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The Impact of Teacher Student Relationship on the Academic, Behavioral and Socioemotional Growth and Development of Students Aged Pre-K to 12

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ROGER WILLIAMS UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

THE IMPACT OF TEACHER STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS ON THE ACADEMIC,
BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIOEMOTIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF
STUDENTS AGED PRE-K TO 12

GRACIELLA ARRASCUE

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Reviewed and approved by the following:

Amy Leshinsky, Ed.D.

Thesis Supervisor

Abstract

Fostering strong relationships with students is a pedagogical approach which can benefit both students and teachers. This research analyzed the application of this methodology in classrooms with students aged pre-k to 12. Based on this research, teacher student relationships can positively benefit student outcomes in academic, behavioral, and social emotional areas. The findings show how to establish these strong relationships, how relationships are a tool for classroom management and how relationships affect student motivation.

Keywords: *academic growth, behavioral growth, social emotional growth, teacher student relationship, SEL, TSRS, student development, trust, education, pre-k, elementary, secondary*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Children spend 18 years of their lives receiving a K-12 education. They spend 7 hours of their days in school beginning at the age of 5. Each successive grade, they are responsible for learning new material, maintaining new expectations and furthering social growth. Each year is marked by a plethora of change; the most influential of which is the student's teacher. The teacher, working together with their students, has one year to help them achieve grade level expectations. Teachers are continuously looking for ways to improve educational processes for their students. This is a challenging task due to the difference in students' development in all faucets: academic, behavioral, and social emotional.

Throughout this paper I will be discussing how the formation of a teacher student relationship is a best practice for bettering education for all students throughout the course of their entire academic career. Teachers dedicating time and effort to forming relationships with their students is important because they spend the most time with them. Teachers are responsible for transmitting not only academic knowledge, but behavioral expectations and social emotional knowledge. Fostering a strong relationship with students is considered to have an impact on the extent to which a teacher can affect student growth and development.

Statement of the Problem

Research shows that a strong relationship with a teacher is a beneficial educational tool. There have been many studies conducted which focus on the effects of these relationships on students of all ages. The relationship that is built between a teacher and student is a strong predictor for that student's engagement and classroom satisfaction. Although there is a lot of literature which proves that teacher student relationships are a focus in some classrooms, there is a gap in proving that this strategy is a widely used practice.

This paper examines the need to implement teacher student relationships as an educational tool in pre-K to 12 classrooms. This matters because with the amount of time students spend in school and the amount of developmental growth they are expected to make, they need the strongest support they can get. The evidence supporting this pedagogical approach demonstrates the benefits of a strong teacher student relationship for students, within developmental areas. This information builds upon the assertion that teacher student relationships should be used as a tool.

This paper examines the impact of the teacher student relationship on student growth and development, specifically in the areas of academic, behavior and social emotional change to support student learning. I will begin with a review of the literature regarding teacher student relationships within three themes which affect students' day to day experiences. I will also describe benefits for educators who seek to involve and foster a strong relationship with students. Lastly, I will discuss implications of this practice which arise during an internship observing a speech-language pathologist.

Significance of the Research

The audience for this work are educators and school administrations. Specifically, individuals who are currently emphasizing teacher student relationships and those who are looking for new methodologies to add to their practices. The research is significantly valuable for teachers who are responsible for leading students to meet academic standards, behavioral standards and social emotional growth standards. The evidence supporting this claim is discussed in Chapter 2, as well as real life implications discussed in Chapter 3.

This research serves to show the multi-faceted benefits of teacher student relationships being given priority within classrooms. If teacher student relationships were emphasized alongside other classroom modalities this could have an impact on all students considering they would

benefit in some of the main areas which measure school success. This research puts together information from a variety of studies in some of which teachers already emphasize teacher student relationships and others, teachers are beginning to use the strategy. Information is also assimilated which compares teachers who do not use this technique to teachers who do. Within all these works, researchers find that a strong student teacher relationship does benefit the student involved in myriad ways.

This research has a wide impact, as children all over the world spend so much of their time in classrooms learning. All students need support to meet the goals expressed to them- which come from multiple domains. Understanding the outcomes that can be obtained by students will help educators to serve them better.

Research Problem and Research Question

The problem that I will be investigating through this paper is how a strong relationship between a teacher and a student affects a student's growth and development positively. I condense student growth and development to the areas of academic, behavioral, and social emotional advancement.

Both teachers and students can benefit from this information. Teachers currently emphasizing student teacher relationship can be assured while teachers looking for a new methodology can be informed. Students will benefit and grow from a practice best suited for them.

This research will address the following question:

- What impact does a strong teacher student relationship have on developmental growth for students when used in pre-K-12 settings?

