POSITIVE DEVIANT TEACHERS: HOW BELIEFS, RELATIONAL DYNAMICS WITH STUDENTS, AND ADMINISTRATOR LEADERSHIP STYLE IMPACT THEIR SUCCESS WITH DISENGAGED STUDENTS

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Daniel Harker, and my son, Zachary Harker, whose support and encouragement enabled me to complete this.

I also dedicate this dissertation to all of the struggling students I have had the honor of supporting in my career. You were the inspiration behind my pursuit of this project.

Abstract

Teachers of chronically disengaged students are at risk for burnout and attrition. This qualitative study used a systemic, ecological lens to investigate how highly skilled secondary teachers built relationships with disengaged students. Data were collected through observations of four teachers and semi-structured interviews with 12 teachers, five administrators, and seven adults whose lives were impacted by a teacher. At the core of their success were two beliefs: (1) the purpose of education was to support the human development of students, and (2) authenticity was key to their success. Additional findings highlighted parallel beliefs of administrators who supported teacher success and increased their job satisfaction. Teacher education needs to shift its focus from teaching strategies to a more in-depth development of the teacher's philosophy and being to enhance how they use themselves in building relationships with disengaged students.

Preface: About the Researcher

I have a great passion for helping disadvantaged students who struggle to engage in school. Prior to pursuing my Ph.D., I worked in a middle school supporting students who struggled socially, emotionally, and behaviorally. I also served on a leadership team guiding school-wide efforts to support students. As a team, we noticed that the students needing the most support had a history of struggling with adversity or had experienced trauma of some sort. We watched them follow a similar trajectory: they entered 6th grade, struggled with connection and disengagement and sometimes behavior problems, this would increase over time, and many would go on to drop out of high school. We saw the pattern and we felt helpless to change it. Interventions were effective for some students, but not for those who did not feel connected to school and did not engage. In my work with students, I could see that one of the barriers these students faced was a lack of hope for their futures and low beliefs that they had the power to change the trajectories of their lives. This problem was not unique to my middle school. In my current role supporting district and school leaders and teachers, I repeatedly hear from the field, "We know that disadvantaged students need support, but how do we do it?"

I worked with several teachers who were able to connect with and engage almost every student they encountered. Students entered their classrooms with distrust of teachers and an unwillingness to try, but with these teachers, they connected and engaged. Somehow, these teachers addressed the problem so many others struggled with. I began my Ph.D. studies because I wanted to understand how to help disconnected and disengaged students who are at risk of dropping out of school. Understanding how teachers who successfully connect with and engage struggling students might offer insight into how to support those students more effectively.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my co-supervisors, Dr. Bonnie Lee and Dr. Susan McDaniel. I would like to thank Dr. Bonnie Lee for challenging me to go deeper in my analysis and shift my thinking and for giving me the opportunity to participate in her research project, on papers, and in conference presentations. I would like thank Dr. Susan McDaniel for believing in me, guiding me, advocating for me, and trusting me to do good work. They were both always very quick to respond to all of my questions and support needs.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to my supervisory committee members, Dr. Sharon Yanicki and Dr. Dawn McBride, for their support, guidance, and thoughtful feedback. I want to thank Dr. Sharon Yanicki for pushing me to think about the details and connect to the theory. I want to thank Dr. Dawn McBride for her belief in me, her enthusiasm for my research topic, and her ability to both encourage me and ask me to dig deeper at the same time. I would like to offer special thanks to my additional Defense Committee members, Dr. Lance Grigg, Dr. Neil Guppy, and Chair, Dr. Chris, Epplett. I appreciate the time they put into reading my dissertation and for the thought-provoking Defense questions and conversations that occurred.

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Finally, I want to thank the amazing teachers, administrators and adult former students who spent time talking with me about your experiences. Without you, this project would not have been possible.

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List of Abbreviations

AELE	Adverse Early Life Experience
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
GPA	Grade Point Average
SEC	Social-Emotional Competence
U.S.	United States

Chapter One: Introduction

It is well established that students who struggle with disengagement and disconnection from school are more likely to drop out of high school (Balfanz et al., 2007; Goodman & Gregg, 2010; Houltberg et al., 2012; Koplan & Chard, 2015; Phan, 2013; Sprague et al., 2001; Tella et al., 2011), setting their adult lives on a potentially difficult trajectory (Blane, 2011; Davidson, 2014; Schoon & Bynner, 2003; Siddiqi et al., 2018). It is also well established that relationships with caring, supportive, and attuned adults have the potential to mitigate risk factors associated with adversity, increase students' motivation to engage, and improve educational outcomes (Davis, 2006; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Kelley & Lee, 2018; Martin & Collie, 2019; Mason et al., 2017; Meltzer et al., 2015; Noble-Carr et al., 2014; Popp et al., 2011; Roorda et al., 2017; Schoon & Brynner, 2010; Uden et al., 2014; Ungar & Richter, 2012; Yu et al., 2018). What is less known is *how* teachers build positive relationships with students, how they motivate chronically disengaged students to engage, and what systemic factors impact teachers' success. In this thesis, I seek to contribute to that body of knowledge.

This chapter includes an introduction to the problem, research questions, and the study itself. In addition, an overview of the literature demonstrating the need for and purpose of this study is provided. It also includes a description of the conceptual foundations that informed the study's design and a brief overview of that design, the research questions, and the significance of the study. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief summary of the remaining chapters.

Need for the Study

Daily experiences impact a student's early life with social and environmental influences from neighborhoods, parents, economic resources, social norms, school environments, racial inequities, and local, national, and institutional policies and practices such as access to healthcare

(Braveman et al., 2011). These factors, called social determinants of health, directly or indirectly impact biological, psychological, social, and emotional health and development (Braveman et al., 2011; Wadsworth & Butterworth, 2011) and can either set the stage for a strong foundation and propensity to succeed in school and life or they can set the stage for struggles that only seem to amplify as the young person attempts to navigate the world (Davidson, 2014; Goodman & Gregg, 2010).

Educational attainment is one social determinant of health that can impact multiple areas of life, including working conditions and income, sense of control, health behaviors, and social resources, which in turn can affect mental, emotional, social, and physical health (Bharmal, 2015; Braveman et al., 2011). The educational attainment of youth can be impacted by the low educational attainment of their parents and the associated social, environmental, and economic factors (Braveman et al., 2011; Davidson, 2014; Wadsworth & Butterworth, 2011). Children born into disadvantage are more likely to experience future disadvantage as disadvantage accumulates over life courses (McDaniel & Bernard, 2011). The life course perspective is helpful in understanding the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage (Shim et al., 2015; Goodman & Gregg, 2010), as it allows for understanding individuals through both personal agency and the social inequities that impact them (McDaniel & Bernard, 2011). Children born into disadvantage or who have experienced adverse early life experiences (AELEs), which are difficult, traumatic, or neglectful social experiences in the home, community, or school, such as bullying, abuse, neglect, poverty, or exposure to violence (Felitti et al., 1998; Hambrick et al., 2019; Koplan & Chard, 2015) are more likely to experience cumulative disadvantage. Cumulative disadvantage is a process by which each stress and adverse experience builds on the next, further compounding and intensifying the level of risk and restricted outcomes that an

individual may experience later in life (Blane, 2011; Schoon & Bynner, 2003; Siddiqi et al., 2018), and making it increasingly challenging, although not impossible, to shift one's life trajectory (Blane, 2011; Braveman & Barclay, 2009).

Changes in one's life trajectory occur at turning points, which are times when individuals experience a transformation in how they understand themselves and how they relate to the world (Hutchison, 2019). Turning points often occur during life transitions, such as entering adolescence, or due to life events, such as changing schools or having an influential teacher (Hutchison, 2019). Schools are in a unique position to potentially shift an adolescent's life trajectory and increase student educational attainment through removing obstacles to school engagement and achievement and creating opportunities for students to change their self-concept (Hutchison, 2019). Students with past experiences of feeling powerless or who have experiences of school failure are more likely to have low beliefs in their abilities to succeed (self-efficacy) (Tella et al., 2011), low beliefs about their abilities to meet their goals (Day et al., 2010; Dixson et al., 2017; Phan, 2013), and low hope for their futures (Snyder, 2002). Researchers have demonstrated that academic success at one point in time is associated with academic success in future endeavors (Schoon & Brynner, 2003), while perpetual negative school experiences are strongly correlated with eventual dropout (Hutchison, 2019). When teachers are able to remove obstacles to learning and students experience success, those students may begin to change their beliefs about their own abilities to succeed, which may increase future successes.

Extensive research findings indicate that a caring relationship with an adult that is built on trust, equitable treatment, guidance (Meltzer et al., 2015), and youth feeling as though they matter (Kelley & Lee, 2018) can create a sense of belonging, hope, development of positive self-identity, and improved self-efficacy. These positive teacher-student relationships have been

associated with increased engagement and achievement regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic variables (Cornelius-White, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Liang et al., 2020; Roorda et al., 2017; Woolley & Bowen, 2007), or special education needs (Murray, 2009). In a national longitudinal study of 3,840 youth in the United States, students were less likely to drop out of high school if they reported positive relationships with teachers and peers (Lee & Burkam, 2003). Hence, teacher-student relationships can potentially shift the life-course trajectory of chronically disengaged youth (Bannink et al., 2013; Bethel et al., 2014; Hambrick et al., 2019; Koplan & Chard, 2015; Mason et al., 2017; Roorda et al., 2017). This shift may be facilitated by increasing students' motivation to engage in school (Davis, 2006; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Martin & Collie, 2019; Uden et al., 2014; Yu et al., 2018), academic achievement (Kelley & Lee, 2018; Roorda et al., 2017; Tella et al., 2011) and graduation rates (Coleman & DeLeire, 2000; Pedrotti et al., 2008; Quin, 2017; Worrell & Hale, 2001). Teachers who are highly skilled at connecting with and engaging students can help students shift their beliefs about their abilities (Allen et al., 2013), which may also impact what they believe about themselves and their futures.

Student motivation to engage is impacted by students' perceptions of their abilities to succeed (self-efficacy), perceptions of whether school success will matter in their adult lives (Goodman & Gregg, 2010; Phan, 2013), and the quality of their relationships with teachers (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Roorda et al., 2017). Adolescents are more likely to demonstrate lower rates of student engagement than younger students (Pianta & Allen, 2008). They are also more likely to experience decreased quality of teacher-student relationships (Roorda et al., 2017). However, positive teacher-student relationships, when present in secondary schools, can have more significant impacts on engagement than in elementary schools (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015; Roorda et al., 2011; Roorda et al., 2017; Uden et al., 2014).

Adolescent motivation to engage can also be impacted by a teachers' personal connections to all students in the class and the level of autonomy and sense of control given to students (Pianta & Allen, 2008).

Increasing student motivation to engage in school through positive teacher-student relationships offers great potential to decrease dropout rates and increase educational attainment. However, not all teachers have the knowledge or skills to develop positive relationships with students and increase engagement. Many teachers experience more difficulty forming positive relationships with students who have frequent behavior problems. Additionally, students with a history of negative teacher relationships tend to have negative feelings toward future teachers, making it more challenging to build positive relationships (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). Negative teacher-student relationships adversely affect both students and teachers, decreasing student engagement and achievement (Roorda et al., 2017) and increasing teacher stress and burnout (Jennings & Greenburg, 2009). Negative teacher-student relationships are also associated with lower academic success, mediated by decreased engagement (Roorda et al., 2017).

Lack of student motivation to engage is significantly correlated with teacher stress and attrition (Junker et al., 2021). When teachers have low self-efficacy (O'Brennan et al., 2017) or are less equipped to manage the social, emotional, and behavioral struggles of their students, they are more likely to experience higher levels of stress and engage in reactive and punitive responses to students (Jennings & Greenburg, 2009). Punitive disciplinary strategies used by teachers harm the teacher-student relationship (Brown, 2005). A cyclical problem can be created in which teacher stress increases reactionary and punitive discipline strategies, negatively impacting the classroom climate, increasing student behavior struggles, and decreasing student

engagement, further increasing teacher stress (Jennings & Greenburg, 2009). Studying teachers who are highly skilled at building positive relationships with and engaging all students may offer insight into how to better support and equip the teachers who struggle.

Purpose of the Study

Dropping out of high school often occurs after a student has developed a long history of chronic disengagement (Quin, 2017; Uden et al., 2014). Pianta and Allen (2008) suggested that training teachers to form positive relationships with students and increase engagement may be a more effective strategy to decrease dropout rates than focusing solely on improvement efforts around curriculum, class size, or testing. However, before effective teacher training can be offered, one must gain a more comprehensive understanding of *how* teachers successfully build relationships and increase engagement.

To understand how teachers build relationships with and engage students, I believe it is important to examine not only what happens relationally between teachers and students but also teachers' beliefs, values, and thought processes because those directly impact the decisions teachers make in their classrooms about their students, their student relationships, and how they approach curriculum and instruction (Anderson, 2015; Nespor, 1987; Uden et al., 2014). Teachers belong to a school community and educational system, and their success may also be impacted by school administrators and policies and supports at the school, district, and state or provincial levels. Therefore, this study also includes an investigation of the impact of factors at those levels on teacher success.

In this study, I utilize a qualitative description research methodology, which allows me to explore the perspectives of different participant samples and allows for questioning that uncovers participants' values and belief systems (Choy, 2014). In this study, I aim to identify the systemic

factors (internal, relational, organizational, and district/state/province) that impact teachers who are highly skilled at building relationships with and engaging disengaged students. Maximum variation in sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015) is utilized as I seek to determine what factors were shared among participants regardless of demographic and personal differences. Participant samples include adult former students from seven regions across the United States and teachers and administrators from one western province in Canada & one western state in the United States. Utilizing a two-country design (even with a small sample from only two regions within those countries) decreases the implicit biases of the researcher, allowing me to notice connections I may otherwise not recognize.

The focus of this study was to seek to understand how teachers increase student engagement for chronically disengaged students because of the association with increased dropout rates, which impact future health and wellbeing across the life course. Secondary schools were chosen as the setting due to the increased need of adolescents for connection and motivation to engage in school (Roorda et al., 2017). Teachers in this study were selected based on their abilities to build relationships with and engage *all* students, especially those who struggled with chronic disengagement in other classes. Research findings from the U.S., Canada, and other countries suggest that positive teacher-student relationships have been associated with increased student engagement and achievement regardless of student gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic factors (Allen et al., 2013; Cornelius-White, 2007; Lee, 2012; Liang et al., 2020; Murray, 2009; Roorda et al., 2011; Woolley & Bowen, 2007), and teachers who prioritize positive relationships and support student-centered learning have demonstrated positive student outcomes regardless of teacher race and ethnicity (Cornelius-White, 2007). In this study, I seek to understand what is commonly shared among teachers who are highly skilled at building

relationships with and engaging *all* disengaged students, many of whom, but not all, are likely to be disadvantaged (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2018). In this study, the objective was to identify factors that were common among all teachers identified as highly effective at engaging chronically disengaged students (regardless of teacher demographic variables or context); therefore, findings were not categorized by individual teacher demographic variables.

Conceptual Foundations

One concept and one theory informed the study design: positive deviance and ecological systems theory. Positive deviance is the concept that within communities, members exist who successfully address a problem where others struggle (Pascale et al., 2010). It is the idea that to solve a problem within a community, one should learn from members who have overcome that problem. Because schools serve as small communities and not all teachers successfully build relationships with and engage disengaged students, studying those who do may shed light on a solution to the problem. In this study, positive deviants are the teachers who are highly skilled at building relationships with and engaging disengaged students.

Ecological systems theory was developed by Bronfenbrenner (1986) and provides a frame through which to examine and understand the systems-level connections impacting a problem. This study aims not to gain an ecological understanding of the factors that impact disengaged youth but rather to understand the multiple levels of factors that impact the teachers who positively influence them. Pianta and Allen (2008) describe the teacher-student relationship through a systems lens that includes teacher experiences and knowledge, teacher-student personal and content-related interactions, and school-level factors such as discipline policies and school climate. They suggest that understanding all levels is an important precursor to

developing teacher training and support programs that will equip teachers to motivate student engagement. This study's design includes an investigation into four levels of factors (individual, relational, organizational, and district/state/province) that impact teachers' success. This systems-level study design will be referred to as a modified ecological model.

Research Questions

The research questions are:

1) How do positive deviant teachers successfully build relationships with and engage disengaged students?
2) What are the factors within an ecological model that impact the success of positive deviant teachers?
    a. What shared factors transcend demographic variables (urban, rural, gender, years of experience, content area taught, located in a western Canadian province or a western U.S. state)?
    b. Are there different factors impacting teachers from the school district in a western Canadian province versus teachers from the two school districts in a western U.S. state?

Research Design

The literature and my personal and professional experiences with students, teachers, school administrators, and district administrators influenced this study's focus and design. Literature about social determinants of health and life course studies, why youth disengage, and how positive teacher-student relationships can increase engagement and educational attainment all contributed to the study design.

This study's focus is on how teachers increase student motivation to engage because disengagement (whether it is due to adolescent development needs, factors associated with disadvantage, or motivational constructs such as self-efficacy and hope) is strongly correlated with school dropout rates. Increasing engagement has the potential to increase school completion rates and prevent the future disadvantage associated with low educational attainment.

This study uses a qualitative description methodology (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Kahlke, 2014; Sandelowski, 2000) to examine, through the perspectives of positive deviant teachers, administrators, and adult former students, the phenomenon of how teachers build relationships with and engage disengaged students. In addition to including multiple participant samples, maximum variation within those samples was attempted (Kahlke, 2014; Sandelowski, 2000). Adult former student participants included males and females; Latinos, Latinas, and Caucasians; represented school experiences from six different regions within the United States, and ages ranging from 18 to 63. Multiple school geographical contexts were included to allow for a comparison. Positive deviant teacher participants included males and females, teachers of multiple subjects, high schools and middle schools, and varying years of experience. Teachers and administrators were recruited from one western province in Canada and one western state in the United States. Finding the intersection between all three sample perspectives allows for triangulation of findings (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lichtman, 2013).

Data are collected in three phases. The first phase includes frequent observations and semi-structured interviews with four positive deviant teachers and semi-structured interviews with three administrators. The second phase includes interviews with adult former students, and the third phase includes semi-structured interviews with additional positive deviant teachers and their administrators. Data is analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This

phenomenon is investigated through a modified ecological model. I use inductive analysis to identify (1) the factors that are shared, regardless of demographic or context differences, within each level of the modified ecological model and (2) which factors vary between the two schools in a western province in Canada and two schools in a western state in the United States.

Significance of the Study

This study's objective is to add to the body of knowledge surrounding teachers' success in connecting with and engaging disengaged students in two ways. The first is to understand *how* teachers develop positive relationships with and engage students who struggle with disengagement from school. The second is to understand the shared factors at the individual, relational, school organizational, and district/state/province levels that impact teachers' success. Understanding how positive deviant teachers are successful and the systemic factors that impact them may allow more schools and districts to provide professional development and support to educators to build relationships with and engage disengaged students. This has the potential to positively impact a change in life trajectory for youth by creating turning points that increase educational attainment. It also has the potential to increase teacher self-efficacy and decrease burnout.

Chapter Summary

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. **Chapter one** introduces the problem, the research questions, and the study itself. **Chapter two** includes an exploration of the literature surrounding social determinants of health and life course perspectives as they pertain to educational attainment, positive and negative teacher-student relationships, school administrator impacts on teacher effectiveness, and factors that impact student motivation to engage in school. **Chapter three** includes a description of the research methodology chosen and outlines the

research methods, including participant selection and recruitment, data collection and analysis, confidentiality, and ethics. In **Chapter four,** I describe the research findings for all three participant samples and the themes that emerged to describe how positive deviant teachers are able to connect with and engage disengaged and disconnected students. **Finally, chapter five** includes the findings, their connection to the field, and implications to support the field. I also discuss limitations and suggestions for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this thesis, I seek to contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding positive teacher-student relationships and student engagement through an investigation into how highly skilled teachers build relationships with and engage chronically disengaged students, including the personal and systemic factors that impact their success. This chapter includes a review of the literature surrounding this topic.

A traditional literature review was conducted and included qualitative studies, quantitative studies, and conceptual literature**.** Literature searches were conducted using the following databases: JSTOR, PsycINFO, ERIC via EBSCO, Academic Search Complete, and Google Scholar. Articles were also found through citations within included literature. The literature included peer-reviewed journal articles along with several books and book chapters. All sources are in English. The majority of articles and books were published within the past 10 years. However, substantial research on the topic of teacher-student relationships was conducted in the 1990s and 2000s. That literature, along with seminal articles and books that date back even further, is also included. Literature from the fields of education, educational leadership, sociology, leadership, and developmental psychology was reviewed in the following domains:

- teacher-student relationships and the impact on engagement, achievement, and school completion;
- factors that impact student engagement such as adolescent developmental needs, student internal beliefs and agency, and the effects of adverse early life experiences;
- the effects associated with positive and negative teacher-student relationships;
- factors that impact teacher-student relationships such as student behavior struggles, trust, and teacher burnout;

- the relationship between school organizational factors, trust, and policy requirements and teacher burnout levels; and
- the potential of teacher-student relationships to facilitate turning points in the lives of youth.

The literature reviewed in this chapter expanded and deepened my personal understanding of the factors that contribute to, and possible mechanisms of, student disengagement as well as the factors that potentially impact a teacher's success in building positive student relationships, such as teacher self-efficacy managing behavior or administrator leadership style. A mechanism refers to how different elements or factors interact with each other to contribute to why something happens or changes (Demeulenaere, 2011). While much is known about student disengagement and the impact of teacher-student relationships, my review of the literature revealed that a comprehensive and systemic understanding of the factors that support the success of teachers in building relationships with and engaging students has not been explored. That gap informed the development of this study. The remainder of this chapter highlights the key themes and findings identified in the literature that informed the development of the research questions investigated in this study.

Educational Attainment

Findings from a large body of evidence suggests that low educational attainment impacts the social, economic, psychological, and physical health of individuals (Bharmal et al., 2015; Braveman & Gottlieb, 2014). Although high school graduation rates have been steadily increasing over the past 35 years (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2018), they continue to be a concern and priority of educational systems (NCES, 2018). There are several theories about why students drop out of school. One theory focuses on factors specific to

individual students such as negative school self-concept, due to early school failure, or lack of participation, due to lack of preparation for school or support from home (Finn, 1989). Another theory centers on neuropsychological issues resulting in low impulse control that can result in disengagement and school failure (Moffitt, 1993). Yet another theory proposes that school dropout is a combination of individual factors such as student background, demographics, self-concept and engagement, and institutional factors within schools and communities (Rumberger, 2011). In this study, I align with the theoretical perspective that disengagement from school is a combination of personal and institutional factors and that positive relationships with teachers have the potential to increase engagement, regardless of the underlying reasons for that disengagement.

Academic success and high school completion can be significantly impacted by the quality of teacher-student relationships (Roorda et al., 2011) and student motivation to engage in school (Balfanz et al., 2007; Phan, 2013). This is especially true in secondary school where engagement consistently decreases (Roorda et al., 2017). In a study of 10th-grade students (n = 3,840) from 190 schools in 30 urban areas within the U.S., using student survey data regarding the presence of positive teacher-student relationships within the school, student achievement data, student and school demographic, and student dropout data, Lee and Burkam (2003) found that students in small (600 or fewer students) to medium-sized (601 – 1,500 students) public and Catholic schools were 85% less likely to drop out of schools with higher positive teacher-student relationships.

Having a highly impactful teacher has the potential not only to increase educational attainment, but also to impact other life trajectory factors such as college attendance, income trajectories, neighborhood quality, teen pregnancy rates (Chetty et al., 2014), delinquent

behavior, and substance abuse (Center for Disease Control [CDC], 2009; Monahan et al., 2010; Chapman et al., 2013; Culyba et al., 2016; Kelley & Lee, 2018; Meltzer et al., 2015; Popp et al., 2011; Schoon & Bynner, 2010; Ungar et al., 2013). Chetty et al. (2014) examined the relationship between highly effective teachers and the life trajectories of students (750,000) in the U.S. They conducted an analysis of school districts' records (of student enrollment history, demographics, which teacher(s) each student was assigned to, and test scores) combined with the federal income tax records (of earnings, total income, university attendance, university quality, neighborhood socioeconomic status, retirement savings, teen birth, and parental characteristics) of prior students (during grades 4 – 8 and who graduated by 2009). Findings indicated that individuals who had highly effective teachers (as measured by growth in test scores) were significantly more likely to attend a high-quality university, have higher earnings at 28 years old, live in higher socioeconomic neighborhoods as adults, and were 4.6% less likely to have a teen pregnancy (Chetty et al., 2014). While this study's findings demonstrated that teachers can have a significant impact on students' future life trajectories, the study did not specifically examine the role of teacher-student relationships.

