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“HOW DOES THE CURRENT EDUCATIONAL CLIMATE IMPACT THE  
TEACHER’S ABILITY TO BUILD AND MAINTAIN QUALITY TEACHER-  
STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS?”

By

Kymberly Saba

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

May 2015

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To my students and my son, who inspire me every day to grow as an educator, and to provide a classroom where everyone feels that they are important, valued and safe to take educational risks.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

In 1947, Martin Luther King Jr. said, “The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character- that is the goal of true education.” As an educator, I believe the current educational climate does not allow for the fostering of either intelligence or character. Based on my experience, I believe the educational system in the United States requires our students to be passive learners while teachers are expected to skill and drill their students so they pass the mandated tests. The introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001 instigated the shift of the management of the modern classroom. NCLB set out to ensure students receive quality education from highly qualified teachers. Martin (2012) noted that while the intentions of this program were good, the reality was that it did little to help students’ achievement. Similarly, Flinders (2005) stated that NCLB set into motion a culture of fear; where schools and teachers were punished when their students did not meet the unrealistic goals set for them. The United States Department of Education (2014) reports that there are currently 43 out of 50 states that have received waivers from NCLB and have developed their own plans to improve education. Weiss (2014) explained that there was hope that the Race to the Top program would make up for what NCLB was lacking, but it too made little impact. This is because the program required schools to come up with their own unrealistic goals, and incorporated punishments for staff when students were unable to meet previously set goals. As an educator, I believe the pressure on schools to prove their



students have received quality education and for students to prove they have met learning requirements has turned our schools into institutions that are ruled by assessments.

As an educator, I firmly believe in knowing what your students know, so that as the teacher you can assist them in learning what they do not know. My question is, if we do not truly know who are students are as people and learners, how can we really help them further their education? If our students do not trust us or believe that we truly care about them, will they put forth the effort necessary to get them to where they need to be? Can we truly accomplish Dr. King's goal of teaching students to think intensively and critically without a solid base of trust? Research has shown that the quality of teacher-student relationships does have an impact on student success. Spilt, Hughes, Wu, and Kwok (2012) found that the relationship a student has with his teacher could either help or hinder his academic success. Likewise, McCormick, O'Conner, Cappella, and McClowry (2013) pointed out that when interventions are being planned, the focus should not solely be on student need and teacher preparedness, but also on building a quality relationship between the student and his teacher.

### My Educational Background

I was a child who was eager to learn, with a strong desire to be grown up. I recall wanting to learn how to read by reading medical books; not children's books. When it finally came time for me to start school, I quickly learned that it was nothing like what I imagined it would be. I thought I would be reading books and learning new things. However, my days were mostly filled with noodle necklaces and free play time. I developed no relationship with my teacher and not long into the school year, I lost my

desire to be at school. Thankfully, my third grade teacher took the time to know who each one of her students were and taught in a way that supported everyone's strengths. She asked us about our interests outside of school, and she related her lessons back to them. She also gave us choices of how we wanted to demonstrate our learning. For instance, people who liked art or music could design a project using those skills, and people who liked being in front of the class could teach a lesson. Her classroom felt safe: there was no worrying about what would happen if you stumbled on a word while reading aloud, or if you solved a math problem incorrectly on the blackboard. She assured each of us that the only way to truly learn was to make mistakes. At the end of that year, she wrote her address in each of our yearbooks and encouraged us to write her over the summer. She was the only teacher I had ever had who reached out to her students like that. Moreover, she was the only one who made it clear she wanted to stay connected after the school year was over.

When I look back on my time as a student, the times I had a positive relationship with my teacher were also the years I was more successful academically. I do not think I knew it at the time, but when the teacher seemed to truly care about the class and the students, I cared more about what I was doing in the class.

### My Professional Background

I have worked in my school district for fifteen years. I have had many different roles with children, in several different schools. It was while I was working in one of those schools that I truly found my calling to become a teacher. If you would have asked me what my dream career was when I was growing up, I never would have said teaching.

Although I had some great teachers, the ones who were not left me with a very negative view of teachers. I knew I wanted to work with children, but I thought it would be as a psychologist or in child advocacy. I started working in the district's school-aged care program while I was working on my bachelor's degree, because it complemented my class schedule and it sounded like a fun job. After I graduated, I continued to work in community education, but I switched to the kindergarten extended day program. While employed in that program, the principal asked me if I would ever consider teaching in a classroom. I told her I was not a teacher, and she told me that I should be. She told me that at the Parent Teacher Organization meeting that parents were talking about how the children loved me and that they were learning so much from me. A couple weeks later, I told the students I worked with that they were smart cookies. Then one little girl said "and you are our milk, because you cannot have cookies without milk." I went home that night and applied to a teacher licensure program. I knew then that the classroom was where I was meant to do my work with children.

I began working at my current school as an instructor for the community education school-aged care program. It was while I was in that position that I witnessed the strong sense of community within the building. The teachers often ate lunch in the cafeteria with their students. The students would talk after school about the cool things their teachers did with their class that day. Furthermore, the teachers and parents seemed to all know each other, and the parents supported the teachers. Witnessing the great things that were happening in that building further fueled my eagerness to enter into education.

I was not far into my teaching licensure program when I discovered not all schools had the same warm and welcoming climate. I realized then that my personal teaching philosophy centers around community and the belief that students are more successful when they feel their teacher believes in them. A third grade boy I met while working in a before and after school program solidified why relationships between the adults in the school and students are important. Days before this student was set to join the program, his classroom teacher wished me good luck and said she hoped that the boy would move now that his dad had remarried. My first thought after talking with his teacher was, what is he going to do to our program? My second thought was, I need to connect with him right away so that he knows he can trust me. When he joined the program there were some bumps in the road because he did not easily connect with the other students, leading to peer conflicts. He was also resistant to the program's structure; but he was not the monster his classroom teacher made him out to be. After a few weeks in the program, he and I developed a relationship and he slowly began finding himself and how he fit in the program. One day, after hearing about some negative things that had happened during his day, I asked him why he did not behave that way when I was around him. He simply stated, "Because you like me and the others hate me". He said "Why be good when they think I am bad?" I understood where he was coming from, because I too had felt that way about school. I'm sure he did not know it, but what he said had a strong, lasting impact on me. I too had had a teacher who formed an opinion about who I was without knowing anything about me or my life. This boy reminded me of how it felt to

have teachers who did not believe in me. He further motivated my aspiration to work with children and help those who feel out of place in school.