Theoretical Framework

Symbolic interactionism is a framework based in sociological theory. The idea provides a key perspective for the field of sociology and human interaction. The basis of this theory can be traced back to Max Weber. His main principle was that people act according to the way they interpret the world around them. George Herbert Mead was another player in the creation of symbolic interactionism; he theorized that “I” is a person’s personal image of themselves, while “me” is the image as perceived by others. While collaborating with George Herbert Mead, Herbert Blumer coined the term “symbolic interactionism.” Blumer derived his perspective from Mead’s theory. His work was characterized by three principles: we act towards someone or something based on the meaning we interpret from them; meanings are the product of social interactions; meaning making and understanding is an ongoing process during which meaning can evolve. In plain English, symbolic interactionism means that how someone experiences a person or event will form the way that this person acts towards this person or event.

Symbolic interactionism can be employed in a variety of situations, including schools. In the article “*That Teacher Really Likes Me*” by Johnston, O., Wildy, H., & Shand, J. the framework of symbolic interactionism “[was] used to conceptualize a process for generating substantive theory about the students’ experiences.” In employing this theory in schools, researchers look at how our world is constructed by the meaning individuals attach to events and interactions. This is important in understanding a student’s school experience because that experience is therefore created by the events they encounter and the interactions that they have within their day to day life.

This resonates with me due to the fact that I believe school experience, school growth and school satisfaction all grow out of the relationship between the teacher and student. Important pillars of the symbolic interactionism theory hold that meaning making originates from social

interaction. Thinking about this in a school setting would establish the student teacher relationship as the social interaction and the meaning of school would be formed out of this relationship, at whatever level it exists. Meaning making is also theorized to be a malleable process, insinuating that a bad school association can be turned into a good one through a change in relationship.

My focus on student growth and development in the areas of behavior, academic and social emotional progress because of student teacher relationship can be supported by this theory. This is due to the emphasis of the theory on the outcome from social interactions and the meanings people can derive from their associations that are built in the world.

Positionality Statement

An aspect that affects my positionality is my previous job experience with children. Over the last decade, I have held jobs that have allowed me to interact with students ages 1-12. I have spent time as a babysitter, teacher assistant, camp counselor and substitute teacher. My roles have allowed me the space to be “fun” in more cases than the average person. In my interactions with these children, I found unique and creative ways to engage students – both in our activities but also in ways that would foster a relationship and allow me to create positive experiences. I have always prized the relationships I would create in my workplaces because of this attitude, one that is based on valuing student teacher relationships, but I never realized the weight of their importance.

I have always loved working with kids. I started babysitting when I was twelve and still do today. Through babysitting I was able to learn the basic aspects of working with kids. Cleaning up, brushing teeth and bedtime allowed me to learn some valuable skills of negotiation. In these early years of working with kids I learned how to plan activities suited for the children

that I was planning on working with. I had to help them cope with their parents being away for a short duration and learned that being fun with them was the simplest way to succeed. What I thought was just babysitting was the foundation of my attitude towards working with children. Centering the experience around them allows them to be engaged, trusting and happy. This contributes to a relationship that benefits all parties involved.

In high school, I was hired at a local preschool as a teacher assistant. This was my introduction to working with students in an organized setting. During the afternoon part of the school day, I was able to be a part of supervision, activity management, and play. Here, I applied the knowledge I gained in the past to build relationships with students. Connection with students made it easier to help them work through challenges, assist with behavioral redirection and to become someone who could create a positive and fun experience for them. During COVID I worked for my EEC Certification and became a substitute teacher. I was very excited to handle a classroom by myself. I believe it was during this time that I established my personal pedagogy with a student centered approach.

During my high school and college summers I worked as a camp counselor, which I loved. In an environment based on fun, like camp, I realized that management of the group was important. In order to have the most fun possible, campers needed to be safe towards themselves as well as others, and follow rules near the water or when transitioning; situations that could become dangerous. I worked to establish this through mutual respect with the campers. The expectations made sense- and they had time to learn and practice. Since the behavioral expectations were based on fairness and trust, they were easily complied with by the campers. Throughout this experience I also learned that I could strengthen relationships by being open to the children's suggestions. In working with them, we were able to create and carry out multiple

“Specialty Days” based on their interests. They were able to feel autonomy in their ideas being brought to life and were even more excited to participate. These connections were built upon year after year, which allowed campers to come to me when they needed help, improving their experience and building skills of expression.

Recently, I became a K-12 substitute at a local school district. Some of the students that I met as little preschoolers are now second and third graders in this same school system. Walking around the halls, seeing them after all this time and them remembering who I am and even being excited to see me not only made me so happy, but added to my realization that the close relationships I created with them **do** last and **are** worthwhile. I strongly believe that the biggest educational tool is a relationship; everything else necessary can grow if this is established first.