Findings from research studies conducted in the U.S., Canada, and other countries suggested that positive teacher-student relationships were associated with increased engagement and achievement regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic variables (Cornelius-White, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Lee, 2012; Liang et al., 2020; Murray, 2009; Roorda et al., 2011; Woolley & Bowen, 2007), and that increased engagement was associated with improved academic outcomes regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic variables (Klem & Connell, 2004). Several studies confirmed these findings. Cornelius-White's (2007) meta-analysis of 119 studies (conducted in the United States, Canada, Germany, the Philippines, Brazil, and the

United Kingdom) found a positive correlation between person-centered relationships between teachers and students and increased positive student outcomes regardless of student racial or socioeconomic backgrounds and regardless of whether the teacher was Caucasian, Latino, Black, or Filipino. Additionally, Murray (2009) conducted a quantitative study of adolescents' perception of teacher relationships on their school success. Participants included middle-school students (n = 104), 99% of whom were low income, 91% Latino, 4% Black, 4% White, and 11% who were receiving special education services. Findings indicated that positive teacher-student relationships, specifically feeling close to and trusting teachers, were significantly associated with increased student engagement, higher grades in Language Arts and Math, and higher math standardized testing scores.

Similarly, Lee's (2012) study of the impact of teacher-student relationships on ninth and 10th-grade students (n = 3,748) found that positive teacher-student relationships were significantly associated with increased student reading performance and behavioral and emotional engagement regardless of gender, socioeconomic variables, race, or language spoken at home. In addition, a study of middle school students (n = 7,764) across five U.S. states conducted by Woolley and Bowen (2007) found that positive teacher-student relationships were significantly associated with increased school engagement, even more so for students who were low income, Latino, Black, and male, all of whom are at greater risk of disengagement and eventual school dropout, than for students without those risk factors. Findings from these studies all indicated that a positive teacher-student relationship was associated with higher student engagement and achievement regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic variables and that they may be even more important for those groups of students.

The findings of these studies are important because students who are Black, Latino, Indigenous, low-income, or male are more likely to have negative teacher-student relationships (McGrath & VanBergen, 2015) and higher rates of disengagement and dropout (NCES, 2018). Chronic disengagement, and the associated higher dropout rates, set these students on a difficult life trajectory of increased risk of poverty and poor health outcomes as adults. If positive teacher-student relationships can increase the engagement and achievement of disengaged students (many of whom, but not all, may be disadvantaged), that places schools in a unique position to potentially shift the difficult life trajectories of disadvantaged youth. However, to do so, more needs to be understood about *how* teachers who are highly skilled at building positive relationships with and engaging all students succeed in those endeavors and what factors impact that success. In this study, my recruitment strategy involved choosing teachers who were highly successful at building positive relationships with and engaging all chronically disengaged students, regardless of the underlying reason for their disengagement.

Student Engagement

Findings from a large body of literature have identified student engagement as a multidimensional construct that includes behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of engagement (Fredericks et al., 2004; Yonezawa et al., 2009). Behavioral engagement can be measured using an academic engagement scale (Green et al., 2008) and involves active participation in school activities and completion of classwork and homework. Cognitive engagement refers to the depth to which students construct meaning from the content they engage in at school (Newmann & Wehlage, 1993) and includes increasing students' intrinsic motivation (Yonezawa et al., 2009). Emotional engagement includes considering levels of interest versus boredom and levels of happiness in school compared to levels of sadness or

anxiety (Fredricks, 2014). Emotional engagement also includes a sense of belonging and connection. Emotional and cognitive engagement are often measured using student self-report surveys although student interviews and observations have also been used (Fredricks & McColskey, 2012). These three aspects of engagement are often interconnected. For example, Green et al. (2008), conducted a five-year longitudinal study of Latino immigrant youth (n = 309) using student perception scales for behavioral and emotional engagement and teacher support. They found that high emotional engagement and supportive teacher-student relationships were significantly correlated with increased behavioral engagement. Balfanz, Herzog, and MacIver (2007) described disengagement from school through a multi-dimensional viewpoint to include emotional and behavioral indicators such as students choosing not to attend classes regularly, misbehaving in class, and expending low effort on schoolwork, or a combination of the three.

Disengagement is an important area of concern for educators as it is related to increased high school dropout rates (Balfanz et al., 2007) and consistently increases during secondary school (Fredricks, 2014; Woolley & Bowen, 2007). Students may demonstrate disengagement through decreased participation and effort in class, disruptive behavior, emotional withdrawal, or failing to complete homework (Fredricks, 2014). Disengagement is not synonymous with disadvantage, although research indicates that some disadvantaged students are more likely to struggle with disengagement. Low income, Black, Latino, and Indigenous students are more likely to be disengaged and are less likely to graduate from high school than their White peers, which potentially limits their income potential and adult health outcomes (Fredricks, 2014). Balfanz, Herzog, and MacIver (2007) investigated the association between student disengagement risk factors and school dropout for a cohort of students (n = 12,972) in

Philadelphia that was followed from sixth grade until one year after their expected graduation date. The sample, predominantly students of color (64% Black, 12% Latino, 5% Asian, and 19% White), attended schools with high poverty rates. Through examining academic grades, attendance, unsatisfactory behavior grades, suspensions, and graduation or dropout status, findings indicated that the behavioral risk indicators of disengagement such as low attendance, chronic classroom behavior problems, and course failure were highly predictive of eventual high school dropout, as only 36% of students with one risk factor, 21% of students with two risk factors, 13% of students with three risk factors graduated from school within one year of their expected graduation (Balfanz et al., 2007). These findings illustrate the association between disengagement and eventual high school dropout, especially for low-income students of color.

As mentioned earlier, increasing engagement was predictive of positive academic outcomes across demographic groups (Woolley & Bowen, 2007), making it even more crucial for populations at risk of decreased educational attainment (Fredricks, 2014). Researchers indicated that disengagement can be impacted by a multitude of factors including adolescent developmental needs (Allen et al., 2013; Pianta & Allen, 2008), exposure to adverse early life experiences (AELEs) including bullying or social inequities in schools (Balfanz et al., 2007; Goodman & Gregg, 2010; Koplan & Chard, 2015), and the cognitive motivational constructs of self-efficacy and hope (Bandura, 2007; Davis, 2006; Phan, 2013; Snyder, 2002). The quality of teacher-student relationships has the potential to either increase or decrease student engagement and achievement (Martin & Collie, 2019; Uden, et al., 2014; Yu et al., 2018; Roorda et al., 2017).

This study's focus is on teachers who are successful at engaging all students, regardless of the reasons for disengagement; however, understanding how participating teachers navigate

the factors that contribute to disengagement may lend insight into the mechanism by which they are able to increase student motivation to engage. In the following sections, I explore factors that contribute to student disengagement.

Adolescence

Student engagement is more likely to decrease during adolescence (Pianta & Allen, 2008; Woolley & Bowen, 2007). In Yonezawa et al.'s (2009) review paper on student disengagement, they suggested that one contributing factor to lower engagement in secondary schools can be teachers focusing primarily on student academic achievement without also meeting their psychological needs (Yonezawa et al., 2009). Adolescents' need for autonomy, control (Allen et al., 2013), self-expression (Pianta & Allen, 2008), and feeling respected as young adults (Hutchison, 2019; Yeager et al., 2018) can impact their engagement and achievement in school (Allen et al., 2013). Teachers may be more effective with adolescents when they recognize those developmental needs (Allen et al., 2013) and create classroom experiences that include student voice and allow for choice in classroom experiences (Pianta & Allen, 2008). Findings from a study of 643 students from 37 classrooms in the U.S., (after controlling for student race, gender, socioeconomic variables, and prior academic performance) indicated that when students had positive relationships with teachers who supported student autonomy, control, and self-expression, and when teachers attended to student emotional and academic needs, they scored significantly higher on standardized academic tests than students with less supportive teachers (Allen et al., 2013). In a book chapter synthesizing the literature exploring positive youth development within secondary classrooms, Pianta and Allen (2008) and Uden et al. (2014) argued that adolescents were more likely to engage when academic content was challenging and relevant and when lessons were designed so that students believed they were capable of

succeeding. If academic content is not challenging, adolescents may feel disrespected and talked down to (Yeager et al., 2018), and yet if it is too difficult, they may disengage because they do not believe in their abilities to succeed (Bandura, 2007; Tella et al., 2011).

Adolescence is a period during the life course when individuals experience greater abstract thinking, reasoning ability, and an increased ability to reflect on the meaning of life and their own experiences, making relevant school content more important than it was in younger years (Hutchison, 2019; Pianta & Allen, 2008). Adolescents also have a developmental need for respect from adults. Yeager, Dahl, and Dweck (2018) explained that adolescents experience a heightened sensitivity to respect from others and to their status within groups compared to younger children or adults. This can be explained by the effects of increased testosterone levels for both male and female students and an increased stress response (as measured by higher cortisol levels) during experiences in which they perceive that their status to be threatened (Yeager et al., 2018). Secondary teachers who lead highly controlling and punitive classrooms may not meet the respect needs of adolescent students (Pianta & Allen, 2008) and may experience negative teacher-student relationships (Brown, 2005) and lower student engagement (Roorda et al., 2017). Evidence of this can be seen in Klem and Connell's (2004) U.S. study that examined the relationship between teacher-student dynamics and student engagement using student records and teacher and student survey data for ethnically diverse and predominantly socioeconomically disadvantaged elementary (n = 1,846) and middle school students (n = 2,430) each spring over the course of five years. Findings indicated that middle school students in classrooms with higher levels of teacher support (as defined by caring and fair classrooms with high student expectations) were 2.5 times more likely to report high engagement, and students

with higher engagement were significantly more likely to have higher academic achievement than students with lower engagement (Klem & Connell, 2004).

Although positive teacher-student relationships and student engagement seem to be lower in secondary school, Roorda et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis of 189 peer-reviewed studies from multiple countries revealed that the impact of positive teacher-student relationships on engagement was even stronger in secondary schools than in elementary (Roorda et al., 2017). If positive teacher-student relationships are strongly positively associated with increased engagement in secondary schools and yet those relationships are more likely to decline at that time, it indicates an even greater need to understand the factors that contribute to the success of secondary teachers who are highly skilled at building relationships with and engaging students.

Adverse Early Life Experiences (AELEs)

A large body of research indicates that students who have experienced adverse early life experiences (AELEs) such as high levels of familial conflict (Smith-Chant, 2017), abuse, neglect, lack of nurturing from parents (Siddiqi et al., 2018; Wadsworth & Butterworth, 2011), and experiences in school such as bullying, racism, or socioeconomic inequity (Koplan & Chard, 2015) are more likely to experience lower motivation to engage in school (Balfanz et al., 2007; Goodman & Gregg, 2010; Koplan & Chard, 2015; Phan, 2013; Tella et al., 2011). The number of AELE exposures (Felitti et al., 1998) and the timing, intensity, and frequency of those exposures, combined with the presence or absence of protective factors, impact the extent of their effect (Hambrick et al., 2019). The two time periods in life when AELE exposure can be most detrimental are early childhood (0 – 5 years old) and adolescence (Hambrick et al., 2019) due to the increased neural plasticity at those times.

AELEs impact school engagement in at least two ways. First, AELE exposures are highly correlated with increased behavior problems in school (Bethel et al., 2014; Burke et al., 2011), and students who struggle with behavior problems are significantly more likely to receive discipline referrals and suspensions (Sprague et.al, 2001), have more negative teacher-student relationships (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015), and be at greater risk of school failure and increased risk of eventually dropping out of school (Balfanz et al., 2007; Hutchison, 2019). Second, exposure to AELEs affects early brain development and disrupts the prefrontal cortex, anterior cingulate cortex, and the subcortical-cortical dopamine pathways of the brain that are involved in self-regulation; cognitive, social, and emotional processing; perceptions of control; cognitive flexibility; and goal-directed behavior (Hashimoto et al., 2015), which are all important factors students need to succeed in school. In addition to affecting brain development, AELEs can also cause a hyperarousal of the fight, flight, or freeze response in the nervous system (Herzog & Schmahl, 2018; Koplan & Chard, 2015), affecting heart rate, sleep, impulsivity inhibition, emotional regulation, relational skills, and abstract thinking skills (Hambrick et al., 2019). These brain and nervous system changes can impact students' perceptions of control in their lives and lead to decreased self-regulation, cognitive flexibility, control beliefs, personal agency (beliefs about their abilities to control outcomes in their lives, and beliefs about their abilities to succeed), all of which can negatively impact engagement (Day et al., 2010; Dixson et al., 2017; Phan, 2013; Snyder, 2002; Tella et al., 2011). These changes may predispose students to struggle with higher rates of disengagement from school and the associated increased dropout rates.

However, research has shown that positive teacher-student relationships can protect against some of the negative impacts of adverse early life experiences, improving school

outcomes, and decreasing risk trajectories (Bannink et al., 2013; Bethel et al., 2014; CDC, 2009; Hambrick et al., 2019; Koplan & Chard, 2015). Hambrick et al., (2019) studied the relationships between (1) traumatic or adverse experiences during different early developmental stages, (2) quality of past relational support (primary caregivers, family, and community), (3) quality of current relational support (primary caregivers, siblings, teachers, peers, and community), and (4) central nervous system functioning (heart rate, sleep, emotional regulation, relational skills, impulsivity, abstract thinking skills) of children (n = 3,523) from the U.S., Canada, Europe, and Australia. Their findings indicated that youths' current experiences of positive and supportive relationships were strong predictors of healthy central nervous system functioning (sleep, arousal level, and concrete cognition) even for youths with past traumatic or adverse experiences (Hambrick et al., 2019). Their results point to the possibility that strong supportive, caring, attuned relationships with teachers during adolescence may buffer some of the damage from exposure to early adversity. Additionally, several qualitative and quantitative studies indicated that positive adult relationships (such as with teachers and coaches) with students who experienced AELEs were associated with increased school success and decreased high-risk behaviors outside of school (Dang & Miller, 2013; Kelley & Lee, 2018; Noble-Carr et al., 2014), These findings highlight the possibility that teacher-student relationships can positively impact school success for students who have experienced AELEs.

Self-Efficacy, Hope, and Locus of Control

Student motivation to engage can also be impacted by the cognitive motivational constructs of self-efficacy (i.e. the degree to which students believe they will be successful; Tella et al., 2011), hopeful thinking (i.e. students' abilities to set goals and also believe in their capacity to meet those goals; Day et al., 2010; Dixson et al., 2017; Phan, 2013; Snyder, 2002), and locus

of control (i.e. the degree to which students believe that their actions will impact their futures; Coleman & DeLeire, 2000). These constructs define students' perceptions of their abilities to succeed (Day et al., 2010; Dixson et al., 2017; Phan, 2013; Snyder, 2002). Self-efficacy and locus of control both describe students' beliefs about whether their efforts will lead to successful outcomes, which impacts their motivation to engage in tasks, their academic achievement (Tella et al., 2011), and graduation rates (Coleman & DeLeire, 2000). When students' beliefs about their abilities to succeed are low, they may be less likely to engage (Bandura, 2007; Day et al., 2010, Dixson et al., 2017, Pedrotti et al., 2008, Snyder, 2002; Tella et al., 2011). Evidence of self-efficacy's relationship with engagement was seen in a study of college students (n = 335) in the Netherlands in which correlations among self-perception data of self-efficacy, self-perception of engagement, and student academic performance using grade point average (GPA) were examined (Ounweneel et al., 2013). Findings indicated that self-efficacy was significantly positively associated with engagement (Ounweneel et al., 2013). Although this study was conducted with university students (average age = 20), results aligned with Bandura's (2007) concept of self-efficacy and are therefore likely to apply to adolescents as well as young adults.

Teachers who develop supportive relationships with students and design lessons that increase self-efficacy by building on student abilities may see improved student engagement and outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Carefully creating opportunities for students to succeed at tasks for which they have low self-efficacy is what Bandura (2007) calls creating mastery experiences, which he explains is one effective way to increase self-efficacy. In a pre-post experimental study of college students (n = 92) in the Netherlands, participants were given activities designed to increase task-specific self-efficacy. Student self-efficacy and engagement were measured pre- and post-experiment using perception surveys and performance in

completing a task. Findings indicated that increases in self-efficacy significantly positively correlated with increased engagement as well as task performance (Ounweneel et al., 2013). While this study was limited to increasing self-efficacy in one specific task, it does indicate that increases in self-efficacy have the potential to increase both engagement and performance.

Motivation to engage can also be impacted by students' hope for their futures (Snyder, 2002) and their beliefs about how important school is for that future. Goodman and Gregg (2010) compiled findings from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) and reported that if students (n = 13,500) believed school was not important to their future, they were less likely to engage in and succeed at school. Hope is highly correlated with academic engagement and success (Day et al., 2010, Dixson et al, 2017, Pedrotti et al., 2008, Snyder, 2002). For example, a study of Latino middle school students (n = 41) in the U.S. examined the relationship between student perception of hope, teacher perception of student engagement, and academic outcomes (as measured by GPA; Rubens et al., 2020). Findings indicated that pathways and agency thinking (the two aspects of hope) were both significantly positively associated with student academic outcomes (Rubens et al., 2020). One aspect of hope, agency thinking, was positively associated with teacher perception of student engagement (Rubens et al., 2020). Pathways thinking is the ability to think through the steps necessary to reach a goal and agency thinking is the belief that one is capable of and has the perseverance to reach a goal (Snyder, 2002). Rubens et al.'s (2020) findings suggest that if students believe they can succeed in reaching a goal, and they have the capacity to think through the steps necessary to reach a goal, they are better able to achieve increased academic outcomes.

In addition to hope's relationship with engagement, Ciarrochi, Heaven, and Davies (2007) conducted a study of high school students (n = 784) in Australia and found that lower

hopeful thinking among students was associated with lower academic achievement and higher rates of behavioral struggles in school. Additional research has confirmed that low hope for the future was linked to adolescent school dropout rates (Worrell & Hale, 2001), and high hope was correlated with a higher GPA, higher academic achievement (Phan, 2013), increased graduation rates, (Ciarrochi et al., 2007; Day et al., 2010; Dixson et al., 2017; Snyder, 2002; Worrell & Hale, 2001), and lower rates of unwanted school behavior (Ciarrochi et al., 2007).

Increasing hopeful thinking may be a strong entry point for effective interventions to shift trajectories across the life course. Adolescence is an especially important period to foster the development of hope as young people begin to form their own identities and create visions for their futures (Phan, 2013). Because the thinking associated with hope can be taught (Snyder, 2002; Pedrotti et al., 2008), schools may be a strategic context in which to teach hopeful thinking, which may, in turn, improve personal, social, and academic success (Pedrotti et al., 2008) and decrease problem behaviors (Ciarrochi et al., 2007; Dixson et al., 2017). In a quasi-experimental five-week hope-based intervention study in Portugal of sixth-grade middle school students (n = 62), hope was measured using the Children's Hope Scale (CHS; Snyder et al., 1997) at pre-intervention, post-intervention, and 18 months post-intervention. The group of students (n = 31) who received the intervention showed a significant increase in hope from pre-intervention to post-intervention that persisted through the 18 months post-intervention measurement (Marques et al., 2011). Similarly, the University of Wyoming found that students who participated in a course designed to increase hopeful thinking experienced increased hopeful thinking and increased academic performance (Snyder, 2002). These studies demonstrated that interventions have the potential to increase hopeful thinking.

Prior research indicates that adolescent development, exposure to AELEs (including bullying and social inequity in schools), students' beliefs about their abilities to succeed, and beliefs about the value of school completion in their adult lives are all factors that seem to impact motivation to engage, which is associated with increased school achievement and completion rates. Research findings also indicate that positive teacher-student relationships are associated with increased engagement, especially during adolescence and for disadvantaged students. However, how positive teacher-student relationships influence engagement (Pianta & Allen, 2008) and how teachers navigate the factors that contribute to low student engagement need further examination and understanding.

Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

Although there are many different reasons students disengage from school, positive teacher-student relationships have the potential to increase student motivation to engage, regardless of the underlying reason (Fredricks, 2014; Lee, 2012; Woolley & Bowen, 2007). This possibility is a tenet upon which this study was founded. Motivation to engage in school, academic achievement, and school completion can be strongly impacted by how connected students feel to their teachers and in school (CDC, 2009; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Mason et al., 2017; Watson, 2018; Woolley & Bowen, 2007). Extensive qualitative and quantitative research findings indicated that relationships with caring, supportive, attuned, and skilled adults have been shown to change the life trajectory of a young person on a path toward dropping out of school or engaging in high-risk behaviors (Culyba et al., 2016; Kelley & Lee, 2018; Meltzer et al., 2015; Popp et al., 2011; Schoon & Bynner, 2010; Ungar et al., 2013). These relationships can be influential in increasing student motivation to engage (Balfanz et al., 2007; Barile et al., 2011;

Lee & Burkam, 2003), increasing a sense of belonging (Davis, 2006; Mason et al., 2017), and enabling students to have positive classroom experiences (Davis, 2006; Yu et al., 2018).

Positive teacher-student relationships are also associated with decreased behavior incidents (Roorda et al., 2011), decreased high school dropout rates (Cemalcilar & Goksen, 2014), increased academic achievement, increased psychological and physical health (Kelley & Lee, 2018), and decreased engagement in high-risk behaviors that may negatively impact their life trajectories (Culyba et al., 2016; Kelley & Lee, 2018; Meltzer et al., 2015; Popp et al., 2011; Schoon & Bynner, 2010; Ungar et al., 2013). In the CDC's (2009) white paper, synthesizing studies about school connectedness from the fields of education, health, psychology, and sociology, the authors found that a sense of belonging at school (one aspect of which was positive teacher-student relationships) was a significant protective factor against school dropout and other life trajectory risk factors such as substance abuse, violence, and teen pregnancy.

A 2012 study of 147 schools and 3,748 15-year-old students in the U.S. analyzed the impact of positive teacher relationships and academic press (a school climate that emphasizes academic standards and excellence) on student engagement and reading performance using data from the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2000 database of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA; Lee, 2012). Academic press is a term used in schools to describe a heavy emphasis on academic achievement through school policies and teacher expectations (Tschannen-Moran et al., 2012). Lee (2012) found that both positive relationships and academic press were associated with increased engagement, but only relationships were associated with improved reading scores. These findings were similar to Tschannen-Moran et al.'s (2013) confirmatory factor analysis that indicated students' feelings of belonging in school, trusting relationships with teachers, and high academic press were each

significantly associated with higher Math and English achievement for students in all school levels, for students living in socioeconomic disadvantage, and for Black, Latino, and White students.

Understanding supportive teacher-student relationships as an important contributing variable to student academic and behavioral outcomes has become a greater focus of recent research (Mason et al., 2017). A substantial number of studies have illustrated the connection between positive teacher-student relationships and increased engagement, achievement, and school completion, but fewer studies have examined what factors contribute to the success of teachers who are skilled at building these relationships.

Allen et al. (2013) conducted a study in the U.S. of teacher-student interactions with students (n = 643) in 37 secondary classrooms across 11 schools and six school districts. The researchers hypothesized that the positive impact of teacher-student relationships was not based solely on teacher skills but also on student qualities. Through collecting standardized observational data of teacher-student interactions using the Classroom Learning Assessment Scoring System - Secondary (CLASS-S) and student academic achievement data, they found that regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, classroom size, and prior student achievement levels, there were specific teacher-student interactional strategies that were associated with positive student achievement. This study's findings highlighted several teacher interactional strategies that positively impacted achievement such as laughing with students, asking students about their lives outside of school, giving students choice in assignments, utilizing small group work and student presentations, and asking questions that helped students develop critical thinking skills (Allen et al., 2013). This study's findings also reinforced the idea that positive teacher-student relationships are associated with increased academic achievement

regardless of student demographics or previous performance. Although Allen et al. (2013) identified specific teacher-student interactions associated with positive relationships and increased student outcomes, they did not identify teachers' beliefs and experiences, school-level factors, or policy factors that may have also been associated with those relationships and improved outcomes.

Previous research findings highlight three areas related to teacher-student relationships and engagement in school: (1) trust, (2) how mattering impacts identity formation, and (3) how teachers navigate student behavior and discipline. Each of those topics will be explored in more depth in the following sections.

Trust

Trust is foundational to student-teacher relationships (Gregory & Ripski, 2008) and has been shown to be significantly positively related to students' Math and English achievement in a confirmatory factor analysis of students (total enrollment n = 34,000) from 49 schools with 67% students of color and 59% students living in socioeconomic disadvantage (Tschannen-Moran et al., 2013). Allen et al (2013) and Popp, Grant, and Stronge (2011) found that teachers who were highly effective with disadvantaged youth provided emotional support to their students and built strong relationships based on trust and respect. Through a multidisciplinary review of theoretical and empirical literature, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) explored the importance of trust in schools. They found that trust is multifaceted and defined differently within different relationship contexts and settings. They summarized that students trust teachers when teachers are honest, competent (know their content), reliable (students can count on them), have benevolent motives (care about the well-being of their students and will protect their vulnerability), and demonstrate openness (willingness to be vulnerable with students; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). They

further explained that openness with another person demonstrates reciprocal trust through showing personal vulnerability and thereby increases the trust of the other person (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

When trust is not established, students may not believe in the competence of their teachers or feel safe enough to take risks, both of which inhibit learning (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Once distrust is established, a person may develop a biased perception of the distrusted individual and continually interpret the actions of that individual as untrustworthy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). For this reason, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) suggest that it is important that teachers begin establishing trust with their students from the first moments of interaction through authentic shared values and openness. Rotter (1971) explained that past experiences of trust can impact how open an individual is to trusting others. When students have experienced teachers or other adults who were not honest, reliable, competent, open, or who did not have benevolent motives, they may be less trusting of teachers in general (McGrath & VanBergen, 2015), and this can create a barrier to teacher-student relationship-building.

