how teachers help students develop a positive sense of themselves, both in terms of having appropriate and attainable academic goals as well as cultivating a sense of positive ethnic and cultural identity.

The fourth theme is: Creating a Positive Classroom Experience for Both Students and Teachers

The participants spoke of the notion that everyone wants to be with people who value them, with this extending to both students and teachers. Each teacher described and exhibited a unique way that this concept took shape in their classroom. The school context was also a factor that impacted the teachers. One of the teachers described the school environment in which she worked as being an important part of supporting at-risk students and the teachers who work with them. Some of the characteristics the teachers demonstrated and spoke about were consistent with aspects of attachment theory (Wallin, 2007) such as attentiveness and responsiveness to students' needs and feelings, and creating a classroom where students feel safe. Attachment theory provides an explanation of how important it is for schools to meet students' emotional needs. The notion of school satisfaction has served as a way to understand the role that attachment plays specifically in the educational context and has been explored by researchers such as

Elmore & Huebner (2010). Their research demonstrated that parental and peer attachments were independent of students' school satisfaction. This strengthens Noddings' proposition (2003) that the educational environment itself must also work towards creating a positive climate of attachment. This research contributes to that underpinning of relational work in schools and raises new questions about the role that teachers play in students' process of attachment, particularly in terms of its impact on school behavior.

Each of the teachers also described a desire to individualize expectations so that each student had the opportunity to be successful. The reasons for organizing their classrooms this way were varied ranging from practical (with classrooms containing students that ranged in ability) to keeping school engaging. Having a classroom that had students working at different paces was also done in order to ensure that each learner was able to build from his or her current level of knowledge and be successful—a process the teachers described as enjoyable for both students and teachers. They also spoke of incorporating approaches to their subject matter that could be personally meaningful and individually relevant. This approach to creating a classroom that is engaging and appropriately challenging to all members may be accessing teachers' own self-determination in terms of their engagement with their work. While self-determination has been employed to understand students' engagement with school, less is known about the impact that autonomy, competence, and relatedness–the requirements for self determination according to Ryan and Deci (2000) also impact teachers.

Birch & Ladd (1998) along with others (Babad, 1993; Wentzel & Asher, 1995) found that teachers preferred students who are high-achieving, hard-working, and display

pro-social behaviors to students who are disruptive and aggressive. The teachers in this study may be unique in the sense that they all expressed a desire to see success with students who had struggled elsewhere either academically or behaviorally. The teachers in this study described getting personal satisfaction from seeing low-achieving students achieve large academic gains, be successful members of society, or succeed at their self-determined goals. This desire to work with students who struggle may be particularly meaningful given the awareness that students have of teachers' feelings towards them (Mercer & DeRosier, 2008; Taylor, 1989). Perhaps this research highlights how teachers who are able to work with at-risk students in a caring way are oriented towards their jobs in a slightly unique way. Specifically, these teachers may be more invigorated by challenges, easily able to not take difficult behavior personally, and have strong skills of empathy.

Each of the teachers discussed some ways in which they felt that relationships between students and teachers should be mutually beneficial. They described in different ways how students should be told that teachers will respect them and desire respect from students. Pianta as a result of his research on teacher-student relationships describes in his dyadic systems theory (1999) a bidirectional process that depicts the relationship between students and teachers and is influenced both by teachers' perceptions and expectations of students as well as students' perceptions and expectations of teachers. The participants indicated that they valued a positive experience for themselves as well as with students and sought to create ways in which their work would be personally enjoyable. This was done with the awareness that it impacts student enjoyment and subsequently may increase performance. Frederickson's theoretical model of positive

emotions (2001) describes how this emphasis on cultivating positive experiences in the classroom could be useful for students and increase academic and interpersonal resources as well as promote increasing levels of success in school. Because of the impact that students and teachers have on each other in creating a positive experience in the classroom, there is much to be gained from increasing the positive experiences of both students and teachers.

Theme Five: Negotiating Power

The teachers described prioritizing their own reactions and ability to remain calm over the student behaviors that they could not control. They both demonstrated in their classroom as well as talked about how they allow students to move around their classrooms. They indicated ways in which they let small behavior pass without comment in order to address "bigger" behaviors they perceived to be more impactful on learning.