The relationships built with students creates trust, allowing students to feel comfortable asking for help academically or personally. A strong relationship also allows students to be open to behavioral redirection and helps them to meet developmental milestones. My work for this senior thesis is meaningful to me because it allows me to establish my set of beliefs within research based best practices, as well as hold an internship that allows me to continue examining student teacher relationships at the pre-K to 12 level and their impact on student growth and development: academically, behaviorally, and socioemotionally.

Definitions of Key Terminology

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) – an experience like childhood maltreatment or exposure to violence that occurs early in a child’s life.

Cognitive – an individual’s general intellectual ability.

Cold Self-Regulation – self-regulation mechanisms used during a situation where emotions do not play a role.

Dyadic – relates to the interaction between two people.

Elicitation – to evoke a response from someone in conversation.

English Language Learners (ELLs) – students whose first language is not English.

Environmental ACEs – an experience like childhood maltreatment or exposure to violence that occurs early in a child’s life relating to the child’s living conditions ex. community violence exposure or food insecurity.

Epistemic Confidence – the extent to which someone is confident in their own competence.

Extension – an attempt to lengthen or hear more of a response in conversation.

Externalizing Behavior – behavior directed outwardly, towards the environment or another person.

Hot Self-Regulation – self-regulation mechanisms used during an emotionally charged situation.

Internalizing Behavior – behavior directed inwardly towards oneself.

Longitudinal study – research design that involves repeated observations of the same variables over either a long or short period of time.

Maladjustment – failure to manage the needs of a normal social environment.

Noncognitive – factors related to learning, ex. math anxiety, self-esteem.

Teacher Student Relationship (TSR) – perceived relationship between a teacher and student, it can be measured from either perspective.

Traditional ACEs – an experience similar to childhood maltreatment or exposure to violence that occurs early in a child’s life which may be traumatic ex. domestic violence exposure or parental substance abuse.

Parental Involvement (PI) – perceived level of a parent’s involvement with their child’s learning. It can be measured from either perspective.

Persistent Challenging Behaviors (PCBs) – a repeated pattern of behavior that is damaging or distracting to a student or their peers.

Prosocial Behavior – a behavior aimed to favor someone other than yourself.

Reciprocal – an inverse, or opposite relationship.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) – a method of education which fosters social and emotional skills alongside school curriculum.

Student Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) – The Pianta Student Teacher Relationship Scale was created to measure teacher’s perceptions of their relationships with individual students.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to show the potential benefits of fostering strong student teacher relationships. Teachers and students can benefit from the use of this approach because it is suited to improve student school experience, student success, and student school satisfaction, which in turn benefits teacher experience. This paper will look at this method used in classrooms spanning from pre-K to 12th grade.

To accompany my research, I chose the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism. This theory asserts that the way someone (in this case a student) experiences something (school, their teacher) predicts the association and the way they act towards that something. I chose this theoretical framework because it made sense to me that students’ prior associations would form how eager they are to learn, participate, and succeed.

The successive chapters will provide information regarding teacher student relationships. Chapter 2 is a literature review focused on best practices, which have been reflected in

researched peer reviewed literature. This literature review is broken into three sections. The first section focuses on the way in which a strong teacher relationship benefits students academically. The second section focuses on how a teacher student relationship makes navigating student behaviors more manageable and contributes to student behavior growth. The final section explains how a teacher student relationship contributes to student social emotional growth. In Chapter 3, I explore how teacher student relationships are important to student development in the case of speech therapy using real life observations from an internship that accompanies my thesis. I will use this information and real life implications for practice to describe how this methodology is recommended in the pre-K to 12 setting.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

To what extent does the fostering of strong relationships between teachers and students affect those students' growth and development; specifically in the areas of academic, behavior and social emotional development? The purpose of this research is to examine literature which focuses on the effects on students whose teachers employ this methodology, as well as to explain how it is implemented. The results of this research can benefit school districts, teachers, and students. Throughout the use of best practices teachers can run more successful classrooms and students can gain a more beneficial school experience.

Chapter 2 discusses these benefits across three themes of student school experience. The first is effects on student academic achievement, which focuses on how students' academic achievement, academic ability and academic motivation can all be affected positively by a strong supportive relationship with their teacher. The next theme is effects on student behavior which examines the ways in which a teacher can use their relationship with a student to effectively manage behavior, as well as how it is a tool to grow skills of student self-behavioral regulation. The final theme is effects on student social emotional growth. This aspect focuses on how teachers who create a strong relationship with students can aid that student's personal development, social interaction skills and SEL skills. These three themes are overarching in a student's education and play a large role in their success wholly, from both a student and teacher perspective, as well as their satisfaction and beliefs about their schooling.