Adolescent Trust. Establishing trust with adolescents adds another level of challenge. Developmentally, adolescents can be highly sensitive to the emotional connection they feel with teachers, and this connection can impact student achievement (Allen et al., 2013). In addition, hormonal changes, such as increased testosterone, can lead both male and female adolescents to become preoccupied with status and respect and begin to think in terms of *us versus them*, and this is a primary developmental factor contributing to the formation of cliques in middle and high school (Hutchison, 2019). Understanding this dynamic can be important for teachers who want to build trusting relationships with adolescents. Adolescents form groups based on who they

perceive to be similar to them, and those individuals become part of their *inside* group, whereas others become part of their *outside* group (Hutchison, 2019). In Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2000) multidisciplinary review on the topic of trust, they shared that individuals tends to make biased judgments about whether they can trust someone based on assumptions of shared values and group membership and are more likely to trust members within their group and distrust members outside of their group.

Another factor that can impact building trust with adolescents involves meeting their developmental needs. Teachers who do not meet adolescents' developmental needs of autonomy, control, respect (Allen et al., 2013), and self-expression (Pianta & Allen, 2008) are less likely to earn student trust and more likely to see lower student achievement. This was evidenced by Allen et al.'s (2013) study of 643 students (in 37 classrooms across six school districts) in which they found that teachers who exhibited sensitivity to student academic and emotional needs, regarded adolescents' need for autonomy, and created a positive classroom climate (students felt a sense of connectedness and warmth) saw significantly higher student achievement.

As highlighted in Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2000) multidisciplinary review of theoretical and empirical literature on the topic of trust, research findings indicated that individuals perceived their leaders to be more trustworthy when they were given shared decision-making and greater choice in tasks (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Although the studies reviewed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy were referring to adult leader-follower dynamics, because the studies were conducted in multiple disciplines with similar findings, it is possible that teachers (who serve as leaders of the adolescents in their classrooms) may experience the same relational dynamic with their students.

According to a meta-analysis of 189 studies of teacher-student relationships from multiple countries, the number of positive teacher-student relationships and levels of student engagement are both more likely to decrease during secondary school (Roorda et al., 2017). It is possible that the added challenge of building trust with adolescents contributes to this decrease. This study focuses on positive teacher-student relationships in secondary schools. It will be important to understand what role, if any, trust plays in the success of teachers who are skilled at building relationships and engaging disengaged students.

Teacher Relationships and Identity Formation

Self-esteem and mattering are both important constructs in adolescent identity formation and psychological health (Watson, 2017). Mattering is the feeling that one is seen, cared about, and needed by others who have concern for them (Kelley & Lee, 2018; Watson, 2017). Extensive research has indicated that caring relationships with adults that were built on trust, equitable treatment, and guidance (Meltzer et al., 2015) were associated with the development of positive self-identity (Watson, 2017). Using four validated perception scales, a study of middle school students (n = 254) from a rural area in the U.S. examined the impact of school connectedness, self-esteem, and mattering on student wellness, which included psychological health and positive identity (Watson, 2017). Findings indicated that school connectedness, self-esteem, and mattering were all independently significantly positively correlated with student wellness (Watson, 2017). While Watson's (2017) study did not examine if school connectedness influences changes in positive identity, it did demonstrate a significant association, indicating that relationships at schools may influence identity formation.

In addition to positive identity formation, youth having positive adult relationships and feeling as though they matter are associated with lower rates of youth delinquency (Kelley &

Lee, 2018). Kelley and Lee (2018) conducted a study of seventh to twelfth-grade students (n = 10,120) comparing youth natural mentoring relationships, feelings of mattering, and youth delinquency and dangerousness rates. Examples of delinquency included: graffiti, damaging property, lying, stealing, running away, and selling drugs. Examples of dangerousness included: using a weapon on someone, fighting, belonging to a gang, and injuring self or others. Natural mentors are adults that youth naturally encounter in their lives such as teachers, coaches, older nonparent family members, or community members. Kelley and Lee (2018) found that youth who identified natural mentors as teachers or coaches had significantly lower rates of both dangerousness and delinquency. They found that the most significant association with decreasing delinquent behavior was a feeling of mattering. For every one unit of increase in mattering, there was a 67% decrease in delinquency, and this was even more pronounced when the mentor was a teacher. (Kelley & Lee, 2018). Kelly and Lee's (2018) study suggests that when teachers develop relationships with youth in which youth feel as though they matter, those relationships have the potential to significantly decrease delinquent and dangerous behavior.

Behavior and Discipline

Student-teacher relationships both influence and are influenced by unwanted student behavior and how teachers respond to those behaviors. In a review of 92 peer-reviewed studies and 12 review articles along with five books and six journal articles about theory, McGrath and Van Bergen (2015) summarized that students with negative teacher-student relationships were more likely to have negative attitudes about school, lower engagement, lower achievement, lower attendance, more unwanted school behavior, and higher antisocial behavior. Whereas, when students had positive student-teacher relationships, they were more likely to have higher motivation to engage in school and higher academic achievement. This was especially true for

students who struggled with engagement and unwanted behavior in the past (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015).

How teachers navigate student behavior and discipline impact the types of relationships they are able to develop with students and the level of trust between them, both of which can influence student engagement, achievement (Brown, 2005; McGrath & VanBergen, 2015; Romero, 2014; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2013), student behavior problems, and high school outcomes such as graduation rates and post-secondary plans (Romero, 2014). A study was conducted that examined the relationship between student behavior and trust of 10th-grade U.S. students (n = 10,585) who were surveyed three times over six years (Romero, 2014). Student behavior was found to be significantly influenced by the trust they felt for their teachers, and students with lower school behavior problems were significantly more likely to graduate from high school and have higher grade point averages (GPAs) regardless of socioeconomic status (Romero, 2014). Similarly, Gregory and Ripski (2008) conducted a mixed-methods study of 32 predominantly Black U.S. high school students with discipline referrals for defiant behavior and 32 of their teachers (18 of whom were nominated by students as having a positive relationship with them and 14 of whom were teachers who wrote the discipline referrals). They found that teachers who utilized a more relational approach to discipline were significantly more likely to experience higher student trust, which was significantly associated with decreased defiant student behavior. Whereas teachers who used less relational and more punitive and reactionary discipline were more likely to experience higher defiant student behavior and lower student trust (Gregory & Ripski, 2008), which can contribute to negative teacher-student relationships (Brown, 2005).

In a qualitative study including yearly interviews for three years of 103 young people (ages 12 – 22) and 23 trusted adults (nominated by the youth participants and included teachers, family members, coaches, mentors, and community support workers) in Australia, young people explained that when trusted adults focused on trust and equitable treatment, guided rather than directed learning, and created caring relationships, it contributed to a sense of belonging, hope, development of positive self-identity, and improved self-efficacy (Meltzer et al., 2015). Additional research findings have indicated that positive teacher relationships are associated with increased student engagement and achievement (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Mason et al., 2017; Roorda et al., 2017). A meta-analysis of 189 peer-reviewed studies, 78 of which were from countries other than the U.S., researchers found that negative teacher-student relationships were significantly associated with decreased student engagement and lower student achievement (Roorda et al., 2017).

Schools in socially disadvantaged neighborhoods tend to have higher suspension rates (Hemphill et al, 2010). Suspensions are a form of exclusionary discipline in response to student behavior that have been associated with increased dropout rates (Hutchison, 2019; Marchbanks et al., 2015) and decreased engagement and achievement (Skiba et al., 2014). In a study by Marchbanks et al. (2015), students who received at least one in- or out-of-school suspension or expulsion between seventh and 12th grade were 23.5% more likely to drop out of high school. Suspension rates are disproportionately high for Black, Latino, Indigenous, low-income students, and boys as well as those who have experienced AELEs (Novak, 2021).

Although exclusionary and punishment-based forms of discipline are still used in schools, they have been shown to be ineffective in many cases (Nelsen & Gfroerer, 2017) and are associated with poor academic outcomes and increased dropout rates (Marchbanks et al., 2015;

Novak, 2021). Educators are beginning to recognize that the environments teachers create and the relationships they develop with students can be more effective at changing student behavior than punishment (Fredricks, 2014; Sugai et al., 2000). In contrast to punishment-based discipline systems, more educators are moving towards positive discipline, which involves student-teacher relationships, positive classroom environments, and helping students manage their emotions and behaviors more effectively (Nelsen & Gfroerer, 2017; Popp et al., 2011; Sugai et al., 2000). This emerging trend is important because disadvantaged youth are more likely to struggle with behavior, and behavior struggles are associated with negative teacher-student relationships (McGrath & VanBergen, 2015) and decreases in educational attainment (Goodman & Gregg, 2010).

While existing research findings illustrate the importance of teachers establishing trust and managing student discipline in non-punitive ways, more needs to be understood about why and how the teachers who are skilled at managing unwanted student behavior and building positive relationships do so. More also needs to be understood about how systemic factors (personal beliefs, school organizational practices and supports, and district/state/provincial policies and supports) influence their success.

Negative Teacher-Student Relationships

Teachers' negative perceptions and biases can also impact the quality of their relationships with students, which in turn can affect student engagement and achievement. In a review paper of 92 studies of teacher-student relationships, McGrath and VanBergen (2015) found that teachers are less likely to build positive relationships with lower-achieving students, students who struggle with behavior, socioeconomically disadvantaged students, students of color, and boys (McGrath & VanBergen, 2015; Muller, 2000). Another example is Muller's

(2000) study of 6,007 students (who were followed in the 10th and 12th grades) that examined the impact of student and teacher perceptions of each other on math proficiency and growth. Teachers in this study were more likely to have negative perceptions of student effort for boys and Black and Latino students. Additionally, students' perceptions that teachers cared about them were significantly associated with student effort and math proficiency and growth. It was also found that teachers judged students with prior low academic marks as exerting low effort even when their current math performance indicated otherwise, and that teachers' perceptions of low student effort were significantly associated with lower math proficiency and growth (Muller, 2000). Muller's (2000) study demonstrated that positive relationships between teachers and students can both increase engagement and achievement, whereas unfavorable teacher perceptions of students have the potential to negatively impact student academic performance.

Additionally, a Belgian study examined whether teacher trust in students and perception of student teachability varied based on student demographic factors within schools such as student gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011). Findings indicated that teachers were more likely to trust students in schools with a higher percentage of female students and less likely to trust students when the school had a high population of low-income students. Findings also indicated that teachers perceived students to be less teachable when they had low trust in those students (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011). If unfavorable teacher perceptions of students can negatively impact student academic performance as suggested by Muller (2000), and school demographic factors can impact teacher perceptions of students' teachability, it will be important in this study to examine both teacher beliefs and school organizational factors as I seek to understand participating teachers' success with building positive relationships with and engaging students.

The Cycle of Negative Relationships, Student Behavior and Engagement, and Burnout

Supportive teacher-student relationships are associated with decreased unwanted student behavior (Mason et al., 2017) and increased student engagement (Roorda et al., 2017), whereas negative teacher-student relationships (Aloe et al., 2016) may be associated with a cyclical dynamic (see Figure 1) of unwanted student behavior and decreased engagement (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Martin & Collie, 2019; Oberle et al., 2020; Roorda et al., 2017) and teacher stress and burnout (Spilt & Koomen, 2009).

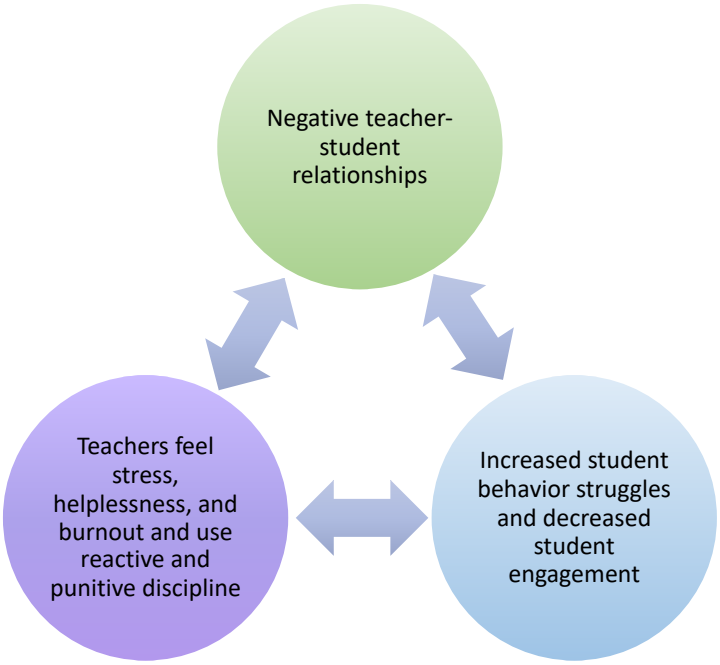

Figure 1: Cyclical Dynamic of Negative Teacher-Student Relationships

An example of this dynamic was illustrated in a study by Harmsen, Helms-Lorenz, Maulana, and Van Veen (2018) in which they used a validated teacher perception survey, observation data of teaching behavior, and data on attrition within one year of the study to investigate the relationship of stress, stress response, teaching behavior, and attrition of new secondary teachers (n = 143) in the Netherlands. They found a significant positive correlation

between negative student behaviors and teacher negative emotions and discontent. They also found that high teacher negative emotions were significantly associated with lower safe classroom climate, poor classroom management, and lower quality instruction (Harmsen et al., 2018). It was unclear in this study whether lower-quality teaching behaviors contributed to negative student behavior or whether the negative emotions teacher felt in response to student behaviors led to lower-quality teaching behaviors. Regardless of the direction of influence, this study does indicate that teaching behaviors, student behaviors, and teacher stress and emotions are interconnected. The following section explores research about the impact of student-teacher relationships on teacher wellbeing and burnout.

Student-Teacher Relationships Impact Teacher Job Satisfaction and Burnout

Positive teacher-student relationships benefit students, but they have also been shown to meet a teacher's need for connection (Spilt et al., 2011) and serve as a source of enjoyment, professional motivation, well-being (Hargreaves, 2000), and job satisfaction (Spilt & Koomen, 2009). In a qualitative study of 53 elementary and secondary teachers in Ontario, Canada, a researcher explored teachers' emotional responses to student interactions and the effect on professional motivation and job enjoyment (Hargreaves, 2000). All but one of the secondary teachers (n = 31) shared that positive student emotions were a strong source of encouragement in their work. In addition, many teachers shared that they experienced a strong source of personal fulfillment when helping struggling students overcome challenges such as supporting a student in earning a high score on an assessment, teaching a disadvantaged student life skills, or helping a student return to school after a traumatic experience (Hargreaves, 2000). In contrast, these teachers also expressed feeling negative emotions when they did not feel seen or understood by their students or if they had negative student relationships. Hargreaves' (2000) findings

suggested that teachers can find motivation and enjoyment in their jobs when they have positive relationships with students, when students experience positive emotions, and when they succeed in supporting students in overcoming difficulties. However, when teachers have negative student relationships or feel misunderstood by students, they can experience lower job satisfaction (Hargreaves, 2000).

High teacher attrition rates within the first five years of entering the profession are a problem many countries face. In the U.S., nearly half of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). In Canada, attrition rates vary by province; however, in Alberta, around 25% of new teachers leave the field within the first five years (Alberta Education, 2012). Low job satisfaction and teacher burnout have been found to contribute to the high rates of teacher attrition (Brasfield et al., 2019; Harmsen et al., 2018). In the Harmsen et al. (2018) study mentioned above, teachers who experienced higher job discontent (due to student behaviors and lack of administrator and colleague support) were 1.67 times more likely to leave the field of education.

High teacher stress and burnout can impact teacher retention and well-being but can also negatively affect the quality of teacher-student relationships (Richards et al., 2016). Teacher burnout is typically described as emotional exhaustion, attitudes that depersonalize students, and feelings of low personal accomplishment (Aloe et al., 2013; Hastings & Bham, 2003). In Jennings and Greenburg's (2009) paper exploring a prosocial model of teaching, they explained that teachers with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization may be more likely to use reactive and punitive disciplinary approaches. As mentioned above, teachers who use these types of disciplinary approaches are more likely to experience higher rates of student defiance, lower student trust, and negative student relationships (Gregory & Ripski, 2008), which potentially

creates a cycle of unwanted student behaviors that can increase teacher stress, burnout, and punitive discipline strategies. Punitive discipline then has the potential to decrease student-teacher trust, which is associated with increased unwanted behavior and lower engagement, creating a cycle. This section explores the connection between student behaviors, teacher self-efficacy, and teacher burnout.

Sources of stress for teachers that contribute to higher rates of burnout are low student motivation, low engagement (Byrne, 1994; Junker et al., 2021), lack of positive teacher-student relationships, and student disrespect, including defiance (Chang, 2013; Hastings & Bham, 2003). For some teachers, student disrespect, student defiance, and negative relationships can increase stress levels and burnout, contributing to feelings of helplessness and anger (Chang, 2013; Spilt & Koomen, 2009). Several studies support this claim. In a study of Canadian teachers (n = 3,044) from all school levels, negative classroom climate (as defined by negative teacher-student relationships, student apathy, discipline problems, disrespect, and low achievement) was shown to be a significant causal pathway of two indicators of teacher burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization) as measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory and the Classroom Environment Scale (Byrne, 1994). Additionally, an exploratory factor analysis conducted in England, using teacher (n = 100) perception data regarding burnout and student behaviors, found that student disrespect significantly predicted two aspects of burnout: emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Hastings & Bham, 2003).

While multiple studies indicated that low student motivation, classroom disengagement, and disrespectful behavior were highly likely to create stress for teachers, one study suggested that not all teachers experience stress in response to disruptive and disrespectful behavior. A biometric study of 40 teachers found that student disengagement and low motivation were

significant sources of stress to teachers (as measured by increased heart rate); however, not all teachers experienced a stress response to disrespectful and disruptive student behavior (Junker et al., 2021). Although the Junker et. al. (2021) study did not explore why some teachers did not experience stress in response to disrespectful and disruptive behavior, it raises the question of whether teacher self-efficacy in managing student behavior can impact the level of stress response they experience in when encountering disrespectful and defiant behavior.

Research findings indicate that student disengagement and disrespect are associated with punitive discipline strategies, negative teacher-student relationships, and teacher burnout. However, not all teachers appear to experience a stress response to certain student behaviors and not all teachers experience burnout. More needs to be understood about what, if any, personal or school organizational factors may prevent teachers from engaging in the: low student engagement/high unwanted behavior → stress in response to student behavior → high burnout → negative teacher-student relationships cycle.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

Teachers with lower self-efficacy in managing the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students are more likely to experience negative teacher-student relationships (Aloe et al., 2013; Jennings & Greenburg, 2009) and that may contribute to the levels of stress and burnout they experience (Spilt et al., 2011). In a qualitative study of 28 teachers in the United States, participants indicated that when they did not feel equipped to navigate the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students, they were more likely to experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization of students (Richards et al., 2016). Additionally, a multivariate meta-analysis of studies (n = 16) examining the relationships between teacher classroom management self-efficacy and burnout (from the U.S., Spain, Norway, the

Netherlands, Turkey, and Israel) found that low teacher classroom management self-efficacy (confidence in managing student behavior, engagement, and student needs) was significantly related to all three measures of burnout: high emotional exhaustion, high student depersonalization, and a low sense of accomplishment (Aloe et al., 2013). Additionally, in a review of literature about interpersonal relationship theories and teacher-student relationships, Spilt, Koomen, and Thijs (2011) suggested that high student conflict can weaken teacher self-efficacy for managing student behaviors, serving as a source of stress and contributing to negative emotions for teachers. They also suggested that the quality of teachers' relationships with students greatly impacted teacher well-being and motivation (Split et al., 2011). In Chang's (2013) study of U.S. teachers (n = 492) across all school levels, a confirmatory factor analysis was done to identify correlations between teachers' emotional responses to student disruptive behavior and levels of burnout. Findings indicated that the emotional intensity of a teacher's response to student classroom disruption positively covaried with the level of burnout that teacher experienced (Chang, 2013). This was especially true for teachers with low self-efficacy around solving problems related to unwanted student behavior, whereas teachers with high problem-solving coping were less likely to experience high burnout (Chang, 2013). Although there appears to be a connection between low classroom management self-efficacy and feelings of stress and burnout, less is known about how teachers develop this self-efficacy and whether it wanes over time or is impacted by school organizational factors.

Teacher Social-Emotional Competence

One factor impacting how effectively teachers support the needs of students is teachers' social-emotional competence. Social-emotional competence (SEC) can be defined as emotional self-awareness and regulation, social and interpersonal skills, and stress management (Oberle et

al., 2020). Jennings and Greenberg (2009) theorize that teachers with higher SEC are more likely to manage student behavior more effectively, develop positive teacher-student relationships, and see higher engagement and student outcomes in their classes. Oberle et. al. (2020) investigated the connection between student perception of teacher SEC and teacher-reported levels of burnout (defined as emotional exhaustion and depersonalization of students) in southwest Canada. Data included a student (n = 676) perception survey of teacher SEC, classroom autonomy, and school self-concept and teacher (n = 35) self-perception of burnout using the Maslach Burnout Inventory. Findings indicated a strong positive correlation between teacher burnout and student perception of low SEC, meaning that teachers who were experiencing high levels of burnout were perceived by their students as less socially and emotionally supportive of students (Oberle et al., 2020).

When students perceive their teachers to be supportive, they are more likely to report the classroom climate to be more positive, their motivation to learn may increase, and they are more likely to receive higher grades (Davis 2006). The opposite can also be true as evidenced by Furrer and Skinner's (2003) study of the correlation between teacher relatedness and student engagement. Data included a student (n = 641) questionnaire on the topics of (1) student level of relatedness (feelings of belonging and value) to family members, peers, and teachers, (2) student control beliefs with regard to school, and (3) student level of behavioral and emotional school engagement. Data also included participating students' teachers' reports on student behavioral and emotional engagement and students' academic grades. Findings indicated that students with high relatedness to teachers exhibited higher behavioral and emotional engagement and students with low relatedness exhibited decreased engagement (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

While evidence points to the importance of teacher social-emotional competence, more need to be understood about how teachers develop that competence. In Oberle et al. (2020) younger teachers were perceived to have higher SEC than older teachers, and in Van Maele and Van Houtte (2014), higher emotional exhaustion and decreased sense of accomplishment were positively correlated with the number of years of teaching. It is unclear if those results were a function of newer approaches in teacher preparation programs that prepare teachers to have higher SEC and classroom management skills or if they were a function of teachers having fewer years in the field and thereby fewer years of experiencing the high stress levels that can contribute to burnout. From the studies described in this section, it remains unclear whether burnout causes teachers to have lower SEC with their students or whether low teacher SEC increases the risk of burnout.

Organizational Impact on Teacher Burnout

Teachers report organizational and policy factors such as workload, lack of support from administrators or colleagues, and curricular and testing pressure as decreasing well-being and increasing burnout (Spilt et al, 2011). Richards et al. (2018) identified participants by administering the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Educator Survey (MBI-ES) to teachers (n = 415) in the U.S. In-depth interviews were conducted with the 14 teachers identified as struggling with the highest burnout levels and the 14 teachers with the lowest burnout levels. Findings showed that 85% of teachers (n = 14) who experienced high burnout out taught in middle or high school, indicating a possible higher rate of burnout among secondary teachers. Teachers with high burnout reported a lack of sense of community within the school, student apathy, combative environments, and constraining public policy as contributing to their burnout. Whereas teachers who experienced low burnout (n = 14) described feeling like they made a difference for students

and reported having positive relationships with colleagues and feeling trusted and supported by administrators (Richards et al., 2018). These findings were similar to Aloe et al.'s (2014) multi-variate meta-analysis of studies on teacher burnout, which indicated that lack of resources, struggles with managing student behavior, difficult student or family relationships, and curriculum and testing pressures were associated with increased teacher burnout.

Additionally, Byrne (1994) used structural equation modeling to test the causal pathways of teacher burnout (n = 3,138) in central Canada. Data was gathered using validated scales for teacher burnout, teacher stress, classroom environment, locus of control, and self-esteem. The results confirmed Richards et al.'s (2018) findings that middle and high school teachers experienced the highest levels of burnout, specifically due to role conflict (work demands that conflict with one another) leading to feelings of emotional exhaustion for middle school teachers and depersonalization and an external locus of control for high school teachers. Results also indicated that when school administrators did not include teachers in sharing decision-making, they were more likely to feel lower self-esteem, and an external locus of control (Byrne, 1994).

O'Brennan et al.'s (2017) study of U.S. high school staff (n = 3,225) from 58 schools with diverse student populations (48% students of color) examined staff perceptions of personal connectedness, student connectedness, administration connectedness, personal self-efficacy, safety, and burnout through the Safe and Supportive Schools climate survey. Their results echoed those of Richards et. al. (2018) and Aloe et. al. (2014) in two ways: (1) there was a negative correlation between teachers who felt connected to the school, students, and administrators and teacher burnout, and (2) staff with higher self-efficacy in managing difficult student behaviors experienced lower burnout (O'Brennan et al., 2017).

In addition to personal (social-emotional competence and self-efficacy managing and problem-solving for unwanted student behavior) and student factors (motivation to engage and quality of relationships), organizational (clearly defined roles, supportive and trusting relationships, shared decision-making, conflicting role demands, and a sense of community) and policy factors (testing and curricular pressures) have been identified as impacting burnout. The importance of trusting and supportive teacher-administrator relationships was highlighted in all four of the articles in this section. Although researchers have identified specific school organizational factors that increase teacher burnout levels, and other research has established that negative teacher-student relationships can be associated with teacher burnout, research has not explored if there is a direct connection between school organizational factors and teachers' success in building positive relationships with students.