The teachers also discussed an awareness of how to deal with conflict when it did arise. Specifically, that they would treat students in accordance with the golden rule, the idea of treating others how you yourself would want to be treated. Many also spoke of wanting to treat their students as honorably as they would want their own children treated. They also highlighted the importance of creating trust with students so that the students know the teacher will not misuse power in order to marginalize students. In order to do this, the teachers described avoiding conflicts with students in which they were "backed into a corner" and focus instead on how a situation can be resolved in an appropriate way that allows the student to "save face." These descriptions are in sync with Burnett's findings (2002), which suggested that students' sense of the strength of relationships with teachers was more impacted by negative teacher interactions than

positive ones such as teacher praise. By emphasizing prevention rather than conflict, these teachers may utilize an important approach to strengthening relationships with students. These results speak to ways in which teachers can facilitate autonomy support in their classroom. This idea of allowing students to have some sort of power and make some decisions in their classroom has been shown to have a positive impact on students' ability to be self-determined learners and has been shown to contribute to improved socio-emotional and educational outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Theme Six: Flexibility

This theme arose from teachers' descriptions of feeling like they wanted to accommodate students' learning styles and be responsive to students needs. The teachers also discussed wanting to create opportunities for learners at different ability levels within their classroom. This means accommodating students working at different speeds and even on different material. In an attempt to increase student interest and engagement, the teachers created different opportunities to connect to the material. These teachers described and I observed additions they made to existing curriculum in a way that often made the lesson more personable and current. For example, I observed the teachers bringing in experts and speakers, heard them describing taking classes of students on trips across the country, sharing news articles and music, and having classroom animals in the science room.

Though still a controversial area, studies have shown that when schools terminate their programs of creating different tracks for students, achievement for all students increases, including achievement for students receiving free and reduced meals, minority students, and those in special education (Burris & Welner, 2005). In each of these

classrooms, students were given some leeway in terms of the speed or level they were working at. This provided the teachers with some additional information about their ability level and how to both evaluate and challenge those students. However, standardized tests remained in place and the teachers chose to include additional curriculum rather than just sticking to the material that it was required they cover.

By showing some flexibility to students it seemed that the teachers were able to garner capital that they could spend another time. For example—by showing a student some acknowledgement about a bad day—they perhaps could listen to the student's concerns as well as ask more of the student on another occasion. By not "nitpicking" and perhaps having more flexibility about what was tolerated in the classroom in the first place, the teachers were perhaps also able to impact their own engagement with their job. Research has shown that the more bothered teachers are by students' behavior, the more burnout they will experience (Hastings & Bham, 2003). This experience likely is bidirectional in that characteristics of burnout include student depersonalization, a diminished sense of personal accomplishment, and emotional exhaustion. These are factors which likely impact students' sense of being in a "caring classroom" and may decrease student accomplishments and increase misbehavior.

The teachers described having some flexibility in the roles they play as teachers. For instance, being an advocate, counselor etc. By harnessing students' energy around a subject that arises in class or an interaction that takes place in the class, the teachers were able to use the students' momentum to improve their educational outcomes. They described connecting the topic of interest to a broad learning goal such as increased vocabulary and word recognition. While this was perhaps not the teachers' goals for what

would be taught that day, it did address deficits that the children had in terms of fundamental expectations for their grade level. Research done on children's early school careers have identified two competencies (1) literacy and language and (2) relationship competency and self-regulation (Entwisle & Alexander, 1999; Ladd, Birch & Buhs, 1999; Ladd & Burgess, 1999) as being important aspects of school functioning. One of the things mentioned by the teachers was an awareness that some of these skill sets are lacking in the at-risk students they see. By middle school or high school, the curriculum has broadly and generally moved past these concepts, but when indications of these challenges or opportunities to address them arise, the teachers in this study choose to work with students on these areas and try to harness students' energy towards addressing these issues.