Effects on Student Academic Achievement

There is an existing large body of research associated with students' academic achievement as associated with a teacher student relationship. This section will cover a few studies and literature reviews which have explored this topic. Research articles are included that

look at; both long and short term academic affects, teacher strategies for building relationships, and what is important to students in feeling supported.

Johnston, Wildy and Shand (2022) conducted a study using 25 grade 10 students across 3 secondary schools in Australia. They collected data through 100 interviews and 175 classroom observations. Researchers collected qualitative data centered on the main research question: “How do students experience their teachers’ expectations for their academic achievement?” Analysis of the data revealed that students acted in ways that improved their academic performance when their teachers communicated high expectations of them. Furthermore, when teachers were interested in personally connecting with students and showed care, students reciprocated by developing positive relationships with those teachers. Students reflected on this relationship as having a positive impact on their academic performance.

Ma, Liu, and Li (2022) conducted a quantitative study to examine the effects of a teacher student relationship on learning outcomes. The study included 332 fourth graders and 321 eleventh graders from China. The study measured student perceived teacher student relationship, curriculum based measures of achievement and student perceived parental involvement. Students’ academic achievement was measured using their standardized test scores. The results of the study revealed that teacher student relationship and student academic achievement correlated positively, in both primary and secondary schools.

Magro, Nivison, Englund and Roisman (2023) conducted a quantitative research study. This study looked at the extent of which relationships with early caregivers and early elementary school teachers had on a student’s academic performance at 16 years old. The study used longitudinal research to follow students through their academic career. They examined the extent to which a child’s primary care experience (3 to 42 months) with their caregivers and their

relationships with their elementary school teachers (K-6th grade) were associated with their academic achievement at age 16. The results found that three out of the four indicators of a strong teacher student relationship were associated with academic achievement in the medium range. Evaluated alongside maternal sensitivity, relationships with adult figures in a child's life are associated with academic achievement later in life.

In a literature review by Myers and Pianta (2008) the authors examined qualitative data centered on teacher relationships in multiple different manners. The goal was to conceptualize what factors affect teacher student relationships and in turn, how those relationships affect classroom performance. Research shows that supportive teacher student relationships are necessary for healthy student development, as well as help students who are at risk of school failure. Conflict between an adult and student was shown to increase the risk of school failure. Quality relationships boost both academic achievement and socioemotional learning, and the need for them does not diminish as a student ages. The perspective of focusing on relationships is a relatively new practice within educational contexts, but further research may reveal more benefits of the theory in practice.

In this research study by Semeraro, Giofre, Coppola, Lucangeli and Cassibba (2020), cognitive (mathematical ability) and noncognitive (anxiety) effects on performance in a math class were examined as compared to the teacher student relationship. A sample of 219 students were evaluated when they entered sixth grade. General cognitive ability was measured through the administration of four timed standardized tests. The topics were: series completion, odd-one-out, matrices and topology. Math anxiety was measured through three questionnaires that measured attitude towards math learning. Teacher student relationship quality was measured from a student perception based questionnaire. Lastly, mathematical achievement was measured

through the administration of a standardized test. While the results showed that cognitive ability was the strongest predictor of mathematics achievement, the student teacher relationship was found to have an indirect relationship through alleviating math anxiety. The role of the student teacher relationship within math learning is thought to play a role in mediating anxiety which aids learning.

Sethi and Scales (2020) conducted research which consisted of two studies, Study 1 was quantitative, and Study 2 was qualitative. Study 1 used survey and structural equation modeling to collect data about teacher student relationships and school achievement. Study 2 used surveys to look at how teachers build relationships. Six hundred and twenty three middle school students and 672 high school students participated in the study, and three focus groups of small samples of students also met during the study. Relationships with teachers were found to directly affect both student motivation and school climate. They were found to indirectly affect GPA. Study 2 examined best practices for teachers to build relationships. All five elements of developmental relationships were found to be present in these teacher student relationships, though power sharing was less common. The most powerful messages students received from teachers were as follows:

“• You can trust me to be here through your good and bad days, and for the long haul;

• I will share some of my self with you as a person so we get to know each other, even maybe make each other laugh once in a while;

• I will be and fair honest with you;

• I will be flexible with you when I can be while still expecting a lot from you;

- I will give you the support you need to succeed” (Sethi, Scales, 2020, page 13).