Teacher Trust and Burnout

Teacher trust has been shown to be an important factor in protecting against teacher burnout (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2014). Trusting relationships with students, administrators, and colleagues were all associated with lower levels of burnout, with student relationships having the most significant association overall (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2014). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1998) conducted an empirical study of teachers (n = 2,741) from middle schools (n = 86) to investigate teacher trust in schools. They examined school organizational climate, teacher trust in administrators and colleagues, and authenticity. The results indicated that a collegial leadership (administrators who were supportive, open, approachable, and concerned with social needs and task needs) and teacher professionalism (teachers who were committed to students, got along with their colleagues, provided support for one another and helped each other with professional problems) were both significantly associated with teacher

trust in the administrator. Findings also indicated that administrator authenticity was significantly positively correlated with the level of trust teachers felt toward them, and teacher authenticity was significantly correlated with the level of trust felt by colleagues (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998).

Using validated perception surveys with students (n = 2,845) and teachers (n = 673), a study in Belgium examined the relationships between quality of social relationships (as measured by trust between teachers and students, teachers and administrators, and teachers and colleagues), teacher burnout, and teacher self-efficacy (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011). Results indicated that teacher trust with administrators, colleagues, and students were significantly positively correlated with each other and negatively correlated with all three measures of burnout. The most significant correlations were teacher trust in students with overall burnout, and teacher trust in administrators with emotional exhaustion. There was also a significant negative correlation between teacher efficacy and burnout. School demographic factors such as the percentage of students living in poverty were not significantly associated with teacher burnout (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011). These findings suggest that when teachers have trusting relationships with students and administrators and high self-efficacy, they are less likely to experience burnout, even in school environments in which burnout is more frequent due to factors such as high poverty rates.

Negative teacher-student and teacher-administrator relationships can contribute to teacher burnout, and teacher burnout is one contributing factor to teacher attrition. In addition to relationship quality, teacher burnout is also impacted by teacher self-efficacy (confidence in navigating the social and emotional needs of students and managing student behavior), the leadership styles of administrators, and policy demands. If teachers with positive relationships

and high self-efficacy are less likely to experience burnout, more needs to be understood about those teachers who are highly skilled in building trusting relationships with students and managing their social, emotional, and behavioral support needs. More also needs to be understood about how administrators support teachers in that.

Turning Points

Turning points is a concept from life course perspectives that refers to times when individuals experience a transformation in how they understand themselves and how they relate to the world (Hutchison, 2019). Turning points occur during life transitions or due to life events. Adolescence is a key developmental stage in the life course (Viner et al., 2012) and a time in which individuals experience biological, psychological, and social transitions (Hutchison, 2019). Life events can serve as turning points when they result in changes to one's self-concept or beliefs about oneself (Hutchison, 2019). Relationships with teachers in schools have the potential to create turning points for adolescents by influencing students' self-concepts and beliefs about their abilities (Kelley & Lee, 2018; Noble-Carr et al., 2014; Watson, 2017).

Students who have experienced social inequity, poverty, exposure to violence, bullying, or other adverse life experiences are at greater risk of struggling with chronic disengagement from school, potentially setting them on a life trajectory that includes decreased educational attainment and the associated decreased social, emotional, and physical health outcomes; however, those trajectories can change (Hutchison, 2019; Yair, 2009). Evidence of this can be seen in a qualitative study of young people (n = 24), all of whom experienced some level of adverse early life experience (including abuse, homelessness, racism, foster care, or unstable home lives) (Noble-Carr et al., 2014). Participants indicated that positive relationships with adult youth support workers (in which they felt cared about, had a sense of belonging, and were

acknowledged for succeeding at something) were pivotal in supporting the formation of their own positive identity and increasing hope for their futures (Noble-Carr et al., 2014). Although this study did not address teacher relationships specifically, youth support workers and teachers can develop similar adult-youth relationships in which students feel cared about, seen for their strengths, and feel a sense of belonging, all of which have the potential to positively impact youth identity formation and hope for the future.

Teachers who are highly skilled at building relationships with students have the potential to help students change their self-concept by removing obstacles to school engagement and achievement (Hutchison, 2019; Yair, 2009) and begin to change what students believe about themselves and their futures (Allen et al., 2013; Noble-Carr et al., 2014). Evidence of this was seen in Yair's (2009) study of adults (n = 1,100) in which 15% of participants described specific examples of how their teachers contributed to transformations in their identities and confidence levels that not only increased their academic engagement and success but also positively changed the trajectories of their lives.

Turning points often occur during life transitions. Adolescence is a critical developmental stage in life due to the increased neuroplasticity of the brain and the number of biological, psychological, and social transitions (Hutchison, 2019) that occur such as entering puberty; cognitive development increasing the ability to reflect; and the transition from elementary to middle school and middle to high school (Viner et al., 2012). These transitions create opportunities for middle and high school teachers to positively impact the lives of disengaged students who are on a trajectory towards high school dropout by creating relationships or experiences that facilitate turning points for students (Viner et al., 2012).

Middle school is especially important because it is a key time in students' lives that often determines whether they will engage in school or not (Kennedy, 2011). It is a time of identity formation, where adolescents begin to define themselves as separate individuals and explore their beliefs and behaviors and determine what their attitudes will be (Hutchison, 2019). As youth enter early adolescence, their brains begin to over-produce gray matter leading to higher plasticity (peaking at age 11 for girls and 12 for boys), which is then shaped by experiences and pruned (Hutchison, 2019). This age range corresponds to middle school for most youth. Because the brain is being molded more intensely during that time, it is an important window for experiences that may help to increase engagement in school through shifting student beliefs about themselves, their abilities, and their hope for the future.

Balfanz et al. (2007) examined the connections between high school dropout and the academic and behavior data of students (n = 12,972) (from a high poverty urban school district in which 76% of students were Black or Latino) when they were in sixth grade. These researchers found that students with chronic classroom behavior struggles (including disruption or lack of engagement) or students who failed either math or Language Arts in sixth grade were significantly more likely to drop out of high school than students without failing marks or who did not struggle with disruptive or disengaged behavior. Balfanz et al.'s (2007) study did not examine why those students had higher dropout rates, if those academic and behavior trends continued, or what role student identity formation or self-efficacy played in those outcomes, but their findings do offer evidence that a student's academic performance and behavior in sixth grade are significantly associated with future dropout. These findings point to the possibility that focusing targeted efforts to support students in early middle school, especially for students of color in high poverty areas, has the potential to create positive turning points for students.

Balfanz et al.'s findings also raise the question of how middle school teachers who are highly skilled at managing student behavior and increasing student engagement and achievement do so.

It is well established in the literature that positive relationships with teachers, especially in secondary school, in which students feel seen and cared about, can support the development of a positive identity (Noble-Carr et al., 2014) and decrease dangerous and delinquent youth behavior (Kelley & Lee, 2018). Supporting students in changing self-concept and developing a positive identity can facilitate turning points for youth at risk of dropping out of school, although direct evidence of the mechanism of this remains a gap in the literature. Additionally, more needs to be learned about what factors enable some secondary teachers to form positive and influential student relationships when overall, positive teacher-student relationships decrease during that time.

Summary

One area frequently highlighted in the literature was the positive impact of teacher-student relationships on increasing student engagement and the resulting increased achievement and school completion rates (Mason et al, 2017; Roorda et al., 2017). However, the majority of studies examining teacher-student relationships either focus on the association between these relationships and engagement, achievement, and school completion, or they focus on identifying concrete actions teachers take that are associated with positive student relationships. These studies provide valuable insight into the importance of positive teacher-student relationships, but they do not comprehensively examine the personal and systemic factors that influence teacher success such as the underlying belief systems and experiences of teachers, the relational dynamic between teachers and students, or organizational supports and policies. These studies also fail to offer sufficient guidance to the field about how teachers can improve if they are not naturally

skilled at building relationships with and engaging students. In this thesis, I seek to broaden the knowledge surrounding positive teacher-student relationships through a systemic investigation to understand (1) the beliefs and experiences of teachers, (2) the relational dynamics between teachers and students, (3) school organizational factors, and (4) the district/state/provincial factors that impact positive teacher-student relationships and teacher success with engaging students.

This study focuses specifically on secondary teachers for several reasons. First, positive teacher-student relationships and engagement both tend to decrease in secondary schools, so it is even more important to understand how the teachers who excel at building relationships and engaging students do so at that level. Second, adolescence is the time in life when youth begin to form their identities, and this is a key time for supportive teachers to encourage the formation of positive identities. Third, positive teacher-student relationships have the potential to facilitate turning points for youth, potentially shifting their life trajectories in positive directions. The increased number of transitions that adolescents experience creates more opportunities for turning points to occur. It should be noted that while extensive literature indicates the powerful impact of positive teacher relationships on increasing youth educational attainment and changing life course trajectories, there may be other factors that contribute to those shifts. This study investigates only one factor in a complex systemic issue.

In qualitative research studies, a balance must be found between understanding the literature surrounding a research question while also entering interviews, observations, and analysis without preconceived ideas of what will be found. In this study, the research questions were developed based on a concern from the field combined with the literature surrounding it. The literature in this review helped me to refine my research questions and expand beyond

focusing solely on the teacher-student relationship to include the personal, organization, and policy factors that may influence teacher success. An overview of the research methodology, conceptual underpinnings, and study design are provided in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

This qualitative research study investigated how middle and high school teachers (from one school district in western Canada and two schools from a western state in the United States) who are highly skilled at building relationships with and engaging disengaged students (positive deviant teachers) succeed and the systemic factors that impact their success. Ethics board approval (see Appendix A) was obtained through the Human Subjects Research Committee of the University of Lethbridge (protocol number: 2020-045).

This study investigated the following research questions:

1) How do positive deviant teachers successfully build relationships with and engage disengaged students?
2) What are the factors within an ecological model that impact the success of positive deviant teachers?
    a. What shared factors transcend demographic variables (urban, rural, gender, years of experience, content area taught, located in a western Canadian province or a western U.S. state)?
    b. Are there different factors impacting teachers from the school district in a western Canadian province versus teachers from the two school districts in a western U.S. state?

In this chapter, I will outline the research design, including the rationale for using the qualitative description methodology (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Sandelowski, 2000,) an explanation of my philosophical stance and assumptions as the researcher, and the conceptual foundations that influenced the study. A detailed description of recruitment, data collection, analysis, ethical considerations, and measures taken to increase credibility are included.

Qualitative Description Methodology

Research study designs can be motivated by practical goals (the desire to change something) or intellectual goals (the desire to understand something; Glesne, 2006, p.39). This study was born from both a practical goal of wanting to contribute to knowledge that might improve the field of Education and an intellectual goal of desiring to understand how teacher beliefs, relational dynamics, organizational factors, and policy factors impact positive deviant teachers' success in connecting with and engaging chronically disengaged students. Because this study centers around questions of practice, it required the use of a methodology appropriate to practice-oriented fields. Qualitative description was the methodology chosen because it is one of the most frequently used qualitative methodologies in practice-oriented fields to understand a phenomenon or process from the different perspectives of those experiencing it (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Sandelowski, 2000) and to provide answers to questions relevant to practitioners and policymakers (Chafe, 2017; Sandelowski, 2000). In addition, because this methodology is designed to answer questions regarding the phenomena of practice, it is less theory-driven than other methodologies (Kahlke, 2014).

Qualitative description is a naturalistic approach in which researchers seek to accurately understand and describe a phenomenon from the perspectives of those who experience it (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Kahlke, 2014; Sandelowski, 2000; Willis et al., 2016). Purposive sampling with maximum variation is typically used to ensure the inclusion of a variety of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Kahlke, 2014). It begins by gathering data with in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Sandelowski, 2000) with individuals about their experiences. One goal in qualitative description is to attain both descriptive and interpretive validity, meaning that most participants

would agree that the description of and meaning attributed to the phenomenon are accurately described (Sandelowski, 2000). Qualitative description requires researchers to use an inductive approach, allowing for themes to be determined by the data rather than an existing theory (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2013; Sandelowski, 2000). Data can be analyzed using content or thematic analysis (Bradshaw et al., 2017). Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) was used in this study. Another key aspect of this methodology is that researchers seek to understand a phenomenon through the multiple perspectives of those involved to identify commonalities or differences across all data sets (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Kahlke, 2014; Sandelowski, 2000; Willis et al., 2016).

Qualitative description was chosen because its purpose is to understand a phenomenon in an applied field with the intent that practitioners may benefit from and possibly apply the findings. The phenomenon under investigation is how positive deviant teachers build relationships with and engage disengaged students and the systemic factors that influence them. Researchers' use of qualitative description to understand phenomena of practice through the multiple perspectives of those involved was aligned well with my study's objective of understanding the research question from the perspectives of teachers, administrators, and adult former students to gain a more comprehensive and systemic understanding. In qualitative description studies, a focus is placed on identifying commonalities or differences within and across participant samples (Willis et al., 2016). This objective aligns with my study's goal of identifying the common factors that transcend demographic differences and the factors that vary between teachers in one school district in one province in Canada and two school districts in one U.S. state.

Although qualitative description is used to understand a phenomenon, it differs from descriptive phenomenology. The purpose of descriptive phenomenology is to understand the essence of a specific lived experience through the eyes of those who lived it (Willis et al., 2016). Qualitative description differs in that researchers seek to understand a phenomenon in a broader, more practical sense from multiple perspectives (Willis et al., 2016). In this study, three participant samples are used to determine what internal, relational, organizational, and district/state/provincial-level factors impact the success of positive deviant teachers. The objective is not to understand the lived experience of one of those samples but rather to understand the multiple levels of factors that impact the phenomenon. This systemic question is more suited to qualitative description. Descriptive phenomenology would have been more appropriate if the research question focused solely on the essence of the experience of being a disadvantaged student in school or the experience of being a positive deviant teacher working with disadvantaged populations.

The philosophical assumption underlying the design of this study is critical realism. There is some disagreement in the literature about if critical realism is an ontological assumption. Braun and Clarke (2013) describe critical realism as the ontological assumption that there is a universal truth that exists behind socially constructed knowledge, whereas Maxwell (2012) describes it as a realist ontology combined with a constructivist epistemology. Either way, both agree that it combines aspects of realism (that there is a universal truth that exists beyond our beliefs) and constructivism (that our perceptions and perspectives influence our understanding and knowledge of the world). In this study, I seek to identify the beliefs, relational dynamics, organizational factors, and policy factors that are shared among all participants regardless of demographic differences because I believe there is a common human truth that

impacts the success of positive deviant teachers. To find that commonly shared truth, the socially constructed perspectives of different participant samples, who may experience the phenomenon differently, must be gathered, compared, contrasted, and understood (Bradshaw et al., 2017). Interview data provides the socially constructed knowledge of participants, and analysis within and across samples allows for identifying factors that appear to transcend demographic and perspective differences and are experienced as 'true' for participants.

Both Braun and Clarke (2013) and Maxwell (2012) agreed that the epistemological position associated with critical realism is constructivist. This is the philosophical stance of this study as I seek to understand each participant's interpretation of the phenomenon (Kahlke, 2014). Constructivism posits that knowledge is constructed and cannot be separated from individuals' experiences and that what one perceives to be true is informed by one's social and cultural contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Determining the epistemological position also requires clarity about whether the research perspective is individual or social and objective or subjective (Klemmis & McTaggart, 2000). In this study, the strategy of inquiry is individual and subjective (although observational data brings in an element of objectiveness), which means that it is grounded in a belief that human behavior is influenced by an individual's beliefs and values (Klemmis & McTaggart, 2000). An individual and subjective strategy of inquiry allows a researcher to understand the perspectives of individual participants (Klemmis & McTaggart, 2000) and is helpful in studying practice-oriented phenomena (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Sandelowski, 2000). In this case, I seek to understand the individual and subjective experiences and beliefs of teachers, administrators, and adult former students regarding how teachers build relationships with and engage disengaged students.

Conceptual Foundations

Aspects of one concept and one theory informed this study's design: positive deviance and ecological systems theory. They are explained in more detail in the following sections.

Positive Deviance

Positive deviance is a strengths-based concept that within communities, there exist members who solve a problem that others struggle with. By learning how those members solve the problem, others within that community may also learn how to solve the problem (Pascale et al., 2010). Because schools serve as small communities, this concept can be applied to a school setting.

Positive Deviance was first developed to address childhood malnutrition in a small village in Vietnam (Pascale et al., 2010). It has since been used to solve a variety of severe problems ranging from decreasing maternal fatality rates in Pakistan to decreasing high school dropout rates in Argentina and the United States (LeMahieu et al., 2017). In the field of Education, positive deviance has been used as both an innovative research strategy and a quality improvement strategy (LeMahieu et al., 2017). It involves shifting the research perspective from focusing on investigating a problem to investigating and understanding possible solutions that already exist within a community. The positive deviance process entails:

1) Identifying positive deviants (individuals within the community who are succeeding where others struggle)
2) Studying *how* positive deviants succeed
3) Creating opportunities for positive deviants to teach others within their community about how to change their behavior and allowing community members to practice those new behaviors (LeMahieu et al., 2017; Pascale et al., 2010).

Schools can be thought of as communities that include different members such as students, teachers, support staff, administrators, and families. While positive relationships with students are a source of job satisfaction and motivation for most teachers (Spilt et al., 2011), some lack the skills to connect with students who are disruptive, disengaged, unmotivated, or more challenging to build relationships with, which can lead to feelings of helplessness and frustration (Junker et al., 2021; McGrath & VanBergen, 2015; Spilt & Koomen, 2009). In this research study, I identify positive deviants as the teachers who are highly skilled at building relationships with and engaging chronically disengaged and disconnected students. This study's design does not include the entire positive deviance process; however, the concepts of identifying teachers who succeed where others struggle and seeking to understand how they succeed were foundational elements of the research design.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory originated as a framework used to examine and understand the inter-relating systems surrounding and impacting a child's life and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). It has since been widely adopted to gain a systemic understanding of children, youth, and adults in fields such as sociology, psychology, and education to increase the effectiveness of support services (Burns & Warmbold-Brann, 2015). For example, taking an ecologic perspective towards concerns within schools such as bullying, physical activity, or peer relations has been used in research to understand how schools might increase the effectiveness of support efforts (Burns & Warmbold-Brann, 2015).

Ecological systems theory provides a frame through which to examine, understand, and impact the systems-level connections contributing to a problem (Burns & Warmbold-Brann, 2015) and how individuals interact with and are impacted by different levels of environments

that surround them (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). Bronfenbrenner defined four levels, (1) the microsystem includes one's immediate setting such as home or school, (2) the mesosystem includes the interactions between two settings such as home and school, (3) the exosystem includes the impact on one's immediate setting by settings where one does not have an active role such as a child's experience at home being influenced by a parent's work environment, and (4) the macrosystem includes cultural norms, policies (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013).

This study's design is based on the assumption that teacher success in building relationships and engaging students is impacted by their internal beliefs and past experiences, teacher-student relational dynamics, and external factors within their schools, districts, and states or provinces. This study was designed as a systemic exploration to understand the levels of factors that impact a teacher's success. Although aspects of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory were conceptually foundational to the design of this study, it was not utilized in its original and pure form. Two concepts from this theory are foundational to the study's design (1) individuals are influenced by factors within the multiple levels of environments surrounding them, and (2) to understand a problem, one must examine it systemically. However, the four levels as defined by Bronfenbrenner are not the four levels used in this study. For example, Bronfenbrenner defines the first level as the immediate environment of the group being studied, such as home, classroom, or work setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). In this study, the first level focuses on the individual level of teachers' internal experience, such as their beliefs and experiences. Teachers' beliefs impact the decisions they make in their classrooms about their students, student relationships, and how to approach curriculum and instruction (Anderson, 2015; Nespor, 1987; Uden et al., 2014). It was, therefore, important to begin at the level of internal experience rather than the immediate environment. It was important to understand if participants

shared specific beliefs that influenced their success in building relationships with and engaging students.

The purpose of this study is to understand, from a systems lens, the levels of factors that impact the success of positive deviant teachers. The modified ecological model used in this study included four levels:

1) Individual (beliefs and experiences of the teachers)
2) Relational (the dynamic of what happens between students and teachers)
3) Organizational (what happens between administrators and teachers; training and support; peer support and collaboration; school policies and norms)
4) District/State/Province (policy and structural supports and requirements)

Conceptual elements of both positive deviance and ecological systems theory are incorporated into the framework for this study and contributed to its research design. Studying the factors that impact the success of positive deviant teachers through incorporating a modified ecological model allows for a more systemic understanding that may contribute to future educator training and replication of successes.

Reflexivity and Assumptions

My previous experience working with disadvantaged youth in the field of Education provided both advantages and disadvantages. One advantage is that having a foundational understanding of what happens in classrooms between teachers and students allowed me to focus on the more subtle nuances of what was occurring during observations. One disadvantage was that I entered into the research process with assumptions and biases about the topics of discipline, power dynamics, and what the relationship between teacher and student would look like. Qualitative research requires that the researcher practice reflexivity, which is to become

aware of their assumptions and biases throughout the study and disclose them to the reader (Cypress, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017; Schwandt, 2007). Practicing reflexivity and gaining awareness of my assumptions enabled me to approach data collection and analysis with curiosity and to look for what was not expected. Asking teachers and administrators to explain why they took the actions and made the decisions they did rather than assume to know, utilizing an expert review in drafting interview questions, and confirming my findings with participants, were all methods utilized to decrease the influence of personal assumptions.

Despite previous experience in the field of education, I did not enter the research process seeking to confirm previously held assumptions because that would have been counterproductive to finding unexpected solutions that have yet to be identified. Data collection and analysis were completed without preconceptions about the answer to the research questions, which allowed findings to emerge from the data (Charmaz, 2000). For example, assuming the answer related to attachment, psychological safety, or self-actualization would have prevented unexpected findings from emerging. During observations, descriptions of teacher-student interactions and conversations were manually recorded verbatim and as free from inference as possible. Rather than assign meaning to what was observed, which would have imposed my biases and assumptions onto it, teachers were asked to explain their thoughts, feelings, and motivations concerning observed actions during interviews. During analysis, semantic codes (codes that use participants' own words) were used (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2013). This ensured the accuracy of codes and decreased the risk of distorting meaning with my own assumptions. Member checking after each stage of the study provided another opportunity to ensure that the data analysis accurately represented participants' experiences and did not reflect my own assumptions (Cypress, 2017; Janesick, 2000; Nowell et al., 2017; Schwandt, 2007).

While this study was grounded in prior research and literature, it was also influenced by three personal assumptions that were based on my experience working with disengaged students and working with teachers and school and district administrators across the state of Colorado. The first assumption was that student perspectives are vital to understanding how teachers build relationships with and engage students. The second assumption was that individuals' thoughts and actions are a result of their beliefs. Therefore, to fully understand how teachers connect with and engage students, I needed to understand their beliefs. Finally, the third assumption was that although individuals' thoughts, beliefs, and actions are influenced by social factors and experiences, there are universal common factors shared by teachers who are highly skilled at building relationships with and engaging struggling and disengaged students that enable those teachers to positively impact the lives of all students regardless of demographic variables.

These assumptions influenced my study design to include adult former students who had struggled with disengagement from school, who were of different ages, ethnicities, and genders, and who experienced teachers who were able to build relationships with them and engage them in ways that other teachers had not. These assumptions also influenced the decision to include a systemic investigation that included an investigation of teachers' personal beliefs. Finally, these assumptions also influenced the decision to use maximum variation in sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015) to investigate if there were, indeed, commonly shared factors among teachers from different regions with different levels of experience and who taught different subject areas that impacted their success.

Two Country Design

In this study, I included a comparison of factors impacting teachers from two schools in one school district in one western province in Canada and two schools from different districts in

one western state in the United States. I also included the perspectives of adult former students from six different regions within the United States. The purpose behind these decisions was to increase maximum variation in sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015) to determine what factors were shared among all participants and what factors varied based on whether the teacher was from the western province in Canada or the western U.S. state. Comparing the themes identified from data collected in two countries provided opportunities for me to see beyond the biases that may be present when examining the familiarity of my own country (U.S). Although qualitative findings are not universally generalizable, identifying common themes through maximum variation in sampling increases the likelihood that findings may be applied to more settings (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Two factors that potentially impacted my findings should be addressed. First, having worked as a U.S. teacher and Colorado State Department of Education employee, I was more familiar with education policies and practices in the United States than I was in Canada. This required that I interview Canadian teachers about basic policies and practices surrounding curricula, testing, and district and provincial support services, in addition to including interview questions pertaining to the research questions. Secondly, recruitment efforts for adult former students were impacted by COVID-19 travel restrictions. I could not travel to Canada, nor did I have the social media connections in Canada to allow for my recruitment efforts to be successful. This resulted in the inclusion of only U.S. adult former student participants. Travel restrictions did not impact teacher and administrator recruitment.

Three-Phased Design

This study was a multimethod and multi-phased qualitative research study (see Figure 2). A multimethod study involves using multiple forms of data collection (Lichtman, 2013); in this

study, that included observations and semi-structured interviews during phase one and semi-structured interviews in phases two and three. Data were gathered from three different participant samples (teachers, school administrators, and adult former students) to allow for a more holistic understanding of the research question and triangulation of findings. The first phase of this study began as a pilot study focused on how positive deviant teachers built relationships with students. The pilot study has been folded into this research study and will be referred to as "phase one" throughout this chapter.