I was fortunate to be hired as a classroom teacher in the very building where my desire to be a teacher was fostered. One of the things I loved about that school was that it practiced looping. Nevin, Cramer, Voight, and Salazar (2008) defined looping as the practice of keeping a teacher or set of teachers with the same group of students for two or more years. The model that was followed in that building was that the classroom teacher remained with the same group of students for two school years. Looping had been in place since the school had opened with the belief that relationships have a substantial role in student achievement. Research has shown that both the teacher and students benefit from this practice due to the added time they have together (Nevin et al., 2008). During my second year teaching in that building, the school district implemented standards based grading. Standards based grading focuses on grading students purely on their mastery of the grade level set standards. It also focuses on common teaching strategies and assessments. While the idea of grading students purely on the mastery of the standards rather than things such as extra credit and attendance points sounded like a common sense idea, the teachers were the ones left with the job of creating new common assessments and common teaching practices. That year was very overwhelming for many of the teachers in my building. Grade level teams spent a lot of time that year trying to develop and implement common teaching practices and assessments. When the first year of standards based grading ended and the teachers started to think about how hard they worked on developing teaching practices and assessments, they were not looking forward

to starting over again with a new grade level the following year. Consequently, a large debate ensued, followed by a school wide vote. The majority of teachers voted to discontinue looping so that teachers could focus on one grade level instead of two. As my years in the building have continued, more pressures have been placed on the classroom teachers. Besides needing to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) as laid out in the No Child Left Behind legislation to prove good teaching was happening, the Read Well by Third Grade legislation was added by the Minnesota Department of Education. Read Well by Third Grade (2014) requires Minnesota schools to develop a literacy plan and submit data on reading proficiency for students in kindergarten through second grade annually. Reading, writing and weekly benchmarking of our students who are at risk for not meeting grade level standards has taken the place of hands on learning and project based learning. Moreover, with the increase in the number of students per classroom, along with the escalation of student needs, the pressure on teachers to help all students meet their goals is on the rise.

I am now left wondering if, in our current state, are our students going to be successful for the long road ahead, or merely successful at taking tests? School is becoming a land of never ending assessments for many students, as teachers are instructed to collect and evaluate data on a regular basis. With the trend in schools to be data focused, where does nurturing the learner, and knowing who your student is as a person come in? I personally struggle wondering, do I follow along with the push to focus my teaching around data, or do I follow my professional judgment and focus my teaching on my students' interests and needs? My teaching philosophy has always been

centered on building strong relationships with my students and their families, which in turn builds confident learners in the classroom. Through my research, I investigated how the current educational climate impacts the teachers' ability to build and maintain a quality teacher-student relationship.

### Chapter Summary

Our current education system has become a competition for who is the best (Hayden, 2011). Our students are compared to students in other countries. Our school districts are compared to one another without the consideration that schools and students are not carbon copies. Even within one school building there are many students who are different learners, just as every teacher is a different educator. The varied life experiences that the students and teachers bring to the classroom make each school and classroom a unique environment. That is not to say that there should not be some checks and balances to ensure students are growing and learning each school year. We obviously have not found the perfect model for our education system because not all students are being reached. But, I question a system that forces teachers to abandon activities that provide enriching life experiences because it is not covered on a standardized test. After I schedule in all the mandated activities using the required materials, there is no room left for activities that are individualized to my students' interests. It has been my experience in my own education and in my professional career that the best learning takes place when the bond between the teacher and student is present, and when the teacher truly knows who their student is. Yet, how can teachers build those relationships when they are working under the pressures of getting all their students to pass the tests? In the following

chapters, I examined research that looked at the correlation between positive teacher-student relationships and academic success. I also looked at the impact of the pressures on teachers and students along with researched classroom practices that foster the teacher-student relationship.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

In the education world, the focus is on closing the achievement gap so that all students are successful, which is pointed out in the Setting the Pace Report (2014). Hayden (2011) & Martin (2012) agreed that the problem lies in deciding how to make this happen. Some believe the answer is to look at education through a business lens, however that idea fails to take into account that learning is fluid and students are not carbon copies. Miller and Lassmann (2013) pointed out that all too often the teachers are the ones blamed for the students our education system has failed. Rushton and Juola-Rushton (2008) reported that teachers are now put in a place where they have to decide to follow best practices or to focus on teaching to the test, because of the pressures of accountability testing. As an educator, I want my students to enjoy school and develop a love for learning. I want them to know I believe in them and I support them. However, I worry that the current trend to focus on assessments is eliminating the time it takes to develop trusting relationships and is removing the fun from learning.

My literature review provides an overview of the current educational climate, including the expectations and stressors that are placed on the teachers and the students, such as increased class size and accountability testing. Furthermore, I will examine the research that demonstrates the role of teacher-student relationships and its impact on academic success. Finally, I highlighted practices which support the teacher-student relationship. All of the subsequent research provides the basis for my research question:

“How does the current educational climate impact the teacher’s ability to build and maintain quality teacher-student relationships?”

### Current Educational Climate

When No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was enacted in 2001, the goal was to ensure that all children were receiving quality education through increased accountability and choice in schools (No Child Left Behind, 2001). Schools were required to assess students annually in grades three through eight by administering standardized tests. Schools that consistently did not meet their adequate yearly progress (AYP) would be subject to penalties. However, this act meant that schools and teachers were graded based solely on students’ ability to pass the standardized tests imposed by NCLB. Flinders (2005) added that these “high stakes” standardized tests only show us which students are good at taking tests since they do not include information on why students chose the answers they did. Schools where students did not produce test scores meeting AYP were at risk of loss of funding or restructuring. Rapp (2002) found that instead of ensuring students were receiving high quality education, NCLB forced teachers’ hands, making their teaching a skill and drill process with an end goal of students being successful on the mandated standardized tests. Henley, McBride, Milligan, and Nichols (2007) stated that the reality of NCLB was that children were left behind, along with the love of teaching and learning.

After NCLB came the promise of a new initiative enacted by President Obama called Race to the Top. The Obama administration acknowledged that NCLB created an educational climate in which schools were forced to use “one-size-fits-all remedies” and standardized testing was “put ahead of a well-rounded curriculum” (Setting the Pace,

2014). The Race to the Top initiative invited states to develop an innovative plan to improve student learning and to ensure college and career readiness for all students. Of the states who submitted plans, grants were then awarded to the most innovative plans. Weiss (2013) pointed out that Race to the Top also brought forth unintended negative consequences. As states developed their innovative plans, many set unrealistic goals in hopes of earning a grant.