Pakarinen, Lerkkanen, Poikkeus, Salminen, Silinskas, Siekkinen and Nurmi (2017) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the extent to which the quality of teacher student relationships as assessed in kindergarten were associated with the same children’s reading and math growth during elementary school, specifically grade 4. The sample included 515 children, and they observed teacher student interactions in 49 kindergarten classrooms. ‘Quality relationships’ as measured in the study were characterized by 3 categories: emotional support, classroom organization and instructional support. The children’s math and reading ability were tested using pre-tests at the beginning of the kindergarten year, and a nonverbal reasoning test at the end of their kindergarten year. The classrooms were observed using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) pre-K observation instrument and 17 observers conducted the observations. During elementary school, the students' math and reading ability was measured at the end of each year (1, 2, 3, 4) using standardized tests. The results found that high quality teacher student relationships in kindergarten were positively associated with children’s more advanced academic development later in life. High quality teacher student relationships in kindergarten were also positively associated with baseline academic skills, suggesting “that warm and sensitive teacher–child interactions, well-organized activities with proactive behavior management, and process-oriented feedback provide children with a good start to schooling” (Pakarinen, et al. 2017, page 199).

Platz (2021) conducted a literature review in order to explore the question: “What is the nature and what is the role of trust between teacher and student in academic education at school?” The researcher examines this question in two parts: the first part focuses on how trust between teachers and students is about being in a trust relationship, the second on how the

reasons for trust are relationship dependent. The second part explores trust by looking at the level of knowledge acquired from the teacher and the development of epistemic confidence. In academic situations, trust increases the amount of knowledge acquired. In schools, students are often taught by communication through a teacher, trusting that this teacher is knowledgeable and dependable makes the student more apt to take in what is being communicated. Relationships with teachers also have a great effect on whether or not students trust the information they receive, by trusting their own knowledge students are able to trust their own abilities.

Effects on Student Behavior

There is also a body of research which establishes a correlation between student behavior and teacher student relationships. This section explores how students present behaviors in schools and how this is associated with student teacher relationships, how positive discipline procedures which form supportive classrooms, and the use of forming relationships to effectively manage behavior.

Acar, Veziroğlu-Çelik, Rudasill and Sealy (2022) conducted a quantitative study which investigated the correlation between student self-regulation responses in real situations and the student's relationship with their teacher. The researchers observed 140 students, aged 39 to 77 months. The researchers observed behaviors in both hot and cool situations and measured participants' response to these situations. The results revealed that teacher-student closeness was positively associated with both hot self-regulation and learning behaviors, while teacher-student conflict was negatively associated with learning behaviors.

Roorda and Koomen (2021) conducted a quantitative research study examining how students in primary and secondary schools present both externalizing and internalizing behaviors. They took a sample from 1,219 secondary school aged students. These students reported on their

externalizing and internalizing behaviors, as well as their relationships with their teachers during three different intervals during one school year. The aim of the study was to determine to what extent the relationship between teachers and students and externalizing or internalizing behaviors was reciprocal. Externalizing behavior was found to positively predict student teacher conflict, indicating that improving relationships should be considered in order to form an intervention for externalizing behaviors in school.

McNally and Slutsky (2018) conducted a study which looked at how the relationships between teachers and their students provide a supportive environment for overall school success. The study included 4 preschool classrooms: two of which were Head Start programs and two of which were private preschools. Four preschool teachers were also included in the study. Data was collected in the forms of questionnaires, observations, a teacher belief survey, interviews, and a final focus group. The researcher used the STRS long form to assess teachers' perceptions of their relationships with individual students for each child in the classroom. Teachers were observed during normal days on three occasions for one hour each. The teacher survey measured three aspects of belief: discipline practices, classroom practices, and beliefs about children. The results showed that higher STRS scores predicted lower levels of conflict and dependency, and a closer and more positive relationship. Overall, teachers reported that they engaged in positive strategies of discipline, first clarifying expectations, then following through with a consequence and using guidance as their main method. Quality teacher student relationships were found to be linked to high quality practices like positive discipline and a safe emotional climate.

Longobardi, Settanni, Lin, and Fabris (2021) conducted a study to measure the relationship between a student's prosocial behavior and the teacher student relationship alongside academic achievement and attitude towards school. The participants of the study were

459 students aged 4 to 9 and 47 teachers. The researchers administered the STRS short form to teachers in order to measure teachers' perception of level of closeness in relationships with their students. Teachers were also asked to rate their students' prosocial behaviors using a form called the strengths and difficulties questionnaire. Researchers also administered a questionnaire to students that was aimed to measure their feelings about school. Using multiple regression analysis researchers found that students' attitude towards school was positively predicted by student teacher closeness and the student perceived relationship with their teacher. Student perceived academic achievement was also positively associated by teacher student closeness and the perceived relationship. Student's prosocial behaviors were positively predicted by students' attitude towards school. Teacher student closeness and student perceived relationship were also directly and indirectly related to prosocial behaviors.