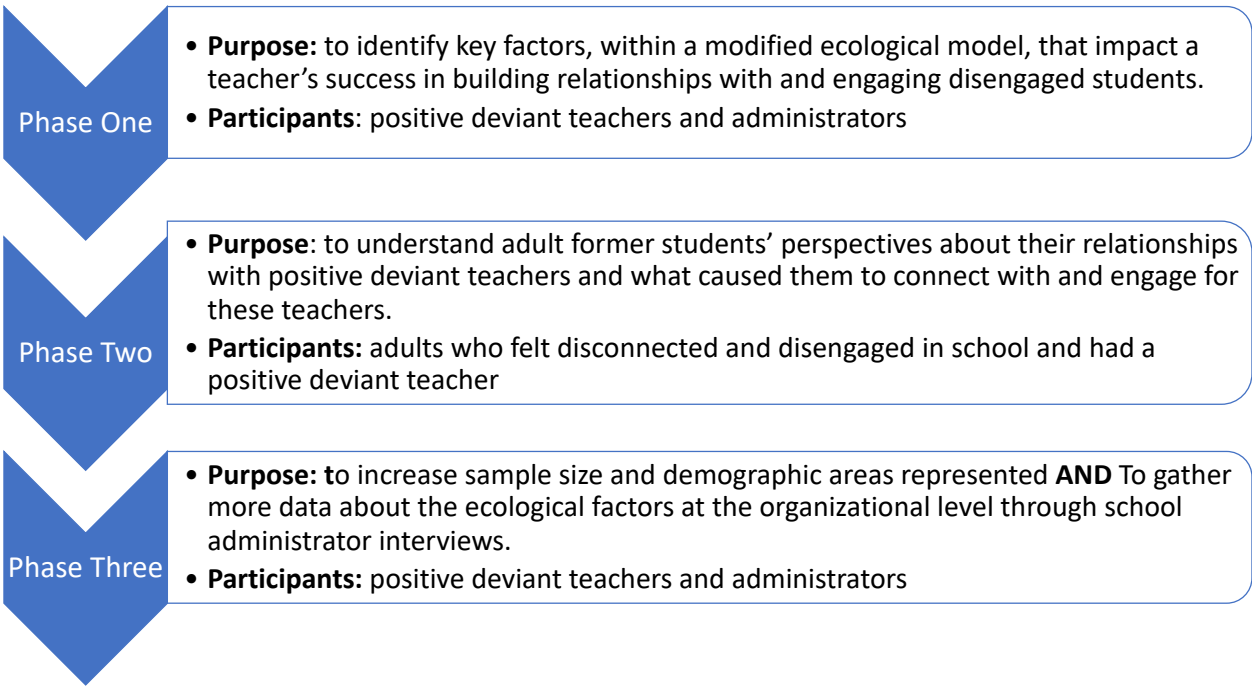

Figure 2: The Three Phases

Target Population and Sample

Consistent with the qualitative description methodology, purposive sampling (sometimes called purposeful sampling in qualitative research; Palinkas et al., 2015), with maximum variation considerations was used (Kahlke, 2014; Sandelowski, 2000). Purposive sampling involves intentionally selecting participants with experience relating to the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Palinkas et al., 2015). Three samples were included to ensure the

perspectives of different members of a learning community were represented. Criteria for each sample are described in Table 3.1. Within each sample, maximum variation was attempted. Maximum variation entails including participants with various demographics and qualities and is used to identify common themes regardless of sample differences (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Participant Selection and Recruitment

Each participant sample required a different recruitment method. Once identified through the recruitment strategy described in Table 3.1, each potential participant was sent an email inviting participation, describing the purpose of the study, and explaining what their involvement required, including the time commitment. Interested participants were emailed a copy of the consent form and given the opportunity to ask questions. None of the administrators who referred teachers or teachers who referred students were notified of who chose to participate.

Recruitment during phases two and three was impacted by COVID-19. Recruitment of educators required approval from the school districts in which they were employed. The intent was to include a small rural and a large urban school in the third phase of the study; however, permission to include the school from a large urban center was denied due to COVID-19 policies.

Table 3.1
Participant Sample Criteria and Recruitment

Participant Sample	Criteria	Recruitment
Positive Deviant Teachers n = 12	• They reach out to support students who are disengaged from school and who struggle behaviorally and emotionally • Students actively seek them out outside of class time • They are recognized by others in the field as the "go-to" person for students who struggle with connection and engagement in school • In this teacher's class, students who are usually disengaged in school will demonstrate higher participation	• Referred by an administrator based on meeting criteria • Emailed through publicly available email address and invited to participate (see Appendix B)

	• They demonstrate higher efficacy in managing student behavior as measured by writing fewer office discipline referrals for the students who usually receive frequent office referrals (although this criterion should not be used as the only indicator of being highly skilled at building relationships)* **Note:** Content areas included: social studies, language arts, physical education, math, science, applied technology, one librarian, and one special education teacher	
Adult former students n = 7	18 years or older and self-identify as: • having been a student who struggled with disengagement and not feeling connected to school during adolescence • having had a positive deviant teacher **Note:** Participants were not required to have been a student of a teacher participant, allowing for broader recruitment strategies and additional perspectives. Only one participant was a former student of a teacher participant.	Snowball sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018) methods employed: • Referral by former teacher** (see Appendix C) • Social Media posts on Facebook and LinkedIn (see Appendix D)
Administrators n = 5	• Supervise positive deviant teachers • Lead schools that meet the criteria listed below **Note:** All teacher participants described their administrators as supportive of them.	• Emailed invitation to participate (see Appendix E)
Schools n = 4	• Middle or high school*** • At least one rural and one urban • Representation of schools from Canada (n = 2) and the United States (n = 2) • Preference for schools that served a higher socioeconomically disadvantaged population ****	

*Selection criteria for positive deviant teachers were informed by the literature regarding positive teacher-student relationships (Hastings, 2003; Junker, 2021; Roorda et al., 2017; Spilt & Koomen, 2009)

**Only one student was recruited through a referral from a former teacher.

*** Middle school and high school teachers were included due to the higher rates of disengagement among adolescents (Furrer, 2003; Pianta & Allen, 2008; Spilt et al., 2011).

****This was a preferred criterion that not all schools met. Schools that serve communities with higher levels of socioeconomic disadvantage are more likely to serve students who have experienced Adverse Early Life Experiences (AELEs) and the associated decreased motivation to engage (Balfanz, Herzog, & MacIver, 2007; Goodman & Gregg, 2010; Koplan & Chard, 2015; Phan, 2013; Tella, Tella, & Adeniyi, 2011). Teachers at these schools are more likely to serve a greater number of students who require additional social, emotional, and behavioral supports.

Participants represented a broad range of demographics (see Table 3.2 for details). The differing demographics of teachers included varying years of experience, gender, middle and

high school, and multiple content areas. Administrators from four schools were included from one western province in Canada and one western state in the United States and represented small urban and rural settings. White, Latino, and Latina adult former students represented school experiences from six different regions across the United States.

Data Collection

Data were collected using observations, field notes, and semi-structured interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lichtman, 2013) from three participant samples (positive deviant teachers, school administrators, and adult former students) during three phases of data collection. This allowed for a more holistic understanding of the research question and triangulation of findings (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Lichtman, 2013). Data were collected through observations, field notes, and semi-structured interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lichtman, 2013) during the study's first phase and as semi-structured interviews in the second and third phases (see Table 3.2). During phase one, observation notes were written in pen in a notebook describing teacher-student interactions and conversations verbatim and teacher actions objectively, without assigning meaning to what was occurring and without interpretation. Field notes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lichtman, 2013) of my thoughts and questions were added during and after observations in pencil to distinguish what was observed from my own inquiries and responses. Observation notes, field notes, and initial interview responses informed the development of interview guides (see Appendices F, G & H) through an iterative process whereby previous interviews informed future interview questions. The research questions and the literature also informed the interview questions. Phase one interviews were conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and were in person.

Phases two and three required remote interviews via phone, Zoom, or Teams due to COVID-19 restrictions. All interviews were audio-recorded on my phone and then transferred to a password-protected computer and deleted from the phone. Interview guides in phases two and three were developed using an iterative process and informed by the research questions and findings from prior phases. Consistent with the qualitative description methodology, questions were added or altered for each subsequent interview as new ideas emerged (Willis et al., 2016).

Member checks to increase credibility and interpretive validity (Cypress, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017; Sandelowski, 2000; Schwandt, 2007) were conducted after the data analysis of each phase. Phase one member checking was conducted in a group interview with all teachers where analysis findings were shared. Participants were asked to verify if the findings reflected their experience and if any key factors were not represented. In phases two and three, member-checking was conducted via email. Participants were sent a list of the finding and given two weeks to respond with feedback about two questions:

1. Was there anything included in the findings that did not feel true or accurate?
2. Do you feel that any key factor to connecting with and engaging students is missing and should be included?

Additionally, participants were sent a list of potential quotes to be included (organized by each main theme) and asked for their confirmation of accuracy and approval for inclusion. Both the member checking email and the confirmation and approval of quotes within the main themes offered opportunities for participants to provide feedback on the accuracy of findings. Between those two methods of confirmation, ten of the 12 teachers, five of five administrators, and three of the seven adult former students responded with confirmation and approval that the findings accurately represented their experiences.

Table 3.2
Participants and Phases of Data Collection

Phase	Participants	Data Collection
One 2019/2020 school year	4 teachers (3 from Canada, 1 from the U.S.) 2 male, 2 female 1 high school in Canada, 1 middle school in the U.S. 3 administrators	**Teachers:** Daily observations, one class period per day for the first two weeks of school, one additional observation in November and February/March (27 total observations). Debriefing in-person individual interviews (10 minutes to an hour) at least twice during the first two weeks and following each additional observation. A final 60-minute member checking group interview of all four teachers was conducted via Zoom in May Semi-structured interview guides developed based on observations, field notes, prior interview data, and informed by the literature **Administrators:** 1 – 2 interviews with administrators (20 – 60 minutes each)
Two Summer 2020	7 adult former students 2 male, 5 female Lived in 6 different regions within the U.S. Ages 18 – 63 5 Latino/Latina, 2 white	One 30 to 60-minute retrospective semi-structured individual interview was conducted with each participant via Zoom or phone Findings emailed to participants for member checking
Three Fall 2020	8 teachers (5 from Canada, 3 from the U.S.) 3 male, 5 female 1 middle school in Canada, 1 Kindergarten – 12th grade school in the U.S. 2 administrators (one from each school, 1 from Canada, 1 from the U.S.)	One 30 – 60-minute individual interview with each participant via Zoom, Teams, or phone Used expert-reviewed semi-structured interview guides developed from themes identified in the first two phases of the study Findings emailed to participants for member checking

Expert Review

Data analysis and themes from the first two phases of the study informed the development of semi-structured interview guides that were used for teacher and administrator

interviews during the third phase of the study. In addition, the semi-structured interview guides underwent an expert review process to increase the face and content validity (Bolarinwa, 2015; Taherdoost, 2016) by allowing experts in the field to identify concerns and suggest modifications that would increase accuracy in concepts, language, and shared meaning.

Expert Reviewers

The interview guides were reviewed by four individuals in the field of Education with expertise in working with and understanding disengaged youth and teacher-student relationship-building (see Table 3.3). Three reviewers met the criteria of having been a positive deviant teacher. However, none were participants in the study.

Table 3.3
Expert Reviewers

A State Department of Education Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Specialist with 19 years of experience as a: • Elementary school teacher • Instructional coach at a school district • Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports Coordinator for a school district • Social-Emotional Learning Coordinator for a school district • Director of a non-profit organization focused on community education for bullying prevention • MTSS Specialist	**A positive deviant teacher with 23 years of experience:** • Teaching middle and high school students • Teaching pre-service teachers at the university level • Supervising educational research at the university level • Medical interpreter training in medical schools and hospitals
An Assistant Principal with 13 years of experience as a: 1) High school counselor 2) Parent Liaison for special education 3) Middle and high school athletic director/dean of students 4) Middle and high school academic dean/college counselor 5) An elementary assistant principal	**A retired Dean of Students with 28 years of experience as a:** • Middle school teacher • Dean of students in a middle school • MTSS Coordinator for a middle school • Literacy Design Collaborative coach for a school district (providing training to teachers in literacy aligned nationally with the Gates Foundation and partnered with Stanford University)

Expert Review Process

Common themes identified during the analysis of phase one and phase two data informed the development of two semi-structured interview guides, one for teachers and one for administrators. Both interview guides were emailed to each of the four reviewers, and feedback was requested regarding the following:

- Did the questions have face validity: accuracy in concepts and language (Bolarinwa, 2015; Taherdoost, 2016)?
- Did the questions have content validity: clarity and comprehensiveness of the questions, evidence of bias written into the questions, and feedback about what items seemed non-essential (Bolarinwa, 2015; Taherdoost, 2016)?
- Was the phrasing of questions clear?
- Were the questions open and neutral, or did they contain bias and appear to be leading?

Reviewers were given the option to provide feedback via email or phone. All reviewers responded to both interview guides. Interview guides were revised to eliminate unnecessary questions, modify questions to increase the face and content validity, and ensure phrasing was clear and not leading. The finalized interview guides were shared with and received approval from all reviewers.

Data Analysis

Consistent with the qualitative description methodology, a comparison of participant perspectives within and across samples to determine commonalities and differences was conducted (Willis et al., 2016). Data were analyzed using inductive Thematic Analysis. Inductive Thematic Analysis is used to find deeper themes within the data without a preexisting theory guiding the initial analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Braun and Clarke (2013) describe thematic

analysis as including seven steps, (1) transcription, (2) reading and familiarizing, (3) coding, (4) searching for initial themes, (5) reviewing themes, (6) defining and naming themes, and (7) writing and finalizing analysis. During analysis, attention was paid to which key factors appeared to be common regardless of demographics or sample perspective and which varied among the participants from the western province in Canada and the western U.S. state.

Each interview was transcribed within two weeks of the event. I transcribed phase one interviews, and all subsequent interviews were professionally transcribed by Rev, a company recommended by the University of Lethbridge Office of Research Ethics. Once completed, recordings were uploaded onto the Rev site and downloaded onto a password-protected computer.

Reading and Familiarizing

This phase included reading transcripts or listening to interview recordings to detect what stands out and capturing thoughts (Braun & Clarke, 2013). During phase one, which lasted nine months, each interview guide was informed by observation data and previous interview data. This allowed for continual reading and familiarization with the data. Typically, thematic analysis is conducted after all data has been collected (Braun & Clarke, 2013); however, in this study, this stage involved an iterative process that required continually reviewing data and adapting interview questions in response to previous data collection. Qualitative research is, by nature, iterative and should change as new findings emerge during data collection (Lichtman, 2013). During the second and third phases, analysis of transcripts was completed at the conclusion of data collection; however, a review of participant responses and the thoughts and connections I noticed were written down after each interview to inform future interviews.

Complete Coding

Complete and open coding was conducted at the end of each phase of the study. Open coding is used in inductive analysis and allows the researcher to note all points of interest pertaining to the research question without preconceived ideas of what to look for (Kahlke, 2014). Complete coding involves identifying information relevant to the research question within the entire data set instead of using selective coding, which focuses on only coding for a specific phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2013). All relevant data pertaining to each of the four levels of the ecological model were coded across all transcripts using the highlight and comment functions on Microsoft Word. Each level was highlighted in a different color: codes pertaining to the individual level were highlighted in yellow, relational in blue, organizational in pink, and district/state/province in purple. To be consistent with the qualitative description methodology and naturalist approach, semantic codes were used (Bradshaw et al., 2017), which means participants' own words were used to generate initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This type of coding was used to ensure meaning accuracy without inference and interpretation.

The final step in complete coding is to sort codes from all sources by common meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2013). During each phase of the study, coding was completed on all interview transcripts, and similar codes were sorted and collated. At the conclusion of the study, codes were again sorted by participant sample. For example, codes from teachers in phase one were sorted and collated with teachers from phase three. This resulted in three sets of collated codes: adult former students, teachers, and administrators.

Throughout the open coding process, memos were added using the comment function in Microsoft Word to capture connections and ideas to be later used during theme development. Memos were noted in italics so as not to mistake them for codes.

Searching for Initial Themes

The first stage of theme development is identifying initial themes, referred to by Braun and Clarke (2013) as provisional themes, by finding patterns within the collated codes. Collated codes for each level in the ecological model were sorted into similar concepts, ideas, actions, or topics, and patterns were identified. This was done within each transcript and across all transcripts. Themes were identified in two ways. The first were themes that were shared among most participants and transcended demographic and perspective differences. For example, themes identified within the relational level were perspectives shared by a majority of teachers, students, and administrators. The second were themes that differed based on if the teacher was in the Canadian province or western state. These themes represented a majority of participants within each sub-group but varied based on country.

Words to describe themes were carefully chosen to ensure accurate descriptions of participants' meanings. Categories were then written out on poster paper and sticky notes to allow for further sorting, pattern-finding, and concept mapping to identify initial themes for each level. For example, a provisional theme at the individual level was "Teachers have a core belief that their role is to guide students to develop as humans." This process was completed for each sample and then compared across samples to allow for triangulation (Lichtman, 2013).

Reviewing Themes

Reviewing themes allows for the identification of final themes and is a process to ensure that initial themes relate to the research question, are coherent, and work together (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In this study, provisional themes were cross-checked with the data to confirm the accuracy of representation. Themes from each phase were also shared with participants to verify

accuracy. Provisional themes were further distilled, modified, and clarified during the review process through further collating and connection making on poster paper.

Braun and Clarke (2013) explain that while the frequency of a code is important, it cannot be the only factor determining what constitutes a theme because it is impossible to know, given the nature of semi-structured interviews, what every participant thinks and feels about every topic. These final themes are referred to as "factors" in chapters four and five. To be classified as a factor in this study, a theme was required to meet two criteria:

1) It was shared by a majority of participants, although exact numbers are not reported for the reasons cited by Braun and Clarke (2013)
2) None of the data contradicted it

Factors were identified and sorted based on the level within the ecological model. However, not all participant samples identified factors within all four levels of the ecological model; for example, adult former students did not discuss factors at the district/state/province level.

Defining Themes

Braun and Clarke (2013) suggested defining themes with a few sentences to ensure that each is distinct and clear and that the themes together provide a meaningful picture of answers to the research questions. In this study, each theme was briefly defined, and the relationships between themes, when present, were identified. For example, the theme of “the role of a teacher is to guide human growth and development” was identified at the individual level and is related to themes at the relational and organizational levels. In addition, a four-part dynamic was identified at the relational level and presented visually in Figure 4. Participants reviewed and confirmed themes at the end of each study phase through member checking (Cypress, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017; Sandelowski, 2000; Schwandt, 2007).

Writing and Finalizing Analysis

Braun and Clark (2013) described the final stage of thematic analysis as writing the themes clearly and carefully choosing quotes to illustrate each one. In addition, they recommend ensuring the inclusion of quotes from all participants. Each theme is described in chapter four of this study, and quotes from all participants are used to provide examples and illustrations.

Ethics

Ethics board approval for all phases of the study was obtained through the Human Subjects Research Committee of the University of Lethbridge to conduct research in Canada and the U.S. In addition, permission from the school districts within which all teachers worked was also obtained. All recruitment emails and messages posted on social media received Human Subjects Research Committee approval (see Appendix A).

Each phase of the project required modifications. For example, phase one required additional observations throughout the school year and administrator interviews. Phases two and three required recruitment and data collection methods modifications due to COVID-19 restrictions. Every study modification and necessary consent form modifications were submitted to the Human Subjects Research Committee for approval before their implementation.

An important ethical consideration in this study was the choice to interview adults rather than youth to obtain the student perspective. Two considerations informed this decision:

1) Students currently struggling with disengagement and disconnection may have an increased level of vulnerability and be in a state of increased emotional difficulty.
2) Adults have had more time to reflect on their experiences and potentially better understand the impacts of their teacher relationship than adolescents currently in these teachers' classes.

Maintaining Anonymity and Confidentiality

Care was taken to protect participants' anonymity and confidentiality throughout the study. Including teachers who met the criteria for being a positive deviant required they be referred by administrators. However, once referrals were received, potential participants were contacted via publicly available email addresses. To protect anonymity, administrators were not notified who did or did not choose to participate. This was also true of adult former student participants. Adult former students were, in some cases, referred by teachers; however, those teachers were never notified as to which former students chose to participate. Although administrators and teachers were not notified about which referrals chose to participate, teacher and former student responses may include an element of positive bias due to recruitment by referral.

The identity of participants has been and will be protected in the following ways:

- All participants were assigned a pseudonym in the following manner:
    - Adult former students were assigned names as pseudonyms
    - Teacher pseudonyms were assigned as "Mr. or Mrs." and followed by randomly assigned letters rather than full names. For example, Mr. P or Mrs. K.
    - Administrator pseudonyms were assigned as "Admin" and followed by randomly assigned letters. For example, Admin C.
- Signed consent forms were obtained in paper form during phase one, and consent was obtained via email in phases two and three. Paper consent forms are stored in a locked file cabinet in my house along with observation notes, and electronic consents are stored on my password-protected computer and through encrypted software on a thumb drive.
- All transcriptions were anonymized for participant name, school, city, and country.

- No identifying information was included in the study findings
- Only general attributes of each school were used
- During the member checking group interview in phase one of the study, participants were given the option not to participate if they would prefer to remain anonymous. Only findings shared by all four participants were shared during the member checking group interview, which protected any individually sensitive information to remain confidential.

Confidentiality of interview data and any documents collected has been maintained. Only myself, as the researcher, and the supervisory committee, if needed, have access to the interview transcripts and any documents collected. Any identifying information about the adult former students, school administrators, teachers, or the school has and will not be included in any results shared in this document, future papers, or future presentations.

Informed Consent

A written copy of the consent form was provided to all participants, and their rights were verbally outlined prior to participation (See Appendices I, J & K). In addition, the methods of maintaining confidentiality were included on the consent form and verbally explained to the participants prior to signing. Due to COVID-19 distancing and travel restriction requirements, digital copies of consent forms were submitted. In cases where participants did not have access to a scanner, the following email message was sent to acknowledge understanding of the form and consent to participate: "Yes, I have read the informed consent form. I do not have any concerns about participating and consent to participate." This method was approved by the University of Lethbridge Human Subjects Research Committee.

Protection of Data

Interviews with adult former students, school administrators, and teachers were digitally recorded and stored using encrypted software. During Zoom and Teams interviews, only audio recordings were captured. Audio files were backed up on a thumb drive using encrypted software. I completed transcriptions of the first phase of teacher and administrator interviews. Interviews from phases two and three were transcribed by Rev, a professional transcription company recommended by the University Human Research Ethics office. Rev ensured confidentiality and data protection. All transcriptions were stored on a password-protected personal computer with encrypted software. All interview transcripts were backed up on a thumb drive using encrypted and password-protected software. In the event that I may wish to return to the data for further analysis/publication, it was approved by the Human Subjects Research Committee that the data from this study will be retained for up to ten years and then destroyed by the end of 2030.

Ensuring Credibility

Trusting that the researcher is presenting credible and trustworthy findings is important when examining a study. In qualitative research, ensuring the credibility of findings can be accomplished through triangulating data from multiple sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lichtman, 2013), self-reflexivity, which enables researchers to be more aware of their assumptions and biases (Cypress, 2017; Schwandt, 2007), transparency of the researcher's biases and assumptions that impact the study design and analysis processes (Nowell et al., 2017), conducting member checking to ensure the accuracy of findings (Braun & Clarke, 2013), and utilizing an expert review of interview guides (Ricci et al., 2019; Taherdoost, 2016). All of these were utilized to ensure credibility in this study.

In this study, observations, field notes, and interviews with teachers, administrators, and adult former students provided multiple data sources. Including multiple perspectives is a key feature of the qualitative description methodology (Kahlke, 2014; Sandelowski, 2000). This provided a more comprehensive understanding of the research questions and allowed for triangulation (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Lichtman, 2013). I practiced reflexivity throughout all stages of data collection, analysis, and writing as I continually looked for what I did not expect to see and repeatedly questioned if what I was capturing was my own assumption or an accurate representation of what I was observing or what the participants were expressing.

During phase one of the research, I was able to confirm the accuracy of my observations and check my biases and assumptions through drafting questions specifically for this purpose during follow-up interviews with teachers. To ensure interpretive validity, following analysis of each phase of data collection, member checks were conducted (Sandelowski, 2000). Obtaining feedback from participants ensured that the findings were an accurate representation of what was shared (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Cypress, 2017; Janesick, 2000; Nowell et al., 2017; Schwandt, 2007) and not a reflection of my own biases and assumptions, which is consistent with the qualitative description methodology (Sandelowski, 2000). Another measure taken to decrease the influence of biases and assumptions was the use of an expert review while drafting the interview guides for the third phase of data collection. Receiving input about interview questions from experts in the field increases the quality of the research questions and creates more transparency in the process (Ricci et al., 2019; Taherdoost, 2016). Practicing reflexivity, triangulation of data, member checking, and conducting an expert review are steps taken in this study to increase the trustworthiness and credibility of my findings.