As an educator, I agree there are students who get lost in the cracks of our system and it is urgent that we find a way to educate all children. Hayden (2011) and Martin (2012) agreed that the educational reforms that have been introduced have not solved the problem but rather have unintentionally placed blame on teachers, assuming that the failures are due to a lack of or inadequate teaching. Due to the fault falling on schools and teachers, Flinders (2005) found that many schools started to spend the scarce funding they have on scripted curricula in hopes that it will solve the problem of not making AYP. As a teacher, I understand the struggle educators face. Teachers want to provide meaningful learning experiences for their students, but if their students do not know how to take and pass standardized tests, it is the teacher's ability that will inevitably be questioned.

If the looming annual standardized test does not add enough pressure to the classroom, the number of students and their varied needs compounds it. As a teacher, I know how overwhelming the thought of making sure every student is getting what he or she needs when your class size averages 30 students. Folmer-Annevelink, Doolaard, Mascareno, and Bosker (2009) found that smaller class sizes allow for the teacher to

better address individual student's needs, which leads to more engagement and learning. It is a daunting task to make sure everyone is learning something new every day, helping the students who are not performing at grade level expectations, and challenging the students who are at or above the grade level expectations. Miller and Lassmann (2013) noted that it is especially disheartening for teachers when they know that at the end of the year, no matter how hard they worked, if their students do not meet the grade level goal it will be viewed as the teacher's lack of ability. Hayden (2011) pointed out that teachers are now being asked to be responsible for things they have no control over; like students who do not maintain regular attendance or frequently change schools.

The current educational system is not just negatively impacting teachers. Rapp (2002) found that board certified teachers believe that the students are also being harmed by our test it, fix it, test it again system. Henley et al.'s (2007) research found that students who were not performing at grade level in reading and math were taken out of classes like art, social studies, health, and recess so they could work on the tested subjects. They also noted that for many of those students, the subjects they were removed from were the highlight of their day, resulting in a dislike of school. Rapp (2002) interviewed board certified teachers who reported that rich experiences and the love of learning are being replaced by fear and self-doubt because of the emphasis placed on standardized testing and making AYP. While I believe that there needs to be something in place to prove that learning is taking place, I do not believe standardized tests are the answer. In my teaching licensure program at Hamline University, I was instructed to not use multiple choice question tests to assess my students learning because the format

would not accurately show me what my students had learned. Yet, that is the method employed to measure student learning. Moreover, schools are devoting precious time to prepare students for those tests.

### The Importance of the Teacher-Student Relationship

I believe the current trend in education is so focused on assessment that other parts of the educational experience like classroom community are being overlooked. McCormick et al. (2013) found that teacher-student relationships do have an impact on the academic success of the student. They found that when students felt that their teacher truly believed in them, they in turn started to believe in themselves. Similarly, Rushton and Juola-Rushton (2008) found that an essential piece of an “engaged learning environment” is a classroom environment where everyone feels “valued” and “safe”. Split, Koomen, and Thijs (2011) found that students are not the only ones who benefit from positive teacher-student relationships. They noted that when quality relationships are in place, teachers view their work more positively. As an educator, I believe when teachers know who their students are outside of the classroom, they are better equipped to make learning more meaningful for the students.

As an educator, I can attest that the current trend in education threatens the ability to form those meaningful relationships because of the time that is dedicated to preparing for mandated testing. Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2014) noted that when teachers take time for social emotional learning, they are often questioned if that time is taking away from the learning of reading and math skills. Dutro and SELLAND (2012) found that students who already felt that they were poor readers saw high stakes tests as a comparison tool to their

higher achieving peers. They argue that for students who already have a poor outlook on their education, high stakes testing just increases that negativity and does little to increase their success (Dutro and Selland, 2012). McCormack et al. (2013) suggested that based on the correlation between positive teacher student relationships and academic success, our means of fostering and measuring student achievement should also promote the teacher-student relationship.

### Practices that Foster the Teacher Student Relationship

Through my research, I discovered that long before No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, there were educators who realized the importance of the relationship between the teacher and student and the relationship between school and home.

Throughout my teaching licensure program, I learned about the importance of relationships and some of the ways those relationships could be fostered. Some of the practices I have learned about are home visits, looping, and Responsive Classroom®. In the following section, I defined each practice and share how they impact the teacher-student relationship.

Stetson, Stetson, Sinclair, and Nix (2012) explained that home visits are when a teacher or a team of teachers visit a student and their family outside of the school building, often at the student's home. These visits allow the teacher to get to know the student and their family in an environment that is comfortable for the student and their family. The visits may occur once or throughout the school year. Meyer and Mann (2006) and Stetson et al. (2012) stated that teachers who partook in home visits reported that it improved the relationships they had with students and parents, and they felt bonded with

the students because they could relate to the students and families on a deeper level. Smith (2013) explained how home visits allowed her to see strengths in her students that she had not seen in the classroom. For example, a student who she thought was loitering after school was simply buying time until his mom got home from work, because being at school was safer than being home alone. Stetson et al. (2012) also noted that after the teacher had visited the student's home, the student sought the teacher's approval more often, leading them to believe that the student felt more connected to the teacher after the visit. Kimble (2012) explained how in her experience she had a time when she was unable to connect with a parent through traditional methods, so she decided to visit the parent's work, which happened to be a bar. She was able to connect with the parent and in turn get the student the help she needed. Kimble ran into that student years later when the student was graduating from high school. The student informed her that she had thought about dropping out at times, but then remembered the teacher she once had who believed in her enough to go to a bar to meet with her mother. Stetson et al. (2012) reported that teachers who incorporate home visits into their repertoire admit that it can be intimidating and more work, but they feel that what they gain is well worth it.

Another method that can be used to build the teacher student relationship is looping. Looping is defined as a core group of students and a single teacher that remain together for multiple years (Nichols and Nichols, 2002). Grant, Johnson, and Richardson, (1996) noted that the length of the loop can vary in the numbers of years the teacher and students remain together, with the average length being two years. They state the act of looping is intended to provide students with a consistent supportive learning environment

similar to a family unit (Grant, Johnson, and Richardson, 1996). Simel (1998) reported that the family-like community that is built into a looping classroom is highly beneficial to students who come from unstable or unsupportive homes, reporting that those students view their classroom as a second family. Burke (1997) noted that students who participated in a looping model scored higher on reading and math standardized tests than their non-participating peers. It was also noted that looping led to less need for retention and more time-on-task due to the fact that students did not need to spend time learning classroom expectations the second year (Burke, 1997).