McGuire and Meadan (2022) conducted a literature review in order to explore how the social inclusion of children who demonstrate persistent challenging behaviors (PCBs) can change their classroom experience for the better. The social emotional delays present in students who display PCBs can be responsible for negative impacts on play skills, emotional regulation, and social interactions. Using best practices, teachers can form social inclusion by including students in the classroom community, ensuring participation in social activities with peers and promoting positive relationships. PCBs usually result from a student's lack of social emotional readiness for school, the skill gap between those with strong social emotional functioning versus weak social emotional functioning grows as students age. Long term effects are attached to the exclusionary discipline practices often applied to students demonstrating PCBs, such as decreased time in the classroom and future suspensions and expulsions. Classrooms which promote positive environments have a lower rate of PCBs and suspensions as they allow students

to feel welcome, supported and give them the opportunity to develop prosocial behaviors. Students engaging in PCBs also tend to have social emotional delays or disabilities, making connections with peers difficult. Teachers can manage this by modeling appropriate interactions or allowing all students to feel involved in the classroom. Teachers can promote equal participation in the classroom by establishing and maintaining social and behavioral expectations, facilitating interactions when needed and modeling behaviors for before, during and after engagement. Classroom activities aimed to promote a prosocial classroom environment will also assist student behavior. Taking part in conversations that all can relate to, and all can participate in benefits student inclusion. It is necessary for the teacher to have a relationship with a student engaging in PCBs, the student will be supported by a friendly, positive relationship and the other students will learn how to interact with a student demonstrating PCBs by emulating how the adult interacts. An inclusive classroom is within best practice for improvement of school experience.

Effects on Student Social Emotional Growth

As social emotional growth emerges as an increasingly important educational standard, research observing the connection to student teacher relationships have been popping up. The following section focuses on the relationship among the ability to self regulate as associated with teacher student relationships, social interaction skills, and effects of an SEL curriculum.

Loomis (2021) explores how exposure to early childhood adversity, child capacity for self regulation and relationship with their teacher are related. This article collected quantitative data from student caregivers and teachers at different points in the school year. Data was first collected from the caregivers of 126 preschool children, relative to the child's exposure to 12 different adverse childhood experiences. Later, during the middle of the school year data was

collected from the child's teachers on student ability to self-regulate and at the end of the school year, their relationship with their teacher. The results showed that adverse childhood experiences were connected to low self regulation ability and consequently increased student teacher conflict. These results show the need for stronger teaching of self regulation skills and implemented trauma responsive practices. This article explains how the role of adverse experiences does affect the classroom, but how the teachers role is important in affecting this outcome.

Sette, Baumgartner and Schneider (2014) conducted a study in order to measure both teacher student relationship and social adjustment. Sixty three boys and 66 girls participated in this study; the students belonged to 7 classrooms. Each classroom has two teachers: one of which was randomly selected to evaluate the quality of the child teacher relationship for each child, the other evaluated the child's social competence and maladjustment. Parents also provided an assessment of their child's level of shyness. Overall, shy children were found to not develop as strong a relationship with their teachers as their peers and shyness was also correlated with higher levels of peer rejection. A lack of a strong teacher relationship was found to be linked to some other negative outcomes.

Cabell, Justice, McGinty, DeCoster and Forston (2015) conducted a study to examine both the quantity and quality of teacher student conversations in preschool classrooms. Using observations collected from 44 classrooms and 297 randomly selected students, small group play conversations were transcribed, written as conversations, and coded for teacher strategies which evoked and built upon children's conversations. One aim of the study was to discover if strategy use in conversations had an impact on student vocabulary gain. Teachers were trained to use elicitation and extension strategies in their observed conversations with students. Data was collected in the form of videos of conversations, taped by the teachers and sent to the

researchers. Measurement of the student's vocabulary skills was administered in both the fall and spring of the school year. The results showed that variance in strategy use over the year significantly predicted children's vocabulary gains over the length of the school year. Teachers who were dedicated towards employing strategies which would improve communication had students engaged in a higher number of multi turn conversations; engaging in a topic over successive turns gives students the opportunity to be exposed to more valuable vocabulary. When a relationship is established between a teacher and student, more conversations are likely to be held, which can improve that students' vocabulary acquisition.