Chapter 4: Findings

> "They were amazing, they were awesome, I always think about them, always, always, they're always in my head. I always think about them because that's how great of an impact, and they don't even know it, they didn't even know it."
>
> -Maria (adult former student participant)

This chapter reports on the thematic findings of a qualitative description study involving a total of 22 participant interviews with 12 teachers, seven interviews with seven adult former students, six interviews with five administrators, and 27 total observations of four teachers to answer the following two questions:

1) How do positive deviant teachers successfully build relationships with and engage disengaged students?
3) What are the factors within an ecological model that impact the success of positive deviant teachers?
    a. What shared factors transcend demographic variables (urban, rural, gender, years of experience, content area taught, located in a western Canadian province or a western U.S. state)?
    b. Are there different factors impacting teachers from the school district in a western Canadian province versus teachers from the two school districts in a western U.S. state?

The findings in this chapter represent the perspectives of three participant samples: adult former students, positive deviant teachers, and school administrators. Pseudonyms for all participants were used. Adult former students were assigned names. Teachers were assigned Mr. or Mrs. and then a single letter, for example, Mr. P. Administrators were assigned Admin followed by a letter, such as Admin M. Positive deviant teachers will be referred to as "teachers"

throughout this chapter. Data from the different participant samples were analyzed to identify themes across the levels of the ecological model. Themes for the individual level were identified from teacher observation and interview data. Adult former student interview data were only triangulated with teacher and administrator data to identify themes within the relational level. Themes in the organization and district/state/province levels were identified using teacher and administrator data. This chapter outlines the themes and subthemes (referred to as "factors") identified within the four levels of the ecological model that impact the success of positive deviant teachers (see Figure 3). The four levels are:

1) Individual (teacher beliefs and experiences)
2) Relational (the dynamic between students and teachers)
3) Organizational (factors between administrators and teachers, training and support, teacher colleague collaboration, school policies and norms)
4) District/State/Provincial (policy and structure supports and requirements)

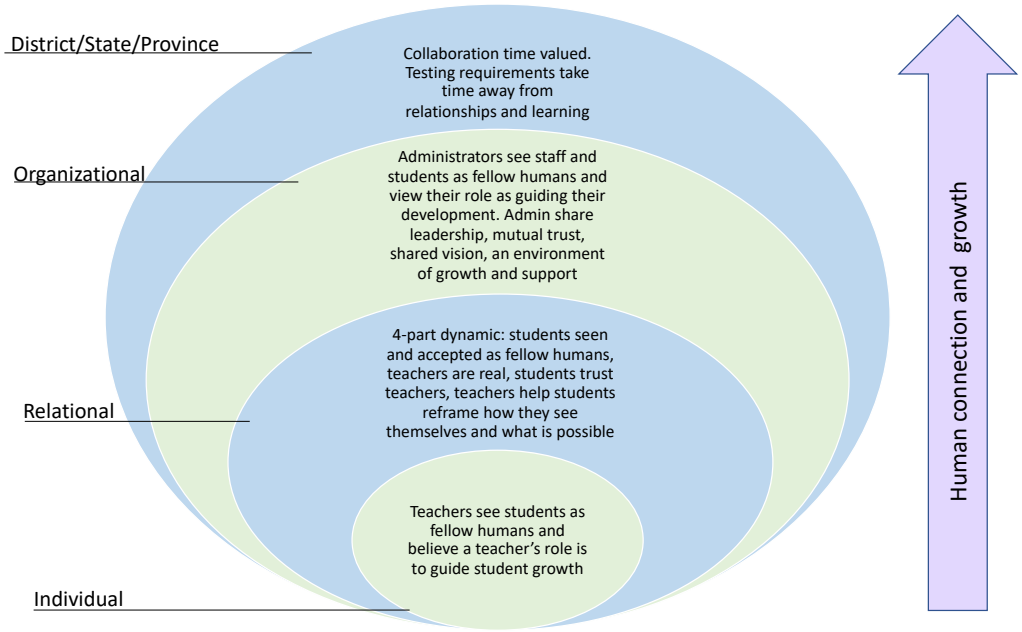

Figure 3: Summary of Themes Within the Ecological Model

As is consistent with the qualitative description methodology, findings are presented using descriptions aligned closely with participants' own words and meaning to ensure accuracy (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Kahlke, 2014). The chapter begins by describing the factors identified for each level of the ecological model. Following that is a description of the underlying theme of human connection and growth that is interwoven through all levels of the ecological model. All themes identified are shared among a majority of each participant sample, unless otherwise noted. For example, findings attributed to teachers represent the perspectives of most or all teachers from all schools in all locations.

Part One: Individual Factors

The first level of the ecological model includes factors that are individual to teacher participants such as personal experiences, core beliefs, and values that influence their leadership style and success in building relationships with and engaging students. The themes presented here are those shared by all or nearly all teacher participants from all locations unless otherwise noted. Nearly all teachers described having an influential relationship with an adult that impacted how they interact with and support students. That adult was either a teacher, coach, or parent. The other personal experiences they described as impacting their success varied across the sample. Several teachers described always knowing they wanted to be teachers, while others pursued different career interests prior to teaching. Several participants stated that positive relationships with teachers motivated them to pursue teaching as a career, whereas others became teachers because they did not have positive experiences and wanted to make a difference for students.

Teachers' Beliefs

While teachers' personal experiences, approaches to teaching, and specific actions taken varied across the sample, three beliefs were commonly shared. They believe that: (a) building relationships with students is the most important factor for engaging them, (b) students are fellow humans and their role as teachers is to guide students' development as human beings, which requires an understanding of human development and needs, and (c) being authentic (true to who they are as teachers) is essential to being successful. These shared beliefs informed the choices teachers made about classroom policies and environments, how they interacted with and led students, and how they approached curriculum and learning. In addition to sharing these beliefs, they also shared confidence in both their abilities to build relationships with and engage students and to teach their content area.

The Importance of Relationships

Teachers expressed genuinely enjoying connecting with students. Mr. C explains that connecting with students is what he values most about teaching:

> I just couldn't imagine a better profession than teaching . . . I thought I was passionate about social studies, and I am, but it's not really about that, it's just about the connections with the kids. That's what I really love doing.

Teachers all shared the belief that one of the most important factors in leading, motivating, and engaging students was to build relationships with them, and that this was more important to student learning than the curriculum. Teachers described the process of building relationships as including: (1) making personal connections, (2) learning about and meeting the unique needs of students, (3) developing trust, safety, and mutual respect, (4) listening to students, (5) partnering with students in their learning, and (6) ensuring students feel cared about.

Mrs. J has worked in several different types of schools, and she explained, “Wherever I've gone, I've felt that the relationship is the most important part. The curriculum, academics comes secondary. Some principals don't like that. But I can't do the academics if there's no foundation.” Mr. C shared:

> The biggest thing is to connect with them early and often . . . try to find some common ground with all of them . . . because it kind of brings down the walls right off the bat. I’m no longer just the adult to yell at them or keep them in line and make them do stuff they don’t want to do. It’s kind of like, “oh we’re in this together and I’m here to support you.”

Teachers also explained that building relationships with and motivating student engagement includes addressing student barriers to engagement such as low beliefs in their abilities to succeed (self-efficacy), lack of trust in adults, and lack of connection with teachers. Teachers explained that if students do not believe they will be able to succeed, they will be less likely to engage. They shared that to increase student motivation to engage, they must build trust with students and increase student confidence. Teacher participants plan their first interactions with students to intentionally build trust, connect with them, and help them feel safe to engage. Mrs. M gave an example of how she approaches this with the first writing assignment she gives students. She asks students to write a personal story and removes all academic requirements from the assignment. She does not give students a firm deadline or grade their abilities. She explained that she wants students to engage, tell her about who they are, and feel safe with her at the beginning of the year. She said:

> When you take the academic out of it, it's easy to make a great connection . . . I never introduce the academic part until they trust me. They always trust me through their writing first and knowing that I'll read it, I'll love it and I'll keep it.

A common belief expressed by teachers at a high school in Canada was that the students who are struggling with adversity will not come to classes when they do not have a connection

with the teacher. Mr. P said, “They’re not going to learn from you if they don’t want to come to your class or if they don’t like you or respect you.” These teachers explained that, as a school, they have a shared vision with administrators about the importance of building relationships with students.

Students Are Fellow Humans

Teachers described students as ‘fellow humans’ who need their teachers to be human because if they cannot relate to teachers, they are less likely to learn from them. Mrs. N said, “seeing them as a human and not just a little body in the classroom” was key to how she builds relationships with and engages students. Mrs. B repeatedly mentioned that students need a “fellow human” as a teacher to connect with them and guide them. Mrs. M said, “I'm a humanist at my core and so it just starts with a real human element; who are you?” She explained that one of her goals as a teacher was to see who her students were as humans.

Teachers demonstrated, through interview responses, a strong understanding of human development and the physical, emotional, and social needs that humans experience, and used that knowledge to connect with, lead, support, and motivate students. Teachers’ leadership style included guiding the development of their students. Teacher participants repeatedly shared that their job was to ‘guide students to develop as humans.’ Although each teacher had a slightly different description of what human skills students will need as adults, they all agreed that guiding development was an important role that they shared. Mrs. J explained, “[A teacher’s role] is to help [students] become better people. Just be good people. Be open to the world. Be thoughtful in discussions. Know how to communicate. Know how to be open to other people's experiences.” Mrs. K shared, **“**Fundamentally [being a good human] is to acknowledge each other and to be caring, really, towards each other.” Mr. P described the skills he focuses on as:

> I think my role is to . . . help them become responsible citizens and responsible members of society and hopefully along the way they become empathetic, they become resilient, they become intelligent, whatever intelligent looks like . . . transition them into where they're going to be able to buy their own groceries and budget for their lives and help people if they need help and all those things.

Human Development and Needs

Teachers described responding to students based on an understanding of adolescent development and physical, emotional, and social needs. This understanding influenced how they thought about, felt about, and responded to students.

Understanding Human Development. Mrs. K stated that being good at any profession requires the "skill of working with humans." Mrs. K explained that she needs to understand middle school students to effectively interact with and motivate them to participate:

> I think that was the switch of "I'm never going to be able to just tell a kid what to do." I have to figure out a different way of doing it and making it look like they're in charge because really that's what all kids want is power. They want control over something that is them. So, if I can give it to them in as many forms as I can in my classroom. . . "You can put your phone face down on my desk or you can put your phone over here in the pocket. Which one do you want?"

Teachers explained that adolescents are strongly influenced by peer acceptance, making it especially important not to do anything that causes students to lose their dignity in front of their peers. Doing so will make it difficult to build or maintain a positive relationship with that student.

Mr. O described the importance of being relatable:

> If your kids that are 12, 13, 14 years old, they want to be able to relate. That's their biggest thing is relationships. "I want to be able to relate to this person," and if you're perfect all the time . . . how is that relatable? And at the end of the day, who's going to want to learn from you? Because what I've learned is you can have the best lesson going on in the world with all of the bells and whistles, but if kids don't like you and you're not relatable, they are not going to learn a thing.

Understanding adolescent development enabled teachers to both build relationships with students and have patience with unwanted behaviors. Mrs. J explained:

> And it's easier to give them a break because I'm like, "You are not fully grown. Your brain is still in development. This is the time where you're supposed to push, you're supposed to challenge, you're supposed to be learning."

Teachers also understood the impact of trauma and adverse early life experiences (AELEs) on youth and designed their classes and interaction strategies accordingly. Mr. C said, "Well, they've never had a supportive adult in their life. Why would they trust me?" He knew that he would have to earn students' trust because their life experiences have decreased their trust in others. Mrs. K explained:

> If you come at any living creature with a stick - meaning forcefully, they will not respond with anything but fear and anger. You have to approach them with a spirit of love. And it will still take a while . . . you've got to circle around and far away, and it takes some time until you can get close . . . but then they're the ones who are the most grateful knowing that you have saved them, and they will be devoted to you forever. So if I can just be patient long enough to get them. Then I know I've got them forever, forever.

Adolescent Need for Autonomy and Self-Expression. Teachers demonstrated an understanding of the adolescent needs of autonomy and self-expression and described giving autonomy to students in varying ways. Mrs. K explained that the key to motivating students excel is to care about them but also give them autonomy and independence:

> [Students] know where to go so they're not dependent on me . . . I anticipate certain things and will have them out . . . so like right now, they're going to need pencils so they're right there. We're going to need the books so they're there. There has to be this wall of, "Though you have my love, I need you to walk on your own." And that's really the difference between loving them up and letting them slide by and loving them up and having them actually excel.

She provided tools, materials, guidance, and encouragement to students, but she would not do the work for them. She wants students to have autonomy and make their own decisions as they take control of their learning.

Mr. D gave his students autonomy by encouraging them to take the initiative to improve but also creating an environment where they felt safe to ask for help. He explained:

> [I want to get the kids] asking questions and thinking about, "How do I get better, and how can that person help me?" and then being there as that beacon . . . "Here's where you go. This is the area that I want you to try and find this, but it's going to be more and more meaningful if you do it for yourself rather than me tell you all the steps that it takes to get there, and then you figure it out."

Teachers described prioritizing creating safe spaces for their students to express themselves. Mrs. C shared that she values self-expression for herself and her students. She said, "I'm not a big fan of the box . . . Why should [my students] be [put in a box]? I didn't fit in the box and I'm successful." She encouraged her students to be authentic and express themselves even if it is different than how others express themselves. Mr. D shared something similar, "I don't mind that these kids think I'm weird. I want them to think I'm weird so that if there's somebody like me that's weird in the back corner, they want to do what I'm doing."

Understanding Human Needs. Teachers explained that if students' basic needs (food, sleep, safety) are not met, it becomes difficult for them to engage in the higher-order thinking activities required in school. Teachers repeatedly mentioned that students needed safety before they could learn. Mrs. M said, "What do students need from me? They need to feel safe with me. They need to know that I'm going to protect them." Several teachers explained that if they noticed a student was struggling and exhausted, they gave those students the space to meet their human needs of sleep, food, or safety before asking them to perform academically. Mrs. K gave an example of how she responds when she notices a student needs rest and safety:

> So, they might go in the cave, which is where I have cushions underneath my table and it's dark and it's quiet. But before I stick them under there, I say "what do I expect you to do tomorrow?" And they say, "Catch up" and I say, "What happens if you don't?" and they say "Well then I probably will never get an opportunity like this to check out."

Teachers described using their knowledge of human development and human needs to connect with and support their students more effectively.

Being Authentic and True to Themselves

Teachers explained that one of the keys to their success in developing positive student relationships and increasing student learning outcomes was being their authentic selves. Teachers described 'authentic self' as what feels true to who one is as an individual. They used the words: genuine, real, true to themselves, or authentic to describe this. Teachers explained the importance of being authentic, both for themselves and for their relationships with students. Mrs. K shared, "Teachers need to figure out who they are and be that in order to be effective." She explained that sometimes teachers lose sight of their authentic selves:

> We see so many other teachers that are doing such a great job and we feel like we're not living up to that ourselves. So, I think that beats us down. And then we're not our true selves. We are trying to be like somebody else . . . but when you're chasing squirrels in all different directions, then you're not harnessing your own energy and talent for those kids.

Several teachers described not being as effective when they tried to manage their classes in ways that were not aligned with their authentic selves. Mr. C explained that he struggled early in his career:

> I got better at it over time because I failed at it at the beginning, but I stuck with it . . . finding what works for me. I think really just embracing my personality as a teacher that is different from maybe what I was taught in school or what they expect in terms of an authority figure. I think accepting who I was as a person, not trying to be someone else was a big part of that. I wasn't always good at it. It took a while.

All positive deviant teacher participants described being skilled at being authentic with students, but they shared that not all teachers know how to be authentic or are comfortable doing so.

In addition to improving their relationships with students, teachers also described the personal impact of not being authentic. Mrs. C shared that she left a teaching position because she was unable to be authentic:

> I did leave the ___ classroom because I didn't agree with some of the curricular choices that were being made. It didn't feel comfortable to be teaching that way. I didn't feel like I could be true to myself . . . I felt worse about coming to work and I had more headaches and had to ask [the students] to be quiet more often.

Confidence in Abilities

During interviews, I asked teachers if they felt confident in their abilities to (a) build relationships with and (b) teach struggling students, and most answered with a definitive 'yes' to both. Some teachers described always feeling confident in their abilities to build relationships with students. Mr. O shared, "In my 14-year teaching career, I don't think there's been a student that I haven't been able to reach on some level." Mrs. B said, "I am confident that if all else fails, I know that I will be able to connect."

Some teachers described not having confidence in building relationships at the beginning of their careers but developing it through experience. Mr. C explained that his confidence grew as he used reflection to discover more about who he was as a teacher and what worked for students:

> You get better at it . . . because every new experience is just adding to the bank of what did and didn't work. . . I want to . . . get more reflection and feedback from the students as well . . . I'm starting to think about how can I get them to reflect more so that I can reflect on my own teaching more? . . . I get a good sense that they're enjoying it but . . . I just want to talk to them more about that.

Mrs. K explained that her confidence in her abilities to connect with students grew based on how students responded to her, "Kids tell it like it is, so I've had enough say that I'm their favorite, and they tell me why so then I just keep doing that."

Not all teachers claimed to be able to build relationships with *all* students, but they did feel confident with most students. Mrs. J said:

> I would say I'm really strong at [building relationships], but of course, it depends on the kid. I'm not going to be able to develop a relationship with every single kid who struggles. But I'm pretty good at figuring out how to reach a lot of the kids that struggle to find a purpose to come to school.

Summary

Teachers from all locations held commonly shared beliefs about the importance of building relationships, a teacher's role in human development, and the importance of being authentic. All teachers expressed confidence in their abilities to build relationships with and engage students. These beliefs informed participants' leadership styles, types of student interactions, classroom environments, and curricular decisions made.

Part Two – Relational Factors

The second level of the ecological model (see Figure 3) explores relational factors between teachers and students that increase engagement. Teacher participants served as leaders in their classrooms as they motivated chronically disengaged students to engage in their classes. Teachers developed trust with students by being authentic and real, valuing them without judgment, giving them respect, partnering with them in their learning and problem solving, and shifting student beliefs about what was possible. This dynamic is explained in more detail in the following sections.

While this study examined teachers, it was important to understand their impact on students. Therefore, this section includes a brief summary of who the adult former student participants are, an in-depth description of the relational and motivational dynamic between positive deviant teachers and students, and a brief description of the impact of positive deviant teachers on the school and life experiences of adult former student participants.

Data from adult former students, teachers, and administrators allowed for triangulation and revealed similar findings. It should be noted that only one adult former student participant was a former student of a teacher participant. All others had no connection to the positive deviant teachers included in this study. The fact that adult former student participants were not students of teacher participants may also strengthen findings as the factors identified from adult former student data align with the factors identified in teacher participant data.

Teacher participants all focused on increasing student *motivation* to engage rather than attempting to increase engagement through following specific strategies or protocols. Therefore, findings in this section do not focus on specific actions taken by teachers as the approaches teachers used varied based on their personalities and authentic styles. For example, one theme was: "Valuing students and their perspectives." The specific actions teachers took varied, but the overarching concept was commonly shared.

Brief Description of Adult Former Students

Adult former students represented six regions within the United States, with ages ranging from 18 to 63. None of the participants were students of the teachers interviewed except for one. All participants described struggling mentally, emotionally, or socially at the time when they experienced relationships with positive deviant teachers. Five of the seven participants were Latino or Latina and experienced struggles relating to racism or cultural and language barriers in school. Two participants experienced abuse resulting in leaving home during high school and experiencing homelessness for a time. Four participants expressed struggling with teachers who seemed inflexible, unfair, or engaged in power struggles with them. Those types of relationships resulted in emotional difficulty in school and distrust of teachers in general. Adult former students will be referred to by their pseudonym names in the following sections.

The Student Relational-Motivational Dynamic

A relational-motivational dynamic that increased positive teacher-student relationships and engagement was described by adult former students and teacher participants as including:

1. Teachers saw, valued, and accepted students as fellow human beings
2. Teachers were real with students
3. Teachers believed in students
4. Teachers created safety and trust
5. Teachers believed in students' abilities and strategically guided students to reframe how they saw themselves

The presence of *all five* of these aspects created a dynamic that resulted in positive teacher-student relationships and increased motivation to engage (see Figure 4.). The remainder of this section defines and explains each of these themes and subthemes in more depth.

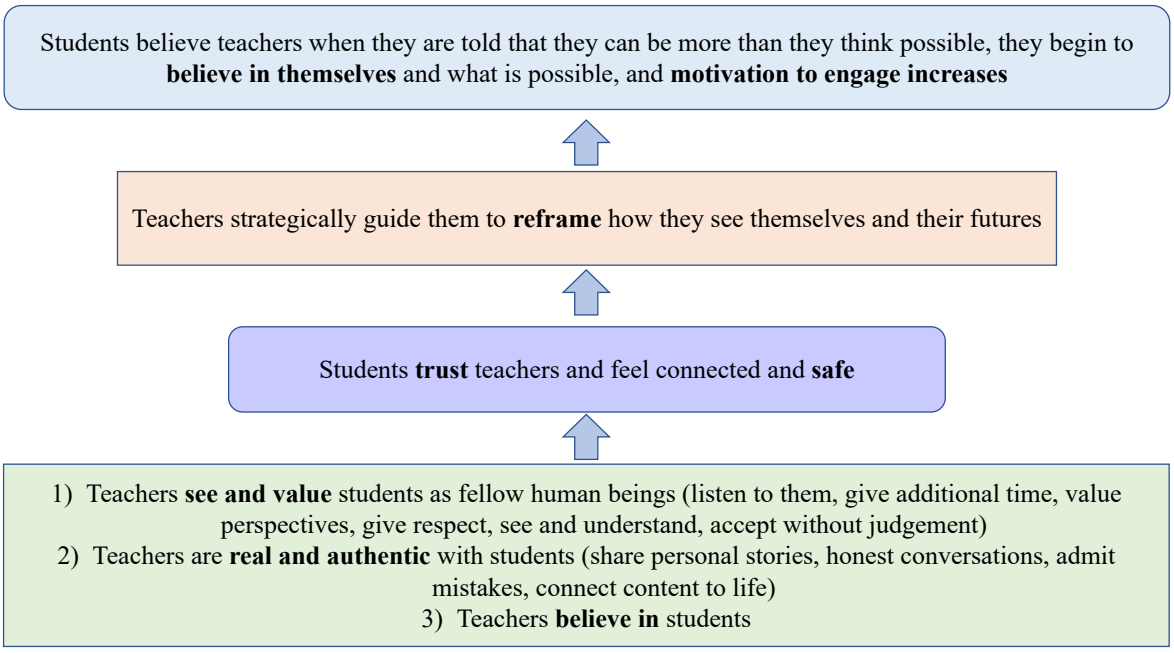

Figure 4: The Student Relational-Motivational Dynamic

Fellow Human Beings

Adult former students, teachers, and administrators all described the importance of students feeling seen, valued, and accepted as fellow human beings by teachers. Administrators explained that a key factor that makes positive deviant teachers more successful than other teachers at building relationships with and engaging students was that students feel seen, valued, and accepted by them.

Seven subthemes for how teachers helped students feel seen, valued, and accepted as fellow human beings were identified using triangulation between student, teacher, and administrator data. The subthemes were: (1) valuing students and their perspectives, (2) respecting and partnering with students, (3) accepting students without judgment, (4) students feeling seen and understood, (5) listening to students, and (6) putting in additional time and effort.

Valuing Students and Their Perspectives. Adult former students expressed how significant it was when teachers talked to them as equals and valued their ideas and perspectives. They explained that while teachers talked to them as fellow humans, equals, and friends, they also stayed professional. They described their teachers as taking an interest in students' lives, asking students questions, and being open to students' perspectives. Mateo described his experience as:

> It was a lot like equals. Very rarely did I ever feel like they pulled the power card on me . . . I've never been good with people telling me what to do because, I just feel like when people tell me what to do, I don't feel like they respect me. . . I had a lot more respect for [his positive deviant teachers]. I felt like they respected me, which was a really big thing to help me get out of my depression.

Teachers and administrators also described the importance of valuing students and their perspectives. All teachers explained that one of the reasons they excelled at building

relationships with students was because they genuinely valued students. Mr. O shared, “I think that that's how students feel valued for me, is they can see that I value my job and I value them, and I have energy for them.”

Admin M values student perspectives and includes them in leadership committees along with teachers and parents. Admin C described wanting to hear from students when they have concerns or if they have ideas about the school:

> We've always had an open-door policy with kids. We have a joke that kids literally come into our office. The door will be shut, and they'll open the door and interrupt us . . . And they'll come in and plop down and be like, “Ms. C, you know, I don't really like how this is playing out.” And we're pretty proud of that.

Mrs. L described an example of valuing student perspectives. During the COVID pandemic, the number of cases was rising and there was a chance the school would have to switch to remote learning. Mrs. L explained that she gathered student input about how she might structure her class remotely if needed. She told them:

> There is a possibility that we may have to go remote. Nobody wants that. But if that were to happen, here are some options for you. What one is going to work best? I don't want to take away time from your core classes. Those are the most important. But if we do some work remotely, what is that going to look like?