Implications

Implications for Theory Development

Theories of care exist even within an educational setting. Noddings' (1992) work in particular addresses the importance of care within the classroom and points to distinctions between types of care such as aesthetic versus authentic care. Her work focuses on understanding the role of caring in students' moral development. The present study provides additional information about the experience of the care-giver. While highlighting the mutually beneficial aspects of the relationships (i.e. everyone wants to be around people that care about them, without relationships you get worn out, feelings of success, etc). This study adds to information about some characteristics of teachers in a Midwestern city who are perceived as caring. In addition, it adds to the literature on how

caring teachers integrate relationships into their classroom and approach instruction. For these teachers in the study, relationships with students contribute to their sense of being able to connect with students in a way that positively impacts their academic performance and creates a positive classroom setting where each student feels able to succeed at learning. The teachers described satisfaction at being able to achieve results with students who had been unsuccessful elsewhere.

In terms of motivational theory, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation plays a role in student's engagement in school (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students who struggle in school may have previously experienced rejection or disinterest from teachers in response to poor academic performance. External motivators such as grades are not powerful enough to facilitate changes in performance over the long haul. For a teacher to provide a relationship, listen to students, tailor curriculum to their interests and abilities, share power with students, experience and express hopefulness about students lives, and provide support that is not contingent on performance, they may be increasing student's intrinsic motivation to engage in school. Though external motivators, these in conjunction with the supportive relationship of the teacher, students may eventually develop a sense of self that includes more intrinsic, autonomous, self-regulated motivation. "According to Ryan and Deci, intrinsic motivation is facilitated by providing, "optimal challenges, effectance-promoting feedback, and freedom from demeaning evaluation" (Ryan & Deci, p. 70, 2000). With a classroom more oriented towards intrinsic motivation, students may be able to develop more self-determination in their educational pursuits (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001). The idea that an aspect of caring could be facilitating intrinsic motivation is one contribution that this study can

make to the literature. When teachers take a strength-oriented approach in which students are genuinely valued, they are approaching their work with students using aspects of positive psychology's theory as well as that of positive emotion theory (Fredrickson, 2001).

Implications for Practice

Every year, more students leave school (American Youth Policy Forum, 2006). As high-stakes testing has been implemented as a way to ensure that even despite high poverty, diverse schools have been accountable for student performance and the emphasis in education has shifted from retention to achievement. While achievement is an important area of education, it has little impact if a student does not also persist in school. Psychologists may have less awareness about the characteristics of caring teachers. The question remains whether this shift in attention has compromised relationships for content. Perhaps for teachers who are less intentional, their classroom process are less aware of the impact these processes have on students. They may miss opportunities to integrate content with processes that simultaneously help students feel connected, and caring may be compromised as part of the push for achievement in high stakes testing. Ultimately both content and caring are important and classroom processes that are able to integrate both seem to offer teachers opportunities to meet both relational and academic goals.

Counseling psychologists, while declaring a commitment to prevention have done little to follow through on that interest (Romano & Hage, 2000). Because of psychologists' literacy in various aspects of relationships such as empathy, validation, and unconditional positive regard, they could play a significant role in research and

practice. Discussing the importance of relationships with leadership in schools could impact the hiring practices of these schools. By acting in a consulting role psychologists can help teachers develop and facilitate caring relationships with students.

Trainings could be another opportunity to introduce teachers to the importance of relationships in successful work with at-risk students as well as specific strategies for integrating classroom management with content. Given the time it took the participants in this study to develop their approach as caring teachers, assisting teachers that are just beginning their careers would likely be useful. For teachers that are working to integrate curriculum with classroom management, some kind of mentoring or supervisory structure could be useful. Psychologists and teachers identified as caring could both provide leadership and support in coaching teachers to develop the skills, beliefs, and practices of caring teachers. Current supervisory practices in schools have tended towards those in which problems are addressed rather than on the development of good practices (Axup & Gersch, 2008). The teachers in this study appeared to have attended to creating and implementing these good practices rather than dealing with difficult or problematic behaviors. This preventative approach to behavior management appears to be an important substitute for behavior management in the classroom. More causal research could be done in order to make the assertion that the most effective means of dealing with difficult behavior is through relationships.

When psychologists are conducting research in schools, the addition of a measure of school satisfaction would deepen researchers' understanding of students' behavior (Brantley, Huebner, & Nagle, 2002). Understanding how teachers' attachment to students impacts students' experience and subsequent success in school, research that

does not address the relational aspect of any academic environment may fail to grasp powerful factors at play in the classroom.