George and Lounsbury (2002) reported that with today's schools becoming bigger and bigger, there is a need to help keep students from feeling lost within our schools. Little and Little (2001) reported that students who are part of a looping classroom are better able to see themselves as an important piece of the classroom structure, which in turn leads to a stronger sense of pride in the school. Rodriguez and Arenz (2007) stated that looping gives students consistency within the classroom environment, leading to a sense of belonging to a group and a close emotional bond with the teacher. They also noted that looping increases the working relationship between the teacher and the student. George and Lounsbury (2000) found that students who looped felt that their teacher believed in them and wanted them to be successful. They also noted that student behavior issues decreased when teachers looped with students because the students knew what to expect and the teacher-student relationship had previously been formed.

Another tool that I have witnessed schools use to build the teacher-student relationship is Responsive Classroom®, which I will further refer to as RC®. RC® is a



set of teaching strategies that fosters social-emotional learning as well as academic learning. As found on the Responsive Classroom website (2014), the following are some of the classroom practices that foster community and belonging in the classroom: Daily Morning Meetings; Whole Class Rule Creation; Interactive Modeling; Positive Teacher Language; Logical Consequences. Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2014) found that students who were part of a classroom that implemented the RC® practices had higher scores on the math standardized tests than their peers who did not experience the RC® practices. The idea behind RC® is that it helps “children build academic and social-emotional competencies” (Responsive Classroom, 2014). Furthermore, Curby, Rimm-Kaufman, and Abry (2013) noted that implementing the RC® practices not only promotes a positive classroom climate, but it may also promote stronger teacher instruction and improved student learning.

### Chapter Summary

Although research has shown that students do not gain knowledge through standardized testing, it continues to be the trend in education (Rapp, 2002). While I have read plenty of research that indicates a correlation between positive teacher student relationships and academic success, as an educator, I can say that the focus in education remains on testing and data collection. In the next chapter, I explored how the current educational climate impacts teachers’ ability to build and maintain a quality teacher-student relationship. I first looked at how teachers view the teacher-student relationship and the importance they place on the teacher-student relationship. I then examined how teachers promoted the teacher-student relationship in their classroom. Lastly, I analyzed

if there were differences in how teachers viewed the teacher-student relationship based on the grade level and subject they taught and the number of years they have been teaching.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

As an educator, I am continually seeking out the best way to connect with students to ensure each one is growing academically and social-emotionally. I have concerns with the current trend in education to focus mainly on administering tests and collecting data. While I agree that data has a place in education, I believe we are missing the opportunity to educate the whole child when we focus too much on one area. Despite the fact that research has shown the positive impact of the teacher-student relationship on academic success, this relationship seems to be neglected as education initiatives are being developed (Flinders, 2005; Hughes, Wu, Kwok, Villarreal, and Johnson, 2011; Jeffery, Auger, and Pepperell, 2013). In this chapter, I identify the methodologies that I used to further explore my capstone question, “How does the current educational climate impact the teacher’s ability to build and maintain quality teacher-student relationships?” My study was designed to examine the teacher’s perspective about the role of the teacher-student relationship in the current educational world. Moreover, it specifically looked at the value that each teacher placed on the teacher-student relationship, if they felt that the educational system valued it, as well as, how teachers developed relationships with their students in their classroom.

#### Setting

The school where I conducted my research is a large suburban elementary school in the Midwest region. I selected this school because it has practiced looping, along with team teaching and pieces of the Responsive Classroom® philosophy. There are currently

35 classroom teachers teaching in grades kindergarten through sixth grade. In addition to the classroom teachers there are numerous licensed specialty teachers. The average classroom size is 26 students per teacher in the primary grades and 30 students per teacher in the intermediate grades. The building contains a mix of teachers in various stages of their teaching career; beginning teachers with less than four years of classroom experience, teachers with ten or more years of classroom experience, and teachers who are nearing retirement.

### Participants

All of the licensed teachers of the selected site were emailed a letter requesting their participation in the study. The email (see appendix B) explained that the study was part of my graduate program research and that the study's intent was to look at the teacher-student relationship. It also explained that there were two parts to the study; the first part being an anonymous questionnaire (see appendix C) and the second part being follow-up questions (see appendix D) that I would develop based on the questionnaire answers. Within the questionnaire, the teachers were able to indicate if they were interested in participating in the second part of the study. Of the 35 licensed teachers who were given access to the online questionnaire, 26 completed it. Of those 26 participants, 12 indicated they would be willing to participate in the follow-up questions. I chose this participant pool of licensed teachers from a large suburban elementary school because the teacher population varies in teaching experience, as well as experience within their current building and teaching experiences in other buildings.

## Method

I used a mixed method to collect data from a population of licensed teachers. Mixed method research involves the incorporation of aspects of both quantitative and qualitative research in so that the research is richer than what could have been done using only a single method (Creswell 2009). I sent an email to the licensed teachers at the chosen site. The email contained an informational letter (see Appendix B) stating why I was doing this study and what the study was examining. If they chose to participate, there was a consent form (see Appendix B) for them to fill out and a link to the online questionnaire. Of the 35 licensed teachers who had access to the online questionnaire, 26 of them completed it. The questionnaire included a section on attitudes about the current teaching climate, attitudes about teacher-student relationships, the use of specific teaching strategies to build relationships, and an open-ended question section about their personal experiences with building and maintaining positive teacher-student relationships. In the questionnaire, the participants were also asked if they would be willing to answer some follow-up questions. Of the 26 questionnaire participants, 12 of them indicated that they would be interested in answering some follow-up questions. I based my follow-up questions on the responses I received on the questionnaire. I contacted all 12 of the interested participants, however I only received responses from 3 of them. I chose to begin my study with an online questionnaire believing that the ease of an online questionnaire and the increased anonymity would result in greater participation. I initially thought that I would personally select a group for the follow-up questions who were diverse in their teaching experiences. However, based on the small number of

willing participants, I sought out all of the willing participants. This study allowed me to gain a better understanding of the view of the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of a variety of licensed teachers. By using a mixed method design, I believe I gained a more in-depth understanding of the impacts of the current educational climate on the teacher-student relationship.

#### Human Subject Approval

I received approval for my capstone study from the MAEd Human Subject Committee in the Graduate School of Education (see Appendix A). I also received approval from the building principal where my study took place. The following measures were put into place to ensure the rights of all participants in my study:

1. I have used pseudonyms when referring to any individual in the study.
2. I used the online program, Survey Monkey, to administer the initial questionnaire, which allowed for me to collect data without knowing individual's identities.
3. All emails that were collected during my study were deleted at the completion of the study.
4. All consent forms and physical data collection materials were kept in a secure location.

My research project did not include the participation of students and is based solely on the teacher perspective.