Respecting and Partnering with Students. Teachers and administrators described seeing students as fellow humans who deserve dignity and respect. Admin C said, “I think it goes back to just the honesty, and the transparency, and treating them with dignity. Always, always dignity.” Teachers explained that students were more likely to engage in their classes when they felt respected as partners in their learning. Mrs. B shared:

> My go-to is to treat them like humans. I don’t like going in with this, “I’m the authority figure.” We’re all in this together. “I’m the one teaching you. You’re the one learning.” So, I think if you right off the bat treat them as equals . . . they love that. They don’t want to be talked down to. They don’t want to be children. They don’t.

Other teachers described similar approaches and reinforced the importance of not abusing their power. Mr. P explained:

> I don't approach the relationship . . . as "I'm the teacher this is why you need to listen to me." [Instead, it is] "Hey, you don't get to do that. You're ruining things for other people. You're being irresponsible. You're being inconsiderate and selfish. Other people need to enjoy this, or other people are affected by your decisions" or whatever you want to call it. And then that's how . . . I don't use that "I'm the teacher you're the student" type thing. I think it's a very old-school way of dealing with situations, and I don't think kids, well I know kids around here don't care.

He then shared, "You'll learn real quick if kids respect you as a teacher. They respect you not because you are the teacher. They'll respect you because you created that environment and earned the respect." He explained that some of the ways he earned respect were following through with what he said he would do, joking with students, positively acknowledging their successes, and never abusing his power.

Accepting Students Without Judgement. Adult former students explained that a primary reason they trusted teachers and felt safe was that they felt accepted without judgment. They felt accepted, safe to be themselves, and safe to participate in class without the fear that their ideas would be ridiculed. They described feeling freedom when their teachers did not impose labels on them or have preconceived ideas about who they should be as individuals. Valerie shared how much it meant to her to not feel judged, "I wasn't worried that they were judging me, and they were good teachers. I know that sounds silly, but it's just that they could teach without it being like you were force-fed." She appreciated that her teachers did not judge her for having to learn differently. Adult former students discussed how much it meant to have a break from the judgment and the pain associated with it. Maria expressed it this way:

> Like there was no judgment, they just were people, they were awesome people. . . They relieved me of the judgment . . . And that pain that comes with it, for that moment and then it all of a sudden, like I mentioned [your authentic self] that was

> asleep, began to vibrate more and then I start to think, "Oh, it's not true [the negative messages from outside]."

Teachers also discussed the importance of accepting and not judging students. Mrs. L said, “I'm just open. I'm available. I don't judge them. I might say, ‘That's not a good idea. I don't like that,’ but I don't. You're not a bad person because of it.”

Administrators also shared that it was important to accept and not judge students, both for themselves and teachers. Admin H described one way that positive deviant teachers were unique:

> [They] don't say one kid is deserving and one kid is not. It's not about deserving of relationship. It’s that relationship is important for every kid and some kids just don't know how to be in relationship. So, I would say they take away the deserving piece. And the judgment on kids . . . there's a lack of judgment, which is nice.

Teachers shared that understanding the adversity students experience and what is developmentally appropriate helped them to accept and not judge students. Mrs. M described it:

> I think it's about meeting them at their levels and not judging who they are as humans because they're 13. . . your opinion's irrelevant as far as who they are as human beings because these kids, it's not even that their plate is half full, it's that their plate is paper and we're giving them sloppy joes. It's not a plate, these kids are coming up to you with discardable plates. Their plate's not half full, their plate is broken and they're missing pieces of it and there are holes falling out of the bottom. So, how could you judge them? You got to look at their plate.

Teachers explained that accepting students does not mean condoning choices or behavior that may be damaging in some way, but it did mean seeing the inherent value in each student as a human being.

Students Felt Seen and Understood. Adult former students described feeling seen and understood. Two participants gave the example of how much it meant to them when teachers sought them out or noticed them in the hall. Isabella shared, “The fact that they saw you between all the crowd, it sort of made you feel special because it's like, ‘Oh, they actually see me. I'm not just some other kid in school.’”

Latino and Latina students explained that ‘seeing students’ included understanding and valuing students’ cultural differences. Several adult former students described not fitting in at school, but when teachers noticed them and responded to their different learning needs, it helped them feel a sense of belonging. Mateo described it as:

> The whole school system is a factory where each class you get passed on to a different section of the factory and [teachers are] the factory workers, they're adding their piece. When they care enough to make sure that piece gets put in properly, it makes a difference compared to someone who’s just standing there and just hammering away.

He explained that not everyone learns in the same way, and when teachers are open to being flexible and taking the time to meet individual students’ needs, it makes a difference. Adult former students described being more motivated to engage in teachers' classes when they felt seen and supported.

Administrators and teachers explained that they intentionally connect with students in and out of their classrooms and get to know them personally. They described noticing students in the hallway or the cafeteria, asking students about their interests, paying attention to how students are feeling, and connecting when students seem to be struggling. Mrs. B shared that she always greets students at the door to her classroom:

> I stand at my door every day, for every class as they come in to greet them. I think that’s a huge, huge thing . . . because I can usually gauge right away as they’re coming in what kind of mood they’re in and to just have a face at the door where I’m not just at my desk sort of acknowledging them as they come in.

Admin C shared one way she connects with students:

> You are in the hall. You make eye contact . . . I was bound and determined to stand outside and make sure I knew every kid's name within the first week of school. And the kids were like, "Are you going to stand out here even when it's raining, Ms. C?" And I was like, "Oh, yeah. You're going to see me." And it got to the point where kids, if I wasn't out there, they'd be like, "Well, where were you?"

All teachers described being skilled at ‘seeing students’, which meant noticing how students were feeling and what students needed. Mrs. C described how she interacts with students when she notices they are having a bad day:

> A lot of times you can see body language, you can look at a kid, you can see that they're not having a good morning, check in with them, let them know that they're in a safe place, that you do care about them, not push them again. . . if they're not feeling good about themselves, I'm really mindful about the language that I use. I'm really mindful about my posture, my physical presence when working with them. Those small little things, I think make a big deal, make a big difference.

Teachers shared that they had a natural ability to be observant, but they also had curiosity and a desire to see and understand their students. Mrs. J described working with a student who needed to tap on his desk to concentrate, but his tapping made it difficult for others to learn. Rather than punish the student for being disruptive, Mrs. J sought to find a solution that would meet the student’s needs and not disrupt the class. She shared:

> I just quietly gave him two sticky notepads and I'm like, "Hey, what if you just try tapping between the pads so the pencil hits the pad and not the desk?" And I didn't say it out loud. I wrote it on the sticky note, "Try this because it will give you a chance to tap and it won't be loud, so I can still teach." So, he read it, and then he tried it and he looked at me, he's like, "Hey, this worked." And I think just noticing kids, actually seeing kids for who they are goes a long way.

Teachers Listened to Students. Adult former students felt like they could talk to teachers about what was happening in their lives, which increased their connection to the teacher. Valerie shared what all other students expressed, “I think all of them said, ‘If you need to talk about whatever's going on, feel free.’” Sofia described her experience of feeling listened to:

> Whenever I had any problems, she would just talk to me, and she would actually listen to everything and just was always there . . . Nothing compared to what other teachers do, or just even the counselor wouldn't even do . . . I was going through a very hard time, and she helped me a lot during all of that.

Teachers Put in Additional Time and Effort. When teachers dedicated extra time and effort to their students during and outside of class, brought in supplies from home, or gave

students food, it helped adult former students feel like teachers cared beyond what they were required to do 'for their paychecks' and it motivated them to participate in those teachers' classes. Anthony shared, "She would give her time to speak with [students] individually, and even just everything in general, with her teaching style . . . She would go that extra mile to make students more connected to the class and more understanding." Mary said, "He went above and beyond and put in hours after class, and he tried to make it purposeful."

Adult former students described teachers as passionate and "going the extra mile" to make sure students understood what they were teaching. Mary described her teacher, "He went the extra mile . . . the other thing that he showed was passion. He wanted to make a difference. He wasn't just putting his time in." She explained that she and the other students felt how much he cared about them and about teaching, and it motivated them want to learn from him. English Language Learners explained that when teachers took the time to explain a concept in different ways, it helped them feel seen and cared about. Sophia said, "She explained things in different ways if we didn't understand it. But with other teachers, they just kept repeating the same thing over and over." She explained that this also enabled her to participate and engage in class more effectively because she could comprehend the content.

Teachers and administrators described the importance of not only exerting effort to understand and connect with students, but also listening to, seeing, and adapting to the students' needs. Admin H explained that positive deviant teachers persevered in connecting with students even when it was difficult:

> I think people who are good at connecting with kids lean in during times when kids are trying to push you away. They are masters at it . . . "No, I'm not giving up. I'm going to continually lean in, and I'm going to continue to try to connect with this kid even when . . . he [or she] appears to not want to connect with me."

Mr. O said that when teachers put effort into understanding and connecting with students, it increased student motivation to engage:

> A good teacher . . . is going to do everything they can until they figure it out with that student. I think tough kids see that effort. Maybe you don't always see it yourself as the adult. The tough kids are like, "You know what? This guy's trying every day. Every day he is giving me a clean slate, a fresh start, and he's trying, and you know what? Even though I don't always appreciate it, I still can value the effort that the teacher's making."

Admin F described the difference she saw in a positive deviant teacher:

> She talks to them. I think she listens. I think she actually gets to know the students. I think she asks questions that probably are more thought-provoking versus just the basic kind of content, who what where when why . . . she believes in order to teach them she's got to get to them like her personally which takes some time and energy.

Teachers explained that one important step in building relationships with and engaging students was to put effort into learning what additional academic or behavioral supports students may need, either before students arrive or within the first weeks of the school year. Mrs. C said, "If kids have experienced trauma, I know who those kids are. That's how we can anticipate, make plans before it comes to that place of disruption." All teachers had access to student files. Canadian teachers described the files as including information about personal backgrounds and what additional social, emotional, or academic supports students have received in the past. Teachers from the United States did not discuss student files in detail. Five of the Canadian teachers described reading student files before the school year began to learn about their students' struggles and what supports they may need. Mr. O explained how he used the files:

> If I know that you're coming to me . . . [and] maybe need some accommodations, maybe it's as simple as reduced quantity. You come to my class, and instead of 20 questions, you get 10. Right away, your anxiety drops. You feel like you can do it, you feel successful. Why not have that ready for you the first day of school?

Teachers also described taking the time to understand why students are not engaging in class or experiencing success. Mrs. M explained that when students were struggling with

behavior or if they were avoiding work, her response was to attempt to understand why so that she could better support them:

> It just comes down to the root of . . . why are they trying [to avoid work]? Is it because they didn't study? . . . Is it because they can't read? . . . then it's like this really exciting journey to try and help bridge the gap between what's going on.

She gave a specific example of a student who chronically struggled with behavior:

> I was . . . watching him read and then his eyes are moving all over the page . . . then I started pulling out all of these writing samples . . . I noticed that he's starting here and then we're down here. . . And I pulled him out yesterday and I was like, "Sweet child, can you read this for me?" And it just was a paragraph, and I put the same word in it multiple times. And the first time, he read the word no problem, one of those higher-level words. And then as it became the second time and the third time and the fourth time, he was just skipping over it, he was trying to avoid these words. And I just asked him, "Where are the words?" And he told me, by the time that he gets to the middle of the paragraph, the words are moving. And he truly is dyslexic. There's no doubt he's dyslexic. And so now I'm on the phone with his mom and I'm putting colored paper over the top of his paper to center the words for him, and this was just yesterday. I'm not saying that his behaviors are going to stop. But what I said to his mom is, "When you can't read, and everybody around you can, you're going to do everything in your power to make sure they don't see that. So, when we're seeing these behaviors come up before tests that have a lot of reading content, we need to look at the source."

She believed his behavior incidents may decrease once he starts receiving the proper academic supports.

As described in part one, teachers believed their role was to guide the development of students, who are fellow human beings. The belief that students are fellow human beings was reflected in the student relational-motivational dynamic from the perspectives of teachers, students, and administrators. Adult former students described feeling seen, valued, and accepted as fellow human beings when teachers valued their perspectives, respected them, accepted them without judgment, saw and understood them, listened to them, and put in extra effort to connect with and support them. This motivated them to participate in positive deviant teachers' classes. Teacher and administrator data supported the same subthemes.

Being Real

Another element of the student relational-motivational dynamic was the authenticity of positive deviant teachers. Positive deviant teachers' personalities, styles of teaching, and interpersonal interaction approaches varied, but the one thing that appeared to be consistent among all teacher participants was being real and authentic with students. Teachers 'being real' was described as teachers being true to themselves and honest. Participants also used the words real, authentic, and genuine to describe this. Teachers explained that it was necessary to align their student interactions with their authentic selves and to have honest conversations with them. Adult former students described valuing the honesty and realness of their teachers. All adult former student, teacher, and administrator participants described 'teachers being real' as an important factor in building connections and creating an environment of safety and trust. Adult former students described teachers as being real when they: (1) shared personal stories, (2) answered questions honestly, (3) engaged students in frank conversations about their choices and actions, and (4) connected academics to real life. Teachers used the words "genuine" and "being real" interchangeably and operationalize them similarly to how adult former students did with the addition of admitting when they make mistakes.

Teachers described the importance of realness and authenticity in two ways: (1) how they aligned their class procedures and policies with who they were as teachers, and (2) being honest and genuine during student interactions. Mr. P explained that students connected with him because he was real with them, "That's probably one of the big things, the kids know that my behaviors are genuine behaviors. They're not fake. I'm not giving them some persona. I think I communicate sternly. I communicate well. You know, I set my expectations." His administrator described him as, "So genuine, and I think the kids appreciate that he's just super honest with

them. You know where you stand, and he'll take care of you, but he's going to tell you when your behaviors need to change."

Administrators also explained the importance that being real and authentic (for themselves and teachers) with students played in building relationships. Admin L shared, "The key is that we really want people to be genuine." Admin C shared that this is even more important when students have experienced adversity:

> A lot of times our kids who are at-risk are substantially more mature in some ways than their peers . . . you have to talk to them on the level that they're at and not like they're the children. And be really honest. And I think sometimes people sugar coat . . . I think of my older kids, and the ones that don't want to be treated like they're little kids, because a lot of times they've seen way, way, way more than somebody five years older than them. So, I think honesty. I think being real.

Adult former students and nearly all teachers explained that students can sense when teachers are not authentic and that decreases trust and connection. Maria shared that growing up in an unsafe environment made her more acutely aware of when teachers were authentic and real and that impacted the level of trust and safety that she felt. She shared:

> When you're a kid growing up in a home that's not very good, you're hypersensitive, you pay attention to everything, how people walk, how they say things . . . I don't know how to explain it other than that . . . you really pay attention to everything, the feel of the room when you go in, the feel of the teacher if she really means it, you just know . . . [positive deviant teachers] were amazing, and they didn't change . . . and I was like, "Oh, wow." So then you naturally feel good in their presence, it's almost like you're thirsty and then all of a sudden there's water."

Maria also recounted that when she was with an authentic teacher, it helped awaken her authentic self that had been "hiding" because of the trauma she had experienced.

Sharing Personal Stories. Adult former students and teachers both described the importance of teachers telling personal stories to their students. Adult former students explained that when teachers shared stories about their lives, kids, or past hardships, it helped students relate to them on a personal level. Hearing teachers' stories of hardships increased feelings of

connection because students did not feel alone in their struggles. Mateo described the impact it had on him:

> I actually know about her past and her childhood. I knew my brothers went through what I went through, but I didn't know anybody else who went through that. She was the first person that I was able to talk to about it and actually realize, we didn't go through the same exact things, but we went through real similar things, to actually connect with something on that level.

Hearing the difficulties his teacher experienced also helped Anthony, "I felt like I could relate to her . . . [that] there's other people out there that are just like me."

Teachers also described the importance of sharing personal stories to build connections. Admin F described how a positive deviant teacher used personal experiences to connect with socioeconomically disadvantaged students:

> I think she also realizes that with them, she can hit them at their core of, "Hey I never wanted to live in a trailer [when I grew up] so I went to school, and it wasn't easy, and then I went and got my masters" and she can be real in a way that not everybody can be real.

Mrs. M emphasized that when teachers share personal stories, they need to choose stories that will resonate with students:

> You can't just tell them a sad story about you . . . it actually comes from a place of being like, 'Hey, let's connect and you're my priority.'" Telling personal stories to build connection doesn't work unless your motivation in telling the story is to connect with them.

Frank and Reflective Conversations. Teachers and adult former students both described the importance of having frank conversations about students' poor decisions and actions and the impact those choices might have on their lives. These conversations included teachers guiding students to reflect on and grow from the experience. Adult former students explained that when their teachers took the time to have honest and supportive conversations with them, it made them feel cared about and increased their trust. Mateo shared how his teacher helped him reflect:

> She would tell me when I did something really stupid. She'd do it in the most unprofessional, teacher way possible, but that was the only way it really got to me. [She] would straight tell me how stupid something was and how big of an f-up it was. Then she would question why I did that. I'd have to question it. Why did I do that? What made me decide to do something that stupid, and why would I do that, and would I ever do that again?

Mr. D shared an example of a conversation he might have with students when they will not engage in class. Rather than punish them, he guides them to reflect on themselves and others:

> "Okay, so today is out of the question. We already established that you're not going to do this. You don't want to and I'm not going to force it, but do you think that there's something bigger keeping you from this? For example, if you don't want to play because you don't like basketball, understand that this has nothing to do with basketball, but standing on the sidelines, what's the impression that all the other people think of you when they're calling for you to come play and you choose not to? They don't think you don't like basketball. They don't think that you're not good at basketball. They think you're an angry person that doesn't want connection.". . . Being completely honest, like I said, it hurts some kids' feelings. It sucks to do that, but I think those are lessons that we need to learn.

Mr. D attempts to do two things with these types of conversations. He guides students to gain greater self-awareness and ask themselves deeper questions about why they do not want to engage. He also wants students to understand how others perceive the choices they are making.

Connecting Academics to Real Life. Teachers and administrators described the importance of focusing on the big picture of what they teach and connecting the curriculum to life. Administrators explained that positive deviant teachers have strong self-awareness and an ability to understand the big picture of what they teach, and this leads to greater student connection and engagement. Admin L described positive deviant teachers as, “They know their why. They know why they do everything. Every rule has a why. Every assignment has a why. Every day that they're teaching has a why.” Admin F gave an example of how a positive deviant teacher connected her content to students’ lives:

> She captures them in a totally different way because it's real. I mean she'll flat out tell them, "You can't read a driver's manual, great, [then] you're not going to get a license." That's a real part that these kids, that's what they care about.

Teachers and administrators explained that when teachers understand the larger purpose of their content and connect the content to what students care about, it increases opportunities for building connections and increases motivation to engage.

Adult former students reported that when teachers connected academics to 'real life' it made them feel like their teachers understood them and valued their world, which then increased their motivation to engage. Anthony described how his teacher guided students to reflect on how the academic content related to them personally, their communities, and the world:

> She wanted us to learn the material, but she also wanted to connect it to the real world. Because most teachers tell you all the information and everything, but she related it to your personal life. "This is how you're going to use this in your life."

Admitting Mistakes. Teachers identified the additional subtheme of admitting mistakes (admitting to not knowing an answer, making mistakes about the academic content, or saying something they wished they had not during an interaction) as an important aspect of being real with students. Mr. C explained the value of honestly admitting not to knowing an answer:

> They don't need to see you as an all-knowing omniscient teacher. They need to see that rather than lie to you, I'll admit I don't know it, and I want to learn it too. I think that kind of shows them, "oh, he's not perfect. He doesn't know everything, just like I don't know everything."

Mr. D described the value of modeling learning from making mistakes and being honest with students:

> Sometimes it's even as simple as that, stopping when I screw up, pointing it out to the kids, and being like, "See? Right there. I made a mistake, and it's okay, because I'm going to keep going in the right direction after fixing it." I think that's a big focus too, is explaining to kids that failure and mistakes are such an integral part of growing that it's okay to do that. Vulnerability allows us to do that. Being uncomfortable allows us to do that.

Admitting mistakes also included taking responsibility for a negative interaction with a student and having a conflict-resolving conversation with them. Mr. C described the value of modeling conflict resolution:

> If I come down on a kid and I feel like I was out of line, I'll apologize . . . That's huge for kids because they're not used to being apologized to by adults. And it shows them, kind of, that healthy relationship that they can have with others. And so, it's okay to admit when you're wrong and it's okay to go back and say I was out of line.

Believing in Students

Teachers explained that sometimes teachers need to believe in students and hold their hope for them until those students are ready to believe in themselves. During an observation of Mrs. K's class, she told students, "I have never had a student fail . . . and trust me, I will get you there." During an interview, she described another example of a student interaction:

> I plant that seed of "I have faith that you can do it." And [the student] said, "I don't." and I said, "That's why I have the faith for you until then." That's the thing that you have to hold for them. It's like this really great present that you can't give them yet is when you say you have that belief in them and that you will hold onto that until they are ready to believe it too. That's like the biggest thing.

Teachers believed that their students were capable of more than the students realized. Mrs. C shared, "I think that the kids are very resilient, and all kids can be survivors and if they're given the right tools and opportunities that they can overcome trauma." Mrs. N expressed, "I think the role of a teacher is to have expectations for a child that they maybe aren't getting somewhere else. And to instill the faith in them that they can actually reach those expectations." In addition to believing students can achieve more than they think possible, teachers explained that they led students to develop the skills and confidence they needed to succeed.

All adult former students recounted that when their teachers saw potential in them and believed they could succeed, it helped them believe it also. Maria shared, "They just said, 'I

know you can do it.' And then you're like, 'Oh, okay.'" She explained that because she trusted her teachers, she believed them when they told her she could do it. Adult former students also described teachers as pushing them to do more than they thought possible. Mary did not have experiences as a teenager where adults believed in her capabilities, and she described how exciting it was when her teacher believed that high school students had potential:

> They looked at us that we had potential, and they wanted to foster that, so that was the huge difference . . . What I think was so exciting is they thought we as teenagers . . . had the capabilities. We weren't looked down on, "Oh, you're only 16 or 17. What can you do?" No, they said, "You can do it all," and because of that, it was empowering.

Creating Safety and Trust

Adult former students, teachers, and administrators explained the importance of developing trusting relationships and creating safety. Participants described the first three factors in the student relational-motivational dynamic (teachers valuing and accepting students as fellow human beings, teachers being real, and teachers believing in them) as laying the foundation for the third factor of creating safety and trust, and that the presence of all three factors contributed to increasing student motivation to engage. Mrs. M explained the connection between trust and student engagement, "When we have these tougher students, they are never going to let you teach them unless they trust you." Mr. O described how he builds trust with students:

> You build trust by listening, truly listening. So, if a student is telling you about something, whether it's just a weekend activity or it's something more serious, you're listening, and you follow through with things that you say you're going to do. Those are my two biggest things.

Teachers explained that one way they built trust was to seek to understand their students early. Multiple teachers described using a student questionnaire about interests and needs within the first few days of the school year as an initial strategy to build connections and establish a trusting and safe environment. These questionnaires enable teachers to find topics of personal

connection with students and determine if students have additional social, emotional, or academic needs. Another strategy that was utilized by teachers in the Canadian school district was to read district student files before students arrived each year. Understanding student needs early allowed teachers to immediately take steps to create safety and connection for students.

Teachers expressed that their understanding of human development, human needs, and the impact of trauma enabled them to create safe environments. They explained that if students' basic needs of food, sleep, and safety had not been met they would not be able to learn. They shared that putting measures in place such as providing food, safe spaces to rest, and setting clear expectations and routines allowed them to create environments of safety.

Adult former students described feeling safe and trusting teachers because they were genuine, real, and caring, and students felt understood and accepted. Four adult former students reported not trusting all teachers. Mary explained that when teachers had attitudes she did not like or when they tried to impose an unequal power dynamic, she would rebel. She shared that when teachers were real, she trusted them:

> When they were teaching, they were sharing their personal life. They would share their stories, so then you feel more comfortable, "Oh, they're real. They're being real," and then we could be real because that's what establishes trust.

Mateo explained why he trusted his positive deviant teachers:

> Because I just respected them. I knew that they had my best interests in mind, and I honestly felt like they would not tell me to do something that would hurt me or set me back. They would only tell me to do something that would help me progress towards my goals in life.

He did not trust that all teachers had his best interests in mind and that prevented him from connecting with other teachers or being motivated to engage in other classes.

Teachers Helped Students Reframe How They Saw Themselves

Adult former students explained that teachers helped them reframe how they saw themselves and what was possible for their futures. This was consistent with teachers' desire to facilitate student growth by helping students believe in themselves. Mrs. K said, "You're teaching them to believe in themselves. No matter what the subject is. Getting them to believe in themselves. I think that's really the main, and to love them. Those are the two big things." Teachers explained that students who have experienced adversity may not engage because they do not believe in themselves or their abilities to succeed. This was consistent with student data. Adult former students recounted engaging more in positive deviant teachers' classes because they felt safe to be themselves and teachers supported them in developing self-confidence.

Adult former students described teachers facilitating conversations and experiences that guided students to develop as individuals, discover what they cared about, gain self-awareness, change their understanding of how they fit into the world, and realize that they had choices about what they wanted their futures to be. Adult former students shared that teachers helped them see themselves differently than the stereotypes and limitations that they saw in the media and heard from peers and other adults. Isabella described teachers helping expand what she saw possible for herself:

> They were actually saying, "No, that's great. The fact that you're Mexican, it really speaks as much as someone else going to college. It shows to the community that immigrants, they're not a bad people, they're actually making a difference and they're good people." So, the fact that they were telling us that, it was great, because media is always telling you like, "Oh no, they're really hooligans and they're coming and they're taking jobs," and all that. And the fact that they were like, "No, that's not true."