This study has highlighted the importance that humanistic and positive concepts such as empathy, positive relationships, emphasizing student strengths, and valuing at-risk students for who they are plays in education. Psychologists are both educated and supervised in order to develop their skills in empathy, and these same skills may be just as important for teachers, particularly those that work with at-risk students. However, there appears to be less of an emphasis on this in teacher training. Three of the teachers in this study came to their approach about the importance that relationships play outside of their teacher training programs. However, much could be done to help teachers develop this understanding about the role of relationships through training. These teachers describe realizing that being in classrooms with at-risk students meant trying new approaches to teaching. Specifically, they identified that a functional classroom requires developing more connections with students. One of the teachers, Pete, described having this awareness of the need for relationships with students through his own experience, and later through his master's degree program found the support to back up his belief. These teachers all described this process of discerning how to teach at-risk students required reflection and fine-tuning that took time to develop. Finally, they were able to get to a point where they felt they were able to integrate curriculum with classroom management. Given the work that it took these teachers to reach this place, it makes sense that it would be a worthwhile area of development in training.

Mental health practitioners may want to explore how they can facilitate teachers' development in the areas of creating caring relationships particularly with at-risk

students. In addition, strengthening the connection between school and home could be another way to improve teacher-student relationships (Pianta et al., 2003). It appears likely that these interactions between school and home can be strengthened as well with teachers that are able to apply caring teacher principles. One teacher described her approach to this as connecting with parents over identifying strengths in students.

Most teachers run into some kids who are more challenging. The accounts of the teachers in this study provide multiple perspectives and approaches that could be useful to teachers who are struggling with thinking about how to integrate curriculum with connections in their classrooms. Specifically, it addresses how caring relationships may contribute to intrinsic motivation and subsequently improve academic persistence.

Implications for Public Policy

Teacher hiring practices in recent years have shifted with the advent of programs such as Teach for America (Green, 2010), which have drawn from an applicant pool which as a whole has excelled in school. There exists a significant need for caring teachers, which while they may be useful for all students, are particularly significant in educating students at-risk of dropping out of school. Frequently, in the schools that serve students of color and students with high rates of poverty, levels of burnout are higher (Abel & Sewel, 1999). In addition, it seems unlikely that a teacher merely focused on teaching the material would be able to address the needs of an at-risk student and facilitate their persistence in school. Because at-risk students may require different supports than students who are not at-risk, it may be important for policy makers to develop guidelines for teachers and administrators on working successfully with this population.

In order to implement programs for at-risk students, there needs to be an understanding of what relational/emotional components are important to these interventions. Programs for at-risk students that implement only curricular changes or behavioral expectations will likely not be as successful as those programs that also include a relational component (Dynarski & Gleason, 2002). As suggested by the current education czar (New Yorker, Feb, 1) including measurements of graduation rates and college attendance and graduation could be useful additions to current data collected from each school and used to assess the school's success. Given the importance of a teacher knowing students, finding ways to extend or repeat a teacher's interaction with a student may be an opportunity to develop rapport between students and teachers. The specific needs and circumstances of at-risk students suggest that it may be useful for teachers to specialize in working with this population in their training. By creating an at-risk student specialization, teachers could demonstrate a commitment and interest in working with this population by gaining specific credentialing in this area. Hopefully, these programs could be geared towards addressing the attitudes, processes, and actions of successful teachers.

Implications for Future Research

With much of the current focus with at-risk students on identification of etiology and risk factors, less research is done on how to positively impact students who are academically at-risk (Christenson, Sinclair, Lehr, and Godber, 2001). While it is promising that teachers developing positive relationships with students could be beneficial, additional research is necessary. More studies would need to be done in order to identify a causal link between caring teachers as described in this study and academic

success with at-risk students. The results of this study pinpoint the ways in which teachers in this study identified as caring worked to integrate their classroom management with the content of the curriculum in order to create a classroom where students voices are heard, students work at a pace that is individually challenging, and processes are created that provide opportunities for students to feel listened to and valued. Teachers identified the following characteristics as significant to their work: (1) wanting to resolve conflict in the classroom, (2) appreciating and empathizing with the struggles of at-risk students, and (3) a desire to keep their curriculum alive in a way that allows the experience of teaching to be engaging both for themselves as well as their students. Further work on how these traits are developed would be useful in order to cultivate and develop these traits in other educators.