### Analysis

I analyzed the data that I collected through an online questionnaire and follow-up questions looking for common themes. I looked for themes among grade levels, years worked as a licensed teacher, and years worked in the current building. I hoped to see patterns throughout the responses given by teachers with similar experiences. Specifically, I looked to see if attitudes about the teacher-student relationship varied based on teacher experience. Moreover, I looked for how the current educational climate impacts teachers' ability to build and maintain quality teacher-student relationships. In chapter four, I include a detailed narrative of the data analysis for the online questionnaire portion and the follow-up question portion of my study.

### Chapter Summary

Through this mixed method research, I set out to explore how the current educational climate impacts teachers' ability to build and maintain a quality teacher-student relationship. Past research has shown that the teacher-student relationship is important to the academic success of the student (Spilt et al., 2012; Toste, 2012). My goal was to gain a better understanding of how teachers are impacted and are dealing with our current educational climate, and how it has changed how they are able to build and maintain relationships with their students.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

In this chapter, I present the results of this study which examined the question: How does the current educational climate impact the teacher's ability to build and maintain quality teacher-student relationships? As a former student and currently an educator, I have personally experienced the impact of a positive relationship between a teacher and the student. When I found research as described by Spilt et al. (2012) and Toste (2012) that highlighted the benefits of positive teacher-student relationships on academic success, I was compelled to explore this further. This study was conducted in two phases. The results are presented as phase one; the anonymous online questionnaire and phase two; the follow-up questions that were developed based upon the responses to the questionnaire. I conclude this chapter with the themes and patterns I discovered throughout both phases.

#### Phase One: Anonymous Online Questionnaire

I began this phase by emailing all of the licensed teachers at the chosen site. The email (see Appendix B) included a letter stating that I was a graduate student conducting a study on teacher-student relationships. The letter also contained information regarding how I planned to protect their anonymity and that I had planned two phases for the study. In the first phase, their responses would be anonymous and in the second phase, I would be the only one with access to their responses. The licensed teachers who were willing to participate completed a consent form (see Appendix B) and used a link in my email to access the online questionnaire (see Appendix C). Of the 35 licensed teachers who had



access to the online questionnaire, 26 of them completed it. All of the questionnaire participants had the option to skip any question and or stop participating at any time. The questionnaire asked the following questions:

- What grade level do you teach?
- How long have you been teaching?
- Do you feel that the educational system in our country values the relationship between the teacher and the student?
- How important do you feel it is to build relationships with your students?
- How much has the importance placed on standardized tests limited the time you have to build and maintain your relationships with your students?
- How well do you feel you know your students and their interests outside of the classroom/school day?
- How much time do you spend weekly on relationship building with your students?
- Do you think your students would say that they have a quality relationship with you?
- What do you use to build relationships with your students?
- Are you willing to answer some follow up questions?

I will now go into the results for each of the aforementioned questions.

Tables 4.1 and 4.2 show the results for questions 1 and 2 in the questionnaire. I used these questions to better understand the experience level of the participants.

Table 4.1

Survey Monkey Q:1 What grade level do you teach?

<b>Answer Choices</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Years Teaching 1-3 years</b>	<b>Years Teaching 4-10 years</b>	<b>Years Teaching 10-20 years</b>	<b>Years Teaching 21+years</b>
K-3	34.62%      9	1	0	5	3
4-6	23.08%      6	2	0	3	1
Multi-Grade	42.31%      11	3	4	2	2
<b>Total</b>	26	5	4	10	6

Table 4.2

Survey Monkey Q:2 How long have you been teaching?

<b>Answer Choices</b>	<b>Responses</b>
1-3 years	23.08%      6
4-10 years	15.38%      4
10-20 years	38.46%      10
21+ years	23.08%      6
<b>Total</b>	26

As seen in tables 4.1 and 4.2, there was a variety of teacher experiences represented. From these two questions, I knew the respondents represented were mostly classroom teachers (meaning that they have one set of students for the whole day), who had been teaching between 4 and 20 years. This was kept in mind as I looked over the

rest of the questionnaire, knowing how the initiatives in education have changed over my career, and knowing how they have changed from when I was a K-12 student. The following table, 4.3 shows the results from question 3, which looked at the teachers' opinion on how the United States educational system values the teacher-student relationship.

Table 4.3

Survey Monkey Q:3 Do you feel that the educational system in our country values the relationship between the teacher and the student?

Answer Choices	Responses	Years Teaching 1-3 years	Years Teaching 4-10 years	Years Teaching 10-20 years	Years Teaching 21+years
Yes	50.00% 13	3	3	5	2
No	11.54% 3	1	0	1	1
Somewhat	38.46% 10	2	1	4	3
<b>Total</b>	26	6	4	10	6

As seen in table 4.3, half of the participants felt that the educational system in our country values the teacher student relationship. However, just under half of the participants felt that it is only *somewhat* valued. For this question, the participants had the ability to further explain their answer. Participant 22 responded “somewhat” and explained that he or she feels that “it is becoming less and less important to those who are making the decisions. Participant 25 also responded “somewhat” and explained that he or she feels “it depends on the administration, district, and the community. Some promote this relationship better than others”. The following tables 4.4-4.9 show the results for questions 4-9 of the questionnaire respectively. Those questions looked at the teachers’

personal view of the teacher-student relationship, how it is impacted by the current educational system, and how they build relationships with their students. Table 4.4 shows that all of the participants felt that building relationships with their students is *somewhat very important to very important*. Participant 25 commented that “students will learn when they feel valued and important by the adults in their lives.”

Table 4.4

Survey Monkey Q:4 How important do you feel it is to build relationships with your students?

Answer Choices	Responses	Years Teaching 1-3 years	Years Teaching 4-10 years	Years Teaching 10-20 years	Years Teaching 21+years
Not Important	0% 0	0	0	0	0
Somewhat Not Important	0% 0	0	0	0	0
Important	0% 0	0	0	0	0
Somewhat Very Important	3.85% 1	0	0	0	1
Very Important	96.15% 25	6	4	10	5
<b>Total</b>	26	6	4	10	6

Table 4.5 shows the responses to question 5 of the questionnaire. The participants were more divided as to what extent standardized tests limit the time they have to build and maintain relationships with their students. However, over half of the participants felt the importance that is placed on standardized tests has *somewhat to very much* limited the time they have to build relationships with their students. Participant 4 noted that it is the “standardized tests along with district mandates and time constraints” that limit the time there is to build relationships. Participant 25 commented, that “I’m always assessing, preparing for the test, not truly able to take time and focus on the individual needs of my

students.” Two of the participants responded *Not At All*, but then commented that they did not feel that this question applied to them because the student population that they work with does not take standardized tests.