Poulou (2017) conducted a study in order to investigate how a teacher's perception of emotional intelligence and social emotional learning are related to student teacher relationships. Teachers from 92 public schools in Greece completed the Self-Rated Emotional Intelligence Scale, Teacher Social Emotional Learning Beliefs Scale, and Student-Teacher Relationships Scale-Short Form regarding 283 students who were aged 5 to 6. One hundred seventy students were interviewed on their perception of teacher student relationship to measure agreement between both student and teacher perceptions of the student teacher relationship. SEL is thought to be important in the classroom because methods teach both teachers and students to manage themselves and allows for the communication of skills including stress management, anger management, social communication skills and encourages a sense of safety for the child. Within the study, teacher's perceptions of their own emotional intelligence were related positively to their perceptions of positive classroom relationships and teacher student closeness. In relation to classroom relationships, students emphasized the importance of a teacher's dedication to SEL comfort and commitment.

Gunter, Caldarella, Korth and Young (2012) conducted a study to evaluate the effects of a social emotional learning curriculum called Strong Start Pre-K, on the social and emotional competencies of pre-K students. The study included 52 preschool students. Two classrooms employed the curriculum, these were the test groups, while two classrooms did not, these were the control groups. The researchers used the insight of these student's teachers to collect data on teacher rated student emotional regulation, internalizing behaviors and the quality of the relationship with the student. After the use of the curriculum, teachers reported an increase in students' emotional regulation. Results also showed a decrease in students internalizing behaviors after experiencing the curriculum. Level of closeness with teachers increased over time in both test and control classrooms, likely due to both development over time and use of curriculum.

Summary

This chapter addressed both how to integrate and the benefits of integrating strong teacher relationships within classroom practices. When a teacher establishes a strong relationship with a student, said students could obtain a better school experience and increased growth in academic, behavior and social emotional areas. Based on a review of the literature surrounding this methodology, it is beneficial for students' outcomes. The following chapter will discuss takeaways formed from observation under a speech language pathologist in an elementary school. These takeaways will be analyzed alongside implications for best practice formed during a review of the research.

Chapter 3: Implications for Practice

Revisiting Problem of Practice

This paper seeks to investigate how student teacher relationships affect student development and learning and answers the question, should pedagogical approaches to establish student teacher relationships be a common practice put in place for student success? The research reviewed in this paper is done to examine the field of education in order to improve results for students. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this paper examines student outcomes in the areas of academic, behavioral, and social emotional growth and development. The theoretical framework supporting this research is symbolic interactionism, which asserts that the way a person experiences another person or event will form the way that this person responds towards this specific person or event. This research is significant because it is a methodology which benefits both the student and teacher by bettering relationships and student outcomes.

As stated above, student growth and development has been analyzed in the areas of academic growth, behavioral growth, and social emotional growth. Research shows that across all ages, a teacher student relationship is beneficial for student academic achievement and perceived support. Another body of research shows that behavior and teacher student relationships are connected and establishes this approach as a classroom management tool. Lastly, more research supports a connection between the teacher student relationship and stronger SEL skills. This chapter will focus on the implications of this research, alongside an analysis of the pedagogy in practice.

Significance of Experience

As part of my work for this thesis, I held an internship experience observing under a school based speech language pathologist. Using my experience from this internship, which

spanned several months, I was able to look at how relationship building affects the work done within the field of speech language pathology.

Significance of Implications

There are three implications for current practice that will improve the use of employing student teacher relationships as an educational tool. First, I will express how to establish strong teacher relationships. The second implication is that the reciprocity between students and teachers' relationship contributes to classroom management. The last implication is that a relationship with a teacher benefits a student's level of motivation.

Establishment of Relationships

The first implication that arises is an understanding of **how** teachers are able to foster strong relationships with their students. This implication has relevance both in literature and in observation. Several of my research articles mentioned the ways in which teachers build the aforementioned 'strong' relationships; specifically, Sethi and Scales (2020) and Pakarinen, Lerkkanen, Poikkeus, Salminen, Silinskas, Siekkinen and Nurmi (2017) discuss the creation of strong relationships.

Sethi and Scales (2020) used surveys to gauge how teacher's built relationships with their students. There were five developmental elements that were seen within the relationships: express care, challenge growth, provide support, share power and expand possibilities. Students felt that they experienced care from teachers when they took an interest in their personal lives, understood them, and didn't give up on them, amongst other things. Teachers establish these notions with students through their words and actions. Pakarinen, Lerkkanen, Poikkeus, Salminen, Silinskas, Siekkinen and Nurmi (2017) indicated that a strong teacher student

relationship was one that formed “emotional and instructional supports and classroom organization” (page 201). A nurturing early caregiver builds trust around learning with a student, which they will carry with them.