While I outlined through this study some of the ways in which teachers who work with at-risk students are caring, this research also provided more questions. Specifically, what are students' perceptions of teachers that are identified by counselors as caring? More generally, how would students describe the impact that the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of caring teachers have? More etiological questions for research would also be interesting, such as how can a culture of care be cultivated in public school settings?

Research is needed on improving teacher training with a focus on developing responsiveness to students' needs, cultivating a belief in the importance of relationships, and instruction and supervision on how to develop those meaningful connections, gaining perspective on students, flexibility in responding to students and classroom events, and creating an awareness of the need for a positive experience for teachers and their students. Research which examines the role that school culture can play in cultivating and

maintaining certain attitudes and values in teachers could be an important area of further work as well. Attention needs to be paid to the teachers that are selected to work with at-risk adolescents. Research could be done to identify teachers that were able to make this adjustment with training and those that were less inclined to and perhaps would be more successful in another profession. Supervision or mentoring similar to the format found in the training of therapists could be a useful format for experienced teachers who have been identified as caring to share their expertise and offer support and redirection when inevitable challenges arise for newer professionals. Finally, while an emphasis on quality of instruction and outcomes is important, this should not come at the cost of attention to relationships which impact retention.

Understanding the importance of cultural awareness for teachers would be another important area of further study. Research on teachers' awareness of culture and ways of explicitly addressing this in their classroom is essential, especially in diverse schools given that the teachers are predominantly White (Michie, 2007). Approaches to teaching cross-culturally may benefit from additional awareness of the issues that arise in these instances and how teachers can work to increase their awareness of the cross-cultural aspect. Research has neglected the cross-cultural component of teaching. The teachers in this study identify ways in which they are able to incorporate conversations about culture, respect, and differences and provide opportunities for students to have some autonomy that allowed for the exploration of their own identity even in subject areas such as science.

Strengths and Limitations

This multiple case study employed rigorous methodology in multiple ways. The study used multiple types of data including multiple interviews with each participant, and multiple observations of different classes each teacher taught. In addition, by seeking information about that teacher from another teacher in the school familiar with their work, another perspective was supplied. These four sources of data provided alternate viewpoints from which to observe the participants. By getting these different viewpoints, it was possible to achieve a greater level of depth in terms of understanding some of the systemic factors impacting these teachers. For example, by doing observations a sense of the ecology of the school was established. Given the importance of context in qualitative research, this was a strength of the present study.

Another strength of the study was the diversity of the participants. Gender diversity was equally distributed with two women and two men participants. Ethnically, the group was less diverse, with three participants who identified as white or European American and one who identified as Lakota, Cherokee and Irish-American. Their educational experiences were distinct as well. The two males identified themselves as feeling like their needs academically as children were not met, with one describing himself as an at-risk student in high school. The two women reported having parents as teachers and stated that they were academically successful.

This study had limitations as well. Though the group was diverse, the small number of participants was a limitation. The study was conducted in a Midwestern city, in which minorities total less than 10% of the population. This is dissimilar from other urban areas that would likely contain a higher percentage of ethnic diversity. While this

study was about caring teachers who were identified as working well with students identified as at-risk of academic difficulties, broader definitions of caring teachers would be relevant as well. For example, students who excel in school may also benefit from being in the classroom of a "caring teacher."

Conclusion

The educational outcomes of at-risk students impact everyone (American Youth Policy Forum, 2006). Specifically, this means that mental health clinicians and researchers, policy makers, educators and administrators, and the students themselves are affected by the quality of education. Attending to the needs of students who otherwise may not succeed in school and seeking ways to improve their outcomes has a societal benefit as well. Attending to ways of increasing educational achievement is important. In order to improve educational outcomes in addition to achievement such as academic completion, the relational aspects of student-teacher interactions need to be addressed.

The focus on academic achievement has meant that less attention has been paid to the socio-emotional needs of students (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). While operationalizing the relational aspect of caring teachers may be difficult, it is certainly an important foundation of successfully educating at-risk students. The caring teachers who were studied for this research suggested the presence of several themes. In both specific and general ways these teachers discuss caring for students as finding ways to integrate their beliefs and practices into their curriculum so that both the relational and educational needs of students are met.