Table 4.5

Survey Monkey Q:5 How much has the importance placed on standardized tests limited the time you have to build and maintain your relationships with your students?

Answer Choices	Responses	Years Teaching 1-3 years	Years Teaching 4-10 years	Years Teaching 10-20 years	Years Teaching 21+years
Not At All	15.38% 4	*1	*1	1	1
Somewhat Not At All	3.85% 1	1	0	0	0
Somewhat	42.31% 11	2	2	5	2
Somewhat Very Much	23.08% 6	1	0	2	3
Very Much	15.38% 4	1	1	2	0
<b>Total</b>	26	6	4	10	6

*Note*-Two of the teachers who responded “Not At All” noted that their students do not take standardized tests.

The information presented in table 4.6 shows the result of question 6 on the questionnaire, which asked teachers how well they know their students and their interests outside of the classroom. 88.46% or 23 of the participants said they know their students and their interests outside of school *Somewhat to Somewhat Very Well*. Participant 25 answered *somewhat* and commented, “[I] wish I had more time to just talk with them and learn more about their interests.”

Table 4.6

Survey Monkey Q:6 How well do you feel you know your students and their interests outside of the classroom?

Answer Choices	Responses	Years Teaching 1-3 years	Years Teaching 4-10 years	Years Teaching 10-20 years	Years Teaching 20+years
Not At All	0.00% 0	0	0	0	0
Somewhat Not At All	7.69% 2	1	0	1	0
Somewhat	50.00% 13	2	2	6	3
Somewhat Very Well	38.46% 10	3	2	3	2
Very Well	3.35% 1	0	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	26	6	4	10	6

The information in table 4.7 shows how much time each participant spends weekly on building relationships within their classroom. The majority of the participants spend an hour or more weekly on relationship building. More specifically, 26.92% or 7 of the 26 participants spend one hour a week building relationships. While 53.85% or 14 of the 26 indicated that they spend more than one hour a week building relationships within their classroom. Participant 8 responded *Less Than 1 Hour* and noted, “I have limited access to students.”

Table 4.7

Survey Monkey Q:7 How much time do you spend weekly on relationship building with your students?

<b>Answer Choices</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Years Teaching 1-3 years</b>	<b>Years Teaching 4-10 years</b>	<b>Years Teaching 10-20 years</b>	<b>Years Teaching 20+years</b>
Less Than 1 Hour	19.23% 5	0	1	3	1
1 Hour	26.92% 7	3	1	2	1
More Than 1 Hour	53.85% 14	3	2	5	4
<b>Total</b>	26	6	4	10	6

Table 4.8 shows the responses to question 8 on the questionnaire, which asked the participants if they thought their students would say they had a quality relationship with them. Most of the teachers were either unsure of what their students would say or felt that they would say yes. Specifically, 69.23% or 18 out of the 26 participants responded *yes* their students would say they have a quality relationship with them. While 26.92% or 7 out of 26 of the participants were unsure if their students would say they have a quality relationship with them. Only one participant responded *No* and that participant did not comment as to why he or she thought this.

Table 4.8

Survey Monkey Q:8 Do you think your students would say that they have a quality relationship with you?

<b>Answer Choices</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Years Teaching 1-3 years</b>	<b>Years Teaching 4-10 years</b>	<b>Years Teaching 10-20 years</b>	<b>Years Teaching 20+years</b>
Yes	69.23% 18	5	3	7	3
No	3.85% 1	0	0	1	0
Unsure	26.92% 7	1	1	2	3
<b>Total</b>	26	6	4	10	6

Table 4.9 shows the results of question 9 on the questionnaire, which asked the teachers how they build relationships within their classroom. Only 23 of the 26 participants chose to answer this question. Of the 23 participants who answered the question, some of them selected more than one answer. 18 of the 23 teachers who responded selected that they use some of the components of Responsive Classroom®, like morning meetings. Grade level get-togethers was the next most selected answer with 6 of the 23 participants selecting that as a way they build relationships with their students. For question 9, the participants could also add anything that was not listed that they did as a means of building relationships with their students. 4 of the 23 participants stated that they eat lunch with their students to get to know them better. Similarly, 3 of the 23 participants stated that they try to have one on one time or small group time with their students. 5 of the 23 participants indicated that they make a point of having the students



share what is happening in their lives and what they are interested in outside of the school day. One teacher went further and stated that it is important to really listen to what the students are saying. Beyond knowing what the students are interested in outside of the school day, 4 of the participating teachers said that they attend sporting or other events that their students are involved in. Additionally, 2 teachers also wrote in that they attend birthday parties and family dinners. Teachers conjointly noted that it was important to build a relationship with students' families. In the classroom, several teachers indicated that they like to plan academic activities that focus on the students' interests. One teacher mentioned the use of Michael Grinder's (1996) ENVoY strategies for classroom management.

Table 4.9

Survey Monkey Q:9 What do you do or use to build relationships with your students?

<b>Answer Choices</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Years Teaching 1-3 years</b>	<b>Years Teaching 4-10 years</b>	<b>Years Teaching 10-20 years</b>	<b>Years Teaching 20+years</b>	
Responsive Classroom- all components	17.39%      4	0	0	3	1	
Responsive Classroom- some components like morning meeting	78.26%      18	5	3	5	5	
Home Visits	4.35%      1	0	0	0	1	
Grade Level Get - Togethers	26.09%      6	0	1	4	1	
<b>Total</b>		29	5	4	12	8

*Note*-Only 23 of the 26 participants chose to answer this question, some chose more than one answer or listed what they did.

In Phase 2 of the study, I looked to see if there were trends in answers across grade levels taught. The following are the results I found during phase 2 of the study.

#### Phase Two: Follow-up Questions Based on the Questionnaire Responses

The participants for the second phase were selected based on their interest indicated on the questionnaire in the first phase of the study. Twelve of the 26 participants of the anonymous questionnaire portion of the study indicated that they would be interested in answering some follow-up questions based on the questionnaire. Initially, I thought I would look through the pool of willing participants and hand select my pool of participants to ensure I was getting a group who varied in years taught and grade levels taught. However, with only 12 participants willing to participate in the follow-up questions, I sought out all 12 of the willing volunteers. I contacted the 12 willing participants through email thanking them for their continued interest in helping me with my study. Because of the lack of interest in wanting to answer follow-up questions, I gave them some choice in how they received and answered the follow-up questions. I thought that by giving the participants some options, I would get better participation. I gave the participants the option to receive and answer the questions through email or through a brief in-person meeting. Only 5 of the 12 contacted participants responded. All of them indicated that they would like to answer the follow-up questions through email. Of those 5 participants, only 3 of them responded to the questions. The following data is what I collected from the 3 participants. I refer to the participants in this phase as A, B, and C. I first asked about their different teaching experiences, such as teaching in different buildings within their current school district,

teaching in different school districts within their current state and teaching in different states. I also asked them about the number of years they have been teaching. In the questionnaire they were asked about number of years they had taught but it was not specific to the exact number of years. Table 4.10 shows the 3 teachers' responses to the aforementioned questions. All three of the participants have had experiences outside of their current building within their current district. Additionally they all have experiences outside of their current school district. All three participants have been teaching for more than a decade. I believe that while my participant pool for the follow-up questions is small, their different experiences will still help in answering my research question of; How does the current educational climate impact the teacher's ability to build and maintain quality teacher-student relationships?