Building relationships with students is also an important aspect within speech pathology. Working with students to meet their individual goals means that there must be familiarity with them to help them grow. Within my observations, I was able to see the ways in which a speech language pathologist can build relationships with the students that they are working with. I saw that planning for working with a student also included taking in what that student specifically enjoys in order to include this in the work and make it a more tailored experience. For instance, when working with a student to build sentences during a snack time, the items pictured would be foods the students are familiar with and enjoy. This strategy makes the work individualized and interesting for the student, as well as contributes to a relationship as the speech language pathologist takes the time to get to know the student.

Impact of Classroom Management

The second implication that emerges from this research is that attaining relationships with students results in good classroom management. This implication can be seen throughout both research and observation. Two articles, one by researchers McNally and Slutsky (2018) and the other by Pakarinen, et al. (2017), discuss this topic.

The first article by McNally and Slutsky (2018) contained a portion of the study that looked at teacher’s classroom management and discipline strategies. Researchers noticed the following strategies: “guidance, directives, natural consequences, punishments, and non-responsive to behaviour” (page 516). Guidance is described as when a teacher uses questions to

review an expectation. A directive is when a teacher explicitly tells a child what is expected of them. These are the tools which can be used to effectively manage a classroom, but the addition of a relationship with the students makes this task easier. “When children have early education teachers who they can trust, who provide the support they need, and who help them regulate their behavior, they are better able to invest their attention and energy in learning” (Pakarinen, et al. page 201). An educator who establishes a strong repertoire with students is one who they trust and are invested in student learning. Focusing on learning from this teacher can lessen misbehavior from boredom because the students are genuinely interested. Students are also more likely to take redirection and follow expectations set in place by someone who they trust.

The need for effective classroom management is also present within speech therapy. Some meetings are individual while others involve a small group of students; regardless of group size students are expected to be on task while in meetings. Speech meetings observed were generally not long and students had a lot of practice to do within each meeting. I was able to see how the speech therapist I observed kept students on task throughout work. When students would have moments which ventured away from working- the speech therapist guided them back by reminding them to focus for the time being so they could move on to a task they would like. Knowing the students personally gave her the ability to lead students through the work and keep them focused. Students’ relationship with the speech therapist makes them more inclined to follow the expectations presented and work hard.

Increased Student Motivation

The last implication to consider is that student motivation can be affected by the teacher relationship as well. Students are more likely to try, to learn and to participate when they feel

motivated to better appease their teachers. Findings supporting this implication have been seen in practice and in articles by Johnston, Wildy and Shand (2022) and Sethi and Scales (2020).

Johnston, Wildy and Shand (2022) theorized that the way students respond to a teacher's expectations of them is a Basic Social Process (BSP). "The BSP of Reconciling with teachers' expectations is a theory that explains how students move through four stages of experiencing the effects of their teachers' expectations of them: Appraising, Responding, Acting and Reflecting" (page 4). According to this theory a student first appraises a teacher's expectation and decides based on an impression if this teacher has high expectations of them. Next the student responds to the expectation, high or low, which forms the action they will take. Finally, the student reflects on whether the action increased or decreased academic achievement. The impression a teacher makes on a student is key to the course of action the student will decide to take. A student will respond better to a teacher whom they trust and feel thinks highly of them. When a student has a strong relationship with a teacher, they will likely feel supported to continue academic efforts even if they feel challenged by them. One student simply stated, "I work harder with a nicer teacher" (Sethi and Scales, page 10). Though nicer is a very general term, I believe that this student sees a 'nice' teacher as one who understands them and has been proven trustworthy.

My observations have also contributed to my understanding of relationships as a tool to aid student classwork motivation. The relationships the speech therapist had with her students allowed her to keep them working and engaged. In one instance, a student had been working and began to have less focus and wanted to stop practicing. The speech therapist encouraged him by reminding him how good he was getting at working with his current sound words and how soon, he would move onto another. He was proud that he was moving onto another sound and began to practice again. Because she knows this student and what will encourage him, she was able to

keep him motivated. Keeping students motivated can be a hard task, especially when the material may be challenging for them- therefore a method for approaching this is a strong technique.

Future Research

Based on a review of current research and personal observations, there are two suggestions for future research. The first is to perform research on adults to see their impressions of their own relationships with teachers impacted their time in the pre-K to 12 environment and beyond, to see if there are lasting effects. There is current research on how teacher student relationships affect students into high school, but an understanding of the long term life affects of this methodology may be beneficial. The second suggestion is to integrate relationship building methodology into teacher trainings at the pre-K to 12 level. The creation of concrete relationship building strategies and suggestions on how to implement them may make building relationships with all students easier. If all students can form those connections, then all students will be able to receive the benefits that result in multiple aspects of their schooling.

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