Lessons Learned

The study has taken 14 months to complete. It was exciting for me to meet with the teachers that the counselors had selected for me to interview. I found myself energized when thinking about the ways in which these participants were working with at-risk students. I was surprised hearing from most of them that they did not seek out this particular population or say that they were working with them in a unique way. It seemed clear to me that these teachers were in fact responding to the needs of their students and thinking about how best to do that.

To be welcomed into these classrooms meant that the realities of middle school and high school life came to life. I got to see what an intense, busy, and complex job it is to manage a classroom. I got to see how difficult it would be for me personally to have the patience to be a good teacher. The teachers made time for me in their busy schedules, and I felt welcomed into their classrooms to observe all that went on there.

Analyzing the data was exciting, as I felt I had captured in the interviews and observations a sense of what made these caring teachers unique. With assistance from the Center for Qualitative Research I was able to learn how to use the qualitative software MaxQDA and this was instrumental to not feeling overwhelmed by all that I had to keep track of in analyzing each case and doing the cross case analysis.

Many participants have been helpful in my research. In particular, Joan Erickson's suggestions for changes to my proposal made the research even stronger. Vicki Plano-Clark's qualitative research suggestions when I was creating my proposal were also imperative. Lindsey Nored's participation as a triangulator of data, was an

enjoyable part of the process later, as I was able to talk through what I was thinking and rearrange my thinking in response to some of her insights.

If I were doing it all over again, I would likely want to make a few changes. Specifically, I would have wanted to add two more cases. I would have been able to get a broad sampling of the economically disadvantaged and more diverse middle and high schools in the city. I would have wanted to do a focus group in order to see how these teachers who perceive themselves as different from other teachers at their school perceive and communicate with each other. I would have liked to have interviewed one of the professors whom Pete described as helping him develop himself as an educator and incorporated her ideas. I'm not sure how that would have fit with the format of the study, and perhaps that is more of a jumping off point for another project. My motivation for continuing to look at the needs of at-risk students has not wavered. By completing this project, I am aware of the huge quantities of social capital and caring people in my life that have made this possible. I continue to be curious about how educational systems and the stakeholders can address students as whole people, who have psychological as well as intellectual needs.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent

A-1 Teacher informed consent
A-2 Other adult in school informed consent

Appendix B

Informed Consent

Caring teacher-student relationships in school.

This is a qualitative research study exploring the characteristics of caring teachers.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study will be to research the contribution of caring adult relationships with students. You have been invited to participate because you are over the age of 19, and have worked in a school with students.

Procedures

If you decide to participate in this study, you will participate in two one-on-one interviews with one member of the research team. The interview will take place at a time and location mutually agreed upon by you and the researcher. The first interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes, and you may take breaks during the interview as needed. The second interview will take place after the observations and will be 30-60 minutes long. During the interviews, the researcher will ask you questions about issues that relate to your work as a caring teacher. The interviews will be audio recorded for later transcription and analysis. As part of the interviews, we will ask you to provide us with demographic and biographic information (e.g., age, employment) as well as the name of another adult in the school who is familiar with your work and whom we could interview. You will be asked if you can provide a writing about how you develop relationships with students, this is voluntary as well. The researcher will also ask to observe you working with students for 4-8 hours on several different days.

Risks and/or Discomforts

There are no known risks to participants.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits to participants. Indirect benefits include insight for participants and readers of the study into what caring teachers do.

Confidentiality

All information collected from you will be kept confidential. Your name will appear only

on this consent form and will not be associated with your demographic information form or with the audio recording made of interviews. Any identifying information will be removed from your writing. Audio recordings will be transcribed by a member of the research team and then immediately destroyed. We will not use your name in any manuscripts or presentations resulting from this research. Instead, we will assign you a pseudonym. We may report the data in social science journals or talk about it at professional meetings or when teaching college classes, but we will not provide any identifying information about you. All research materials will be kept in a locked file cabinet, and we will destroy all research materials within three years of completing the analysis procedures. Given that this research is taking place in a public setting, there are limitations to confidentiality.

Compensation

You will not be paid for this study.

Opportunity to Ask Questions

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to ask questions and to have those questions answered. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator, or to report any concerns about this study, contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965.