Table 4.10 How many building, districts, and states have you taught in. How many years have you taught?

Participant	Number of buildings taught in in current district	Number of districts taught in current state	Number of states taught in	Number of years teaching
A	2	2	1	16
B	3	2	1	17
C	5	2	2	25

Next, I asked them the following question: Do you feel that the pressures and expectations on teachers has changed during your time teaching? The following are their responses:

Participant A stated:

Yes, the pressure and expectations are higher. There are more interventions expected of a regular classroom teacher. We don't have the time to individualize an educational plan for each student (2015).

Participant B stated:

Yes! The amount of work that has been added over the years is incredible. Some of the things added are: technology, PLC's/Data Teams, new curriculums, district expectations, building expectations, parent issues (backing the child over the teacher, not ever telling their child no, lack of discipline at home), as well as whatever federal law we happen to be under. Many of these things are good, but when they are added to an already full plate and nothing else is taken off it is overwhelming. The lack of training and support for things such as technology and district expectations adds more stress than help. The technology should be helpful, yet we are constantly being asked to check our email when we should be with students. If you are in a building without adequate administrative support, it is even more overwhelming. The needs of students have also increased. There is a huge gap between the students who come into school with no experience and learning and those that have been given experiences at home (2015).

Participant C stated:

Yes, teachers are required to do many more tasks than in the past. These tasks range from custodial housekeeping items to the implementation of an

overwhelming amount of special programs. Classroom student numbers have risen as have the diversification of student cultures and primary needs (2015).

While all three agreed that the pressures and expectations have increased for teachers, they varied in their given examples. Participant A focused on the increased amount of interventions teachers are required to do. Participant B noted pressures from expectations that had been handed down by the government, school district, building administration, and parents. Participant C focused the pressures added within the building such as decreased custodial support, an increased number of special programs, and the increase in class size.

Next, I asked them what they felt were the barriers to building relationships with students in 2015. The following are their answers:

Participant A stated:

I feel I have a good relationship with most of my students. But the time it takes to fit in all of the curriculum requirements takes away from the relationship building a bit (2015).

Participant B stated:

Time. Our schedules are dictated to us and we have so much to “get to” that we don’t have the time to invest in our students. Technology can be another barrier. Children have so much screen time that they don’t know how to interact with an actual person (2015).

Participant C stated:

Our “core curriculum” day has expanded so that even the teaching of art, science, handwriting, spelling and social studies often go untaught. Class sizes have also grown. Time for building relationships has definitely suffered (2015).

All three participants talked about their daily schedule and what was expected to be covered each day as a barrier to building relationships. I next asked them if they had taught different grade levels and if so did they feel that certain grade levels are easier to build relationships with than others. The following are their responses:

Participant A stated:

I have taught 6, 3, and mostly 4. I feel a teacher needs to know what age of child she is comfortable with and that will help build the relationship with students (2015).

Participant B stated:

I have taught grades K, 1, & 2. I feel it is easier the younger they are. They want to please their teacher and have their teacher like them (2015).

Participant C stated:

I have taught grades 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6. I believe the ease of building relationships with students is the same at all grade levels but at the same time VERY different. Relationships with younger children are not as deep and long lasting. Most likely due to their developmental stage in the primary years. My relationships with my older students were closer to that of a friendship and as a result longer lasting (2015).

While participants A and C did not feel the grade level factored into building relationships with students, participant B felt the younger the student, the easier it was. Participant A felt that the teacher's own comfort level was more of a factor in the ability to build relationships within the classroom. Finally, participant C noted that while the grade level does not impact the ability to build relationships, the type of relationship is different based on the developmental stage of the student.

My final question to the participants was, over their career, what ways have they found to build positive relationships with their students. Their answers follow:

Participant A stated:

I always find when you ask questions and understand more about students' likes and dislikes, they trust you and that will build the relationship. And making sure you have a direct partnership with the parents (2015).

Participant B stated:

I think my training in Responsive Classroom® helped. Letting the child talk and just listening also fosters positive relationships. Eating lunch, asking questions about their personal life and just seeing them as a special person are other ways I've built relationships (2015).

Participant C stated:

I make use of newsletters on a classroom website and phone calls more than in the past (2015).

Overall, between the 3 participants, there was a trend of communication as a means of building relationships. Moreover, the relationship building was not limited to just the student but also with the students' family.

### Chapter Summary

In looking at the results from both the online questionnaire and the follow-up questions, there were some notable themes in the responses. Overall teachers highly support the teacher-student relationship and spend time developing it. They also wished there was more time to focus on building and maintaining relationships; but as participants A, B, and C, noted over time, the expectations and demands on teachers has limited the freedom to make time for relationship building during the school day. Another theme I noticed was that many of the teachers talked about extending their relationship building beyond the classroom to building relationships with their students' families. In Chapter Five I will discuss the major findings of this study as well as limitations of this study and some suggestions for further this research.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### Results

Currently in the educational world the focus is on closing the achievement gap so that all students are reaching academic success (No Child Left Behind, 2001; Minnesota Department of Education, 2014; & Setting the Pace Report, 2014). Hayden (2011) & Martin (2012) reported that the discrepancy lies in how to achieve this. The current focus is data driven, and in my professional experiences, that has meant weekly meetings to plan interventions as well as assessing my students weekly to monitor their progress. As I read research about student achievement, I discovered more and more research that pointed out the positive impact that the teacher-student relationship had on academic success (McCormack et al., 2013; Spilt et al., 2012). As an educator whose teaching philosophy centers on knowing the whole student, I found this interesting. I personally struggle with finding the time each day to fit in what is mandated, as well as searching for time to squeeze in what I know is best for my students. This study set out to find if other teachers were facing the same struggle and examines the research question: How does the current educational climate impact the teacher's ability to build and maintain quality teacher-student relationships?

#### Major Findings

This study looked at the teacher-student relationship from the teacher's perspective. Specifically, at the importance they place on the teacher-student relationship, the time they dedicate to fostering it, how they foster it, and barriers to building

relationships with their students. The teachers in this study all believed that the teacher-student relationship is important. They also indicated that they dedicate time every week to building relationships with their students. The teachers' opinions did vary on how much they thought the importance placed on standardized tests impacts their ability to build and maintain relationships within their classroom. The majority of the teachers surveyed believed the importance placed on standardized tests has at least somewhat impacted them. Moreover, the teachers who participated in the follow-up questions all stated that the demands and expectations on teachers has increased over their careers, which has limited the time they now have to focus on individual students. All of these findings align with the research that lead me to this study.

#### Limitations of This Study

There were several limitations with this study. The first limitation being the small sample size. While there were trends among the participants' responses, the number of responses was relatively small. Another limitation to this study was that all of the participants currently teach in the same building. While many of the participants have taught for many years and presumably in different buildings, it is hard to say how much their current work situation impacted their feelings and answers. Finally, this study failed to identify why the teachers valued the teacher-student relationship. It is unknown if they believe that it adds to the students' academic success like I found in reading others' research, if they believe it is important to the management of the classroom, or if there is another reason altogether.

### Suggestions for Future Research

Considering the major findings of this study, I would recommend continued exploration of how the current educational climate impacts the teachers' ability to build and maintain quality teacher-student relationships. More specifically, looking at student academic success in correlation to the quality of the teacher-student relationship. I also think it would be worthwhile to look at this in different regions of our country, looking at if teachers all over our country face the same challenges in being able to build relationships within their classrooms. There is no arguing the fact that there is an achievement gap between our students. However, the initiatives that have been put in place so far have yet to impact that gap. Looking forward, I think it is important that we continue to look for a means to close the gap, and the teacher-student relationship could be an important piece of the solution.

APPENDIX A:

Human Subjects Approval

To: Kymberly Saba

From: Barbara Swanson

Date: 1-6-15

Re: HSC Approval

We have received the information requested, so on behalf of the Human Subjects Committee, we are pleased to inform you that your application has been unconditionally approved. You are now able to collect data related to your capstone.

Please accept our best wishes for the successful completion of your project.

Barbara Swanson, EdD

Chair, HSC Committee

School of Education

Hamline University

[bswanson@hamline.edu](mailto:bswanson@hamline.edu)

[\(651\) 523-2813](tel:(651)523-2813)

**APPENDIX B:**  
**Consent Letter and Forms**

January 15, 2015

Dear Fellow Teachers,

I am completing my master's degree in education at Hamline University. As part of my graduate work, I plan to conduct research during the month of January, 2015. The purpose of my letter is to ask for your participation in my research. The final product will be a printed, bound capstone (thesis) that will be shelved in Hamline's Bush Library. I may also publish or use my findings in scholarly ways in the future.

My master's capstone (thesis) will look at how the current educational climate impacts the teacher's ability to build and maintain quality teacher student relationships. I will conduct my research through a confidential online questionnaire. Based on my findings, I may need to ask more in-depth questions. If you are comfortable and willing to participate in further questions outside of the confidential questionnaire, there will be a place for you to indicate that on the questionnaire.

There is little to no risk if you choose to participate. All results will be confidential and anonymous. Pseudonyms for the district, school and participants will be used. Any follow up questions will be conducted in a way that is easy for the participant.

Your participation in any part of the research is voluntary, and, at any time, you may decline from participation.

I have received approval from the School of Education at Hamline University and from (*name omitted for confidentiality*), (*name omitted for confidentiality*) Elementary School Principal to conduct this study. The capstone will be catalogued in Hamline's Bush Library Digital Commons, a searchable electronic repository. My results might be included in an article in a professional journal or a session at a professional conference. In all cases, your identity and participation in this study will be confidential.

If you agree to participate, keep this page. Fill out the duplicate agreement to participate on page two and return it to me through my mailbox in the school office or email me a copy no later than January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Kymberly Saba  
(*Contact information omitted*)

Informed Consent to Participate  
*Keep this full page for your records*

I have received the letter about your research study for which you be administering a confidential questionnaire. I understand that during the questionnaire there will be an opportunity for me to volunteer for follow up questions. I understand that my participation in this study poses little to no risk for me, that my identity will be protected, and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences.

---

Signature

---

Date



Informed Consent to Participate  
*Return this portion to Kimberly Saba*

I have received the letter about your research study for which you be administering a confidential questionnaire. I understand that during the questionnaire there will be an opportunity for me to volunteer for follow up questions. I understand that my participation in this study poses little to no risk for me, that my identity will be protected, and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences.

---

Signature

---

Date

APPENDIX C:  
Questionnaire Questions

## Questionnaire Questions

1. What grade level do you teach?

**K-3 4-6 Multi-grade**

2. How long have you been teaching?

**1-3 years 4-10 years 10-20 years 20+years**

3. Do you feel that the educational system in our country values the relationship between the teacher and the student?

**Yes No Somewhat**

Comments

4. How important do you feel it is to build relationships with your students?

**Not Important, Somewhat Not Important, Important, Somewhat Very Important, Very Important**

Comments

5. How much has the importance placed on standardized tests limited the time you have to build and maintain your relationships with your students?

**Not At All, Somewhat Not At All, Somewhat, Somewhat Very Much, Very Much**

Comments

6. How well do you feel you know your students and their interests outside of the classroom/school day?

**Not At All, Somewhat Not At All, Somewhat, Somewhat Very Well, Very Well**

Comments

7. How much time do you spend weekly on relationship building with your students?

**Less than 1 hour**

**1 hour**

**More than 1 hour**

Comments

8. Do you think your students would say that they have a quality relationship with you?

**Yes No Unsure**

Comments

9. What do you do or use to build relationships with your students?

**Responsive Classroom- all components**

**Morning meeting**

**Home**

**visits**

**Grade level get together**

**other**

Comments

10. Are you willing to answer some follow-up questions? If so, please leave your name and email address.

Name and email

APPENDIX D:

Follow-Up Questions

- 1) Have you taught in different buildings, Districts, and or states? If so, for how long?

\*You do not need to name them.

Buildings:

Districts:

States:

- 2) How many years have you been teaching?
- 3) Do you feel that the pressures and expectations on teachers has changed during your time teaching? Please explain.
- 4) What do you feel are the barriers to building relationships with students in 2015?
- 5) Have you taught in multiple grade levels? If so, do you feel that it is easier to build relationships in certain grade levels?
- 6) Over your teaching career what new ways have you found to build positive relationships with your students.

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