Freedom to Withdraw From the Study

You may decide not to participate in this study or withdraw at any time. Your decision not to participate or to withdraw will not harm your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Documentation of Informed Consent

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

_____ Check if you agree to be audio recorded during the interview.

Signature of Participant _____

Date_____

Researchers:

Sarah W. Thompson, M.A., Principal Investigator (402)-730-2408

Appendix C

Informed Consent

Caring teacher-student relationships in school.

This is a qualitative research study exploring the characteristics of caring teachers.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study will be to research the contribution of caring adult relationships with students. You have been invited to participate because you are over the age of 19, and have worked in a school with students.

Procedures

If you decide to participate in this study, you will participate in a one-on-one interviews with one member of the research team. The interview will take place at a time and location mutually agreed upon by you and the researcher. The interview will take approximately 30-60 minutes, and you may take breaks during the interview as needed. During the interviews, the researcher will ask you questions about issues that relate to your work with the other participant. The interviews will be audio recorded for later transcription and analysis. As part of the interviews, we will ask you to provide us with demographic and biographic information (e.g., age, employment).

Risks and/or Discomforts

There are no known risks to participants.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits to participants. Indirect benefits include insight for participants and readers of the study into what caring teachers do.

Confidentiality

All information collected from you will be kept confidential. Your name will appear only on this consent form and will not be associated with your demographic information form or with the audio recording made of interviews. Any identifying information will be removed from your writing. Audio recordings will be transcribed by a member of the research team and then immediately destroyed. We will not use your name in any manuscripts or presentations resulting from this research. Instead, we will assign you a

pseudonym. We may report the data in social science journals or talk about it at professional meetings or when teaching college classes, but we will not provide any identifying information about you. All research materials will be kept in a locked file cabinet, and we will destroy all research materials within three years of completing the analysis procedures. Given that this research is taking place in a public setting, there are limitations to confidentiality.

Compensation

You will not be paid for this study.

Opportunity to Ask Questions

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to ask questions and to have those questions answered. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator, or to report any concerns about this study, contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965.

Freedom to Withdraw From the Study

You may decide not to participate in this study or withdraw at any time. Your decision not to participate or to withdraw will not harm your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Documentation of Informed Consent

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

_____ Check if you agree to be audio recorded during the interview.

Signature of Participant _____

Date_____

Researchers:

Sarah W. Thompson, M.A., Principal Investigator (402)-730-2408

Appendix D

Interview Protocols

B-1 1st interview with teacher
B-2 2nd interview with teacher
B-3 Interview with other adult in school

Appendix E

Interview protocol

School:
Teacher code:
Teacher's subject:
Date:
Demographics

Introductions:
Informed Consent:
Demographics:
Age:
Ethnicity:
Gender:

What does it mean to you to be a caring teacher working with at-risk students? Example?

What do you do to facilitate adult-student relationships in the classroom?

How do you connect with students that are more difficult to reach?

What differences do you notice between yourself and other teachers in regards to how you interact with student?

How do you know when you are successful in developing relationships in the classroom?

In working with students who struggle more in school, in what way do you change your approach in the relationship?

What (formal and informal) feedback did you get during your training about creating positive relationships with students and how did this help or not help you?

What do positive adult-youth relationships in schools look like?

Why is it important to you to be a caring teacher?

What importance does being a caring teacher take on in your work?

Tell me about how working in this school has helped or made it more difficult to be a caring teacher.

Is there anything else I should know?

Thank you for your time!

Appendix F

2nd interview protocol

School:
Teacher code:
Date:

Explain to me what I see when I observe your classroom

Answer specific questions I have after observing

Answer follow up questions I have after reviewing transcript from first interview

Any additional information you would like me to know?

Would you be willing to review my summary of the information I gathered? (member checking)

Thank you for your time!

Appendix G

Interview with other adult in school

- **School:**
- **Participants code:**
- **Teacher code:**
- **Teacher's subject:**
- **Date:**
- **Demographics:**

- **Introductions**
- **Informed Consent**
-
- **Demographics:**
- **Age:**
- **Ethnicity:**
- **Gender:**

What can you tell me about X's work in this school?

X said that you helped support his/her work as a caring teacher, In what way do you do that?

Why do you do that?

What does X do to communicate his/her care for at-risk students?

What does X do differently than other teachers?