Isabella's positive deviant teachers intentionally tried to counter the negative racial messages students of color saw in the media and broaden what her students thought was possible for their futures. Sophia described the impact her teacher had on how she felt about herself:

> She just made me feel like I was more than what I thought I was . . . before I was more of a trouble kid, and she just made me feel stronger, more caring about myself, of how she would tell me things. I just felt a lot happier when I was in her class.

Three adult former student participants explained that teachers helped them see that the world 'wasn't all bad' and that it was possible to experience good. Maria and Mateo both described experiencing the world as a threat until their teachers were genuinely kind and saw potential in them. This opened them up to the possibility that the world could be different than they knew it to be. Maria shared:

> You're constantly in a fight mode, but then there's a teacher who is kind . . . it's changing that belief of, "Oh, the world is horrible, it's ugly, it's no good, blah, blah, blah." Then there's a teacher that is just themselves, they're not even trying, it's just them . . . [you] start to question that narrative in your head, then you start to think, "Is there a possibility?" Then all of a sudden, you're thought isn't, "The world is horrible." But, "The world could be ... " And then you fill in the blank.

Adult former students also explained that teachers helped them realize that they had choices for their futures. Mateo shared:

> They helped me realize that I'm in control of my own future. That, yes, my childhood was bad, but there are a lot of people who have gone through worse things and who have overcome those things. It's up to you. I could very easily, "my parents hit me, blah, blah, blah, that's why I'm not in college." Or I could just let it go, move on, and get scholarships. They allowed me to realize that I shouldn't fear my past. I should want to learn from it.

These experiences helped all adult former students reshape their identities and changed the narratives in their heads about who they were. Five student participants shared that these teachers also helped change their vision of what their futures could be.

Teacher findings mirrored what adult former students described. Teachers explained that the first four aspects of the student relational-motivational dynamic (students seen and accepted as fellow humans, being real, believing in students, and creating safety and trust) allowed for the success of their efforts to help students reframe what they believed about themselves. Teachers described being very intentional as they led students to reframe how they see themselves and what is possible. They shared that they: (1) show students they believe in them, (2) guide student self-reflection to facilitate self-awareness and growth, and (3) utilize strategic scaffolding to increase student self-confidence and belief in their abilities. Teachers explained that none of those strategies would be effective without first earning student trust. Mr. C shared what other teachers also described, "If they trust in you, then they'll be more likely to believe you when you tell them that they can succeed."

Self-Reflection to Facilitate Self-Awareness and Growth. Teachers described seeing students as fellow human beings and guiding students in self-reflection to help them to discover who they authentically were and what they cared about and to help students reframe how they saw themselves. As was highlighted above, teachers used frank conversations to encourage reflection. They also taught reflection through (a) verbally modeling how they reflected and how they thought through situations, (b) asking students facilitative questions to encourage deeper thinking, and (c) designing activities connected to their content that guided students to reflect.

Several adult former students also described the impact of learning to self-reflect as they developed as people. For example, Anthony said, "She made me realize how important school is and also how important even self-reflecting on myself is. She would encourage me to push myself and to become a better person . . . better version of myself."

Student Self-Awareness and Fulfillment. Teacher and administrator participants shared that all adults' and students' lives should be guided by their passions and aptitudes. Teachers explained that they tried to help students gain greater self-awareness and discover what those passions and aptitudes were through talking to students and through modeling self-reflection and awareness. Mr. D tells his students:

> What you need to do . . . is develop the understanding of who you are, what makes you tick, what's your why, and then try and share it . . . Show people over and over and over again why you like doing that thing.

He also told his students, "Our job, as teachers, is to show you all the things that you can learn, to pump tires when you found it, and to get you back on the road when you hit the ditch." He was referring to teachers encouraging students to dive into the subjects that interest them and guiding students back on track if they make mistakes or fail.

Mrs. B shared that it is important to help *all* students connect with their purpose, both struggling students and students with high academic achievement. "There are even [high achieving] academic kids who feel lost, like they don't know what their passion is or what they're going to do, so just trying to drive home 'You'll find your thing. You'll find your thing.'"

Student Authentic Self. Mrs. K expressed her desire to help students become their authentic selves by modeling that. She said, "I want to be the light, and I want to show them what that light looks like so that then they can be the light." She explained that, as a teacher, she could either help students become the light of who they are (their authentic selves), or she could make their lives more difficult. She wanted to inspire students.

Adult former student interview data support this as they shared that their teachers awoke a passion in them and allowed them to express their authentic selves openly when other teachers did not. Maria explained that she built emotional walls around herself and shut parts of herself

down because of the traumatic environment she grew up in. She explained that her teachers allowed her to reconnect with her authentic self, simply by being their authentic selves.

Adult former students also shared that teachers helped them grow as individuals. Teachers guided students to learn and to find their own paths rather than direct all students to learn in the same manner. Valerie said, “They thought I had potential. Like with the art teacher, she was willing to let me express myself, and go with it. She didn't actually instruct me. She just guided me.”

All adult former students described feeling accepted and not judged by positive deviant teachers, which helped them feel safe to be themselves. Valerie, Mateo, and Mary all described struggling with teachers who judged them, tried to force them to conform, and did not encourage them to be themselves. Valerie shared a story of a teacher who tried to force her to conform:

> [He said] “Because this is what the class is, this is what you're going to do. If you don't conform, you're not a good team player. You're not part of our school. Why are you even here?" He said that to me one day, "Why are you even here?" I was like, "Trust me, it's not my choice."

Modeling. During observations, Mrs. B and Mrs. K both modeled for their students how to become aware of their own thoughts. Mrs. K described guiding students to develop reflection skills:

> [She tells students to] “Think about their homes. Think about what their parents say. . . think about that they actually do have self-talk.” Most of them don’t realize that until they say to themselves, “Do I self-talk? Oh, wait, that is self-talk.”

She explained that self-awareness and self-reflection are important human skills and that, through modeling, she can help students develop those skills. I observed Mrs. K taking multiple opportunities each day to encourage students to reflect, gain greater self-awareness, and connect their lives to the academic content in her class. I continually saw her verbally modeling her

thought processes as she taught content and through personal stories. She explained the value of reflection as, “Learn yourself as a human, and you can be a better human for others.”

Questioning. Rather than tell students that their answers were incorrect, teachers described using facilitative questions to guide students to explain their thinking. Teachers explained that this questioning process provided insight into how students think, and it supports students in developing self-awareness and communication skills. Mr. D said, “Making [students] just think and ask questions, I think that's the true secret to teaching. I'm not giving information. I'm not just handing it out. I'm asking kids to be inquisitive, ask their own questions. Mrs. C shared:

> Say if we're having a conversation about the solar system . . . and a student just gives wrong information. Instead of saying “no,” or “that's wrong” [I] ask them more . . . causing some disequilibrium at times, I think creates an ability for them to really reflect on why is their answer right? Why is their answer wrong? Why am I saying this answer?

Teachers also described using reflective questions to help students understand their own behavior. For example, if a student engaged in disruptive behavior in class or disengaged for some reason, every teacher participant described responding to that situation by having a reflective conversation with the student. Mr. D explained:

> Not browbeating it and saying, "Don't do that," but posing the question of, "There's something that's causing you to do that. Do you know what it is?" Usually, it will curb that behavior, first of all, but secondly, it starts to make those kids think, "Maybe I am doing something wrong. I should change this behavior? I should do it this way?" Posing it as a challenge that way is kind of helpful too.

Mr. D described incorporating self-reflection into his classes, “Having [students] really think about themselves as individuals and how they can be instrumental in changing someone else's day, making it better or making it worse. We talk about that a lot in . . . class.” He shared how he guided students to reframe:

> So many kids are always looking at what's negative or what's wrong, but they fail to see that showing up to school on a regular day is persevering. Being here every day with the same lunch kit or the same lunch that you don't like, but that's all mom and dad can afford, that's perseverance. That's a success.

Mr. P described guiding two students who stopped participating in class to reflect on how their behavior impacted him:

> You showed up 20 minutes late with an excuse that I told you on day one I don't accept because I gave you a schedule . . . Then you were doing stuff. You were pretty good. And now you're sitting here plus you pull your phone out. What could you be doing? Put yourself in my shoes. How should I feel about this?"

Rather than discipline the students for arriving late and failing to participate, he asked them to reflect on and consider how it impacted him.

Designing Activities. Teachers strategically designed classroom activities to guide students to reflect. Mr. C gave an example of an activity he designed to encourage students to reflect on themselves, their needs, and their supports during a project:

> I want them about halfway through the quarter to fill this out, "Discuss the progress you've made towards your goal. What are some successes you've had so far?" And then, "What are the challenges you've experienced so far? What do you need to do to overcome them?" So, thinking about, "Can I support you more? Are you lacking materials? Are you just not putting as much effort in as you initially thought you would? What are the obstacles? And is there anything your fellow students can do to support you?" . . . That reflective piece is something I hope they take to heart.

During an observation, Mrs. K guided students to reflect following an inspirational video about 'growing into shoes you don't fill yet' by asking each student to write short written responses to the question, "What shoes do you not fill yet?" She explained that she wanted students to realize they can be more than they think possible, and she used activities like this to guide them to start thinking differently.

Mr. C was observed leading his class through a team bridge-building activity. Following the activity, he asked them, "Why do you think we did this activity? What is the purpose?" They

had a whole class discussion about it. He then asked, “For those of you who didn’t succeed, what barriers did you have?” He explained that he used these types of questions to help students to reflect, learn, and grow.

Strategic Scaffolding to Increase Student Confidence and Belief in Their Abilities. Teachers explained that students have decreased motivation to engage when they do not believe they will be successful. They explained that when students do succeed, it shifts what they believe about their own capabilities. One common strategy that teachers utilized to increase student beliefs in their abilities was to focus on progress rather than achievement, and one way to do that was to celebrate small successes. Mrs. N explained:

> It starts with small victories. So, it depends on how tarnished their self-image is . . . I just think small victories, and then you constantly set the bar higher and higher and higher. . . It doesn't have to be a grandiose thing in front of the entire class but a one-on-one, "I'm so happy you have your stuff out today." And then it's, "I'm so happy you wrote that down. I'm so happy you got that question right."

Another strategy all teachers described was seeking to understand students’ current ability levels and supporting them to build their skills from there, rather than assume what students should know based on age or grade level. Mr. O shared:

> If you can understand exactly where they're at academically and you can meet them at that sweet spot where they're challenged, but not so challenged that they throw their hands in the air. That really lends itself to a healthy learning environment . . . because then you have kids that feel like they can be successful, and they're being met at the level they need to be met at.

Teachers explained that guiding students from their current skill level to grade-level skill level sometimes required understanding the barriers students were experiencing and then developing creative solutions to address their needs. Mrs. M described an experience with a student who “did not like” her content area. Rather than accept that the student did not like her content area, she attempted to discover why the student felt that way. She realized that the

student struggled with reading and retaining large quantities of content. Mrs. M collaborated with the student's mom to support her preparation for the first quiz. Mrs. M described her interaction with the student following the quiz:

> When I got her mark back, I obviously had this huge celebration with her . . . I was like, "Girl, you need to leave. You need to go call your mom. You need to tell her what you got on this quiz." And she was almost crying, she's like, "Do you think I could go call her?" I was like, "I think you have to." And she was just like "Okay Mrs. M" and ran out the room.

Mrs. M was able to meet the student at her current ability level, address the emotional needs she was experiencing, and provide the academic supports she needed. Mrs. M explained that those types of experiences help students reframe what they believe they are capable of and that increases their motivation to engage.

Managing Student Behavior

In addition to the factors described within the student relational-motivational dynamic, teachers and administrators explained that teachers' leadership style, classroom management, and student discipline approaches impact student relationships. There was not a common classroom management style among participants. Some teachers were laid back and allowed noise and movement in their classes, whereas others were strict in their expectations of what students were allowed to do. Some teachers used soft redirects to address behavior, and others used stronger tones. Teachers explained that attempting to lead and manage their classes in a manner that was inconsistent with their authentic selves was ineffective.

All teachers described the best way to address a behavior incident was to have a private conversation with a student. They explained that they entered into these conversations with empathy, inquiry, and a goal of collaboration rather than anger about the disruption. Teachers described beginning conversations by asking, "What is going on?" They explained that when

students disrupt class or refuse to work, it is often a reflection of the deeper struggles that students are facing. Teachers repeatedly said, 'I don't lose my temper with students because once I do, I've lost the relationship.' They explained that students are more motivated to engage in classes when they have personal relationships with teachers, so they do not want to damage that. This was consistent with adult former students who also reported that their personal relationships with teachers increased their engagement in those classes when they may not have engaged in other classes.

Teachers explained that they see students as fellow human beings who are still developing and who will make mistakes. They described being forgiving of student behavior incidents and using them as opportunities to guide students through reflection and growth. All teachers shared that they experienced very few student behavior incidents in their classes and attributed that to building strong relationships with students.

The Impact of Teacher Relationships on Students' Lives

This section of findings covers adult former students' descriptions of how the relationships they had with teachers impacted their lives during school and as adults.

Trying Harder

Six of the seven participants described being motivated to 'try harder' for positive deviant teachers because they saw how much the teachers believed in them. Adult former student participants recognized the effort teachers put into helping them, and it increased their motivation to try in those classes because they did not want to let the teachers down. Valerie described working harder for her teachers because of the time and support they gave her, "I definitely could tell that they were putting some of their time and energy into me, and I wanted them to know that their efforts were worthwhile." Sofia explained that because she and her

classmates valued their relationship with the teacher, they "tried harder" in her class. She said, "It wasn't like, 'Oh, hey, you have to do everything because I'm the teacher,' but it was we *wanted* to do everything because *she* was the teacher." Because adult former students valued their relationships with positive deviant teachers, their motivation to engage in those classes increased. They wanted to 'make their teachers happy' and they wanted to preserve the relationship.

Better Life and School Choices

In addition to having increased motivation to try harder and being more engaged in positive deviant teachers' classes, adult former students described prioritizing school and wanting to make better life choices because of their relationships with these teachers. Mateo shared that he did not want to do anything to damage his relationships with his positive deviant teachers, "If they're disappointed in me, I did something really stupid and that bothered me. I would take those steps to, how do I fix this, how do I get back to what I was doing right?" Anthony shared, "She made me realize how important school is and also how important even self-reflecting on myself. She would encourage me to push myself and to become a better person." He said that has continued even after he was no longer her student.

Wanting to Make a Difference

Three adult former student participants described aspirations to make a difference in their communities that began because of their relationships with these teachers. Anthony's vision for positively impacting society was influenced by his teacher. He said, "I guess the reason I want to be a medical doctor, or even a higher education minority person, is because there's not really anybody that understands people like me, even in a professional environment. Everything is all Anglo-American." He described always knowing he wanted to pursue a helping profession. He

explained that it did not occur to him to focus on helping his community until his teacher guided him to realize that he was in a unique position to do so.

Impact on Adult Lives

While adult former students' engagement in positive deviant teachers' classes increased, those teachers' influence also impacted participants' adult lives. Valerie said, "20 or 30 or 40 years later I was like, 'Wow. If it hadn't been for those guys, I'm not quite sure this would have turned out as well.'" Mary described her teachers as awakening a passion that impacted the rest of her life, "Because of [them], I got a passion for cross cultural and other countries and wanting to learn about other people of different cultures." Maria explained that her experiences with teachers impacted how she raises her own children to be more self-reflective and to think more critically.

Summary

Teachers believed students were fellow human beings and that influenced their leadership style and the student relational-motivational dynamic identified in this study that increased student engagement. Teachers described seeing, valuing, and accepting students as fellow human beings and adult former student interview data echo those findings. Teachers and adult former students also explained the importance of teachers being real with students. They shared that when teachers were real and students felt valued and accepted, then students were more likely to trust teachers. Once teachers developed positive relationships and trust with students, they were then able to help students reframe how they saw themselves and what was possible for their lives. All of these elements worked together to increase student motivation to engage in positive deviant teachers' classes.

Part Three – Organization Factors

This section of the chapter describes school-level factors, from the administrator and teacher perspectives, that impacted the success of positive deviant teachers within the third level of the ecological model (see Figure 3). School-level factors included factors influenced by administrator beliefs, decisions, and leadership style, as well as support staff and resources. All teachers described having confidence in their abilities to build relationships with and engage students regardless of organizational factors. However, several factors in this level were described as helpful to their success. Factors within this level increased teachers' sense of well-being, job satisfaction, and retention.

Administrator Influence

Teachers and administrators described the influence administrators have on the environment, relationships, policies, and practices within the school. Administrator participants shared a similar leadership style that included a focus on developing trust with their staff, having honest conversations, giving staff trust and autonomy, and sharing leadership and vision. This mirrored the leadership style of teachers as they developed trust with students, valued and accepted students, were real and authentic, gave students respect and autonomy, and partnered with students in their learning and problem solving. The dynamic of how administrators built relationships with and motivated staff was very similar to that of the student relational-motivational dynamic identified for teachers with students (see Figure 5).

Administrators shared the teachers' belief that students are fellow humans and believed that an administrator's role was to guide the development of both students and teachers. Admin H described the human side of education, "I could go on about it because I think it's, well it's just so important to me. It's deeply rooted in what I believe about humans and education, you know,

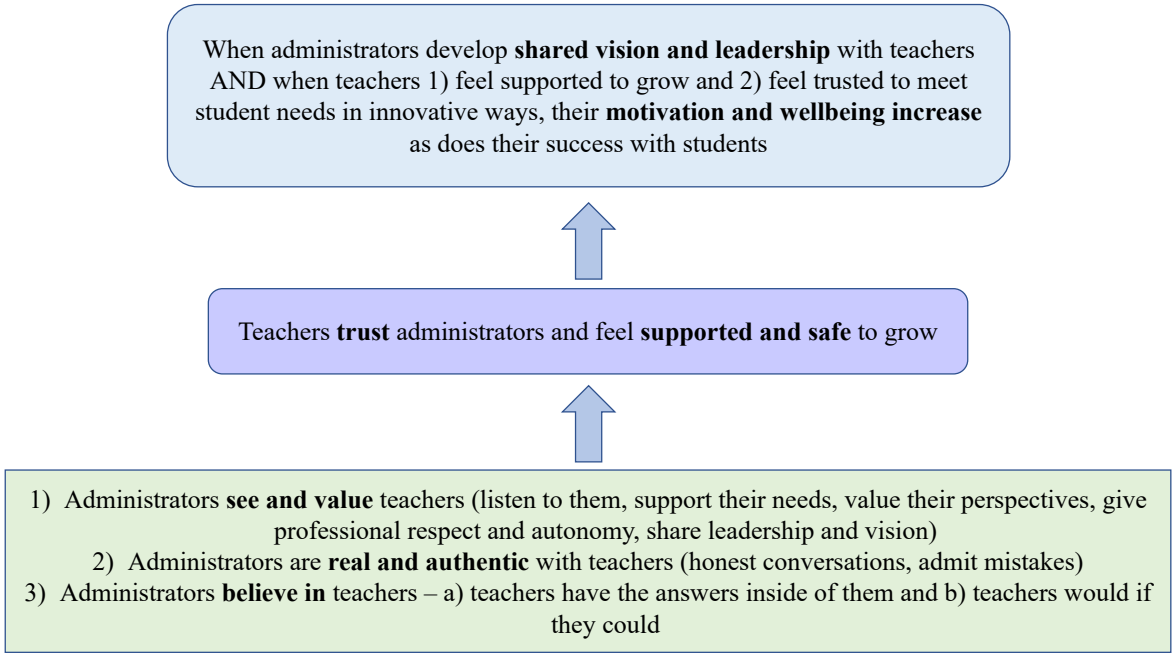

Figure 5. The Teacher Relational-Motivational Dynamic

so I could talk about it forever." They also shared teachers' beliefs about the importance of building relationships. They emphasized that staff and students are more motivated to engage in what they are asked to do if there is first a foundation of a positive and trusting relationship.

These beliefs impacted how administrators interacted with and supported teachers and students, the policies and practices they established, and how they approached student discipline. Teachers and administrators in the participating Canadian and the U.S. schools identified the school-level factors that impacted them as: (1) trusting relationships and shared vision between teachers, administrators, and other colleagues, (2) a supportive environment, (3) a culture of growth, and (4) intentional decision-making.

Building Trust, Sharing Vision, and Giving Autonomy

Administrators explained that they build trust with staff through sharing leadership, including staff in setting the school vision, and giving staff trust and autonomy. Administrators shared that their role in supporting teachers requires developing relationships and trust in the

same way that teachers must do that for students. Admin L explained the importance of building strong relationships, "That's the only real way to change anything in the school is through that relationship that you've created . . . That supports an environment of conversation and dialogue within the school."

Building Trust. Admin L believes it is important to trust staff because they are professionals:

> You have to create a certain amount of trust that they are professionals. Do we need to go in and support each other to create that trust? Yes. I think that we have to work in an environment of trust. . . If you have too tight of a leash on everybody, the growth will be stunted if you don't create that culture of trust in the building.

Admin C described how she builds trust with staff through honoring their feedback:

> I try to be very open about listening, and not lead with my opinions or beliefs. Try to always hear all sides of a situation, be transparent in communication and information, and not keep things from teachers . . . sometimes we get feedback that we don't like or that stings. . . and the only time that we're ever going to really grow is when we're challenged. Rather than hunkering down and pretending that the feedback isn't out there, and we know best, it's about honoring that the feedback is there. Which means owning it. . . Asking questions around it to try to better understand it, rather than reacting to it. And then, taking action.

Sharing Vision. Participants described a shared vision as having similar beliefs about the value and purpose of the work. Admin L described it as "knowing your why." She shared:

> We talked about when you know what your why is, it makes the day-to-day activities better . . . Sometimes it makes you more flexible in the moments you're with students, and sometimes you change things on the fly because things aren't working, or you realize you need more time for things. We try to say that, as a school, if we understand our *why*, the how is less important. How you get to the endpoint is less important as long as we all know what the endpoint is, and as long as we all are doing our best to move towards that in our own way.

She went on to explain that one of the strategies they use as an administrative team is the careful selection of new staff members during hiring to ensure that staffs' personal 'why' aligns with that of the school.

> When we interview, we ask people, what's the big picture of their main area? If a new teacher comes in and says, the main purpose of English is... And lists off all the program of studies, that's good for them. But I don't really think they understand what the purpose of teaching English is. . . When they say the purpose of teaching English is looking at texts that can help you understand the world and make you a better person and those types of things. Then I think they understand why they're teaching English.

Administrators also shared how they develop a shared vision with staff and sometimes also students and families. They explained that developing a shared vision with staff increased staff motivation to align with and engage in promoting that vision. They explained that when staff understand the greater purpose and why they are being asked to do something, motivation to participate increases. Admin M described his school's visioning team, "We had parents, community, and then we had all the teachers, all of the staff, support staff, caretaking, everyone." He explained, "the only way you get people to buy in is if it's their ideas . . . because that's what everybody wants. Everybody wants to have something that they can say, "I did that," or, "I did this."

Admin L described shared vision, "We have an idea, we have a goal, now, let's get everybody together to move towards that goal." Admin C explained the importance of shared vision:

> Your vision has to match and be consistent. Because if the administrator's vision of where they want to go is different than what the teacher's vision is, is different than the student's and the parent's, it's not going to work. And so, I think sometimes, as an administrator, you might get something that you just really believe in, and it may not be a fit for that district at that moment in time.

She explained that earlier in her career as an administrator, she imposed her viewpoint on teachers about the direction she wanted the school to go. She did not take the time to include teachers and the initiative was not successful due to a lack of staff commitment and buy-in.

Teachers explained that they shared a vision of education with their administrators and colleagues and that working with like-minded individuals made them feel like they belonged. They described resonating with the students and staff and feeling supported by administrators. Mrs. B said, “It was my first day subbing in the building and it was this immediate feeling of ‘Yeah, this is my place.’” Mrs. M explained that her personality and teaching style fit with the vision and philosophy of the school and her administrators. Mr. C and Mr. P both described their fellow staff members as incredible and stated that they could not imagine working anywhere else.

Autonomy. Teachers and administrators shared the belief that humans need autonomy. Teachers explained that being given autonomy and being trusted by administrators increased their job satisfaction. Teachers described appreciating that administrators trusted them to make decisions based on their own judgment about what would be best for students. Mr. D explained, “[The principal’s] ability to sit back and be like, ‘Yeah. I trust you. I know that you're doing the right thing.’ He doesn't question the motives. He understands what we're doing. If there's advice to be given, it's given.” Admin L shared, “From my experience, I don't think that ‘I'm in charge and I'm going to tell you what to do’ is going to work very well.” She described recognizing that her staff need autonomy:

> I would never come in and say, "Okay, science people, we're all going to do a lab on Wednesdays. Every Wednesday, I expect to come in and see every science teacher teaching a lab." Because I don't know that any teacher can be like anyone else.

Admin L explained that each person’s style is different and by giving staff autonomy, she allowed them to be more authentic, to design their classes consistent with their own style, and to meet the needs of their students.

Mrs. K described working at a different school where she did not feel trusted or supported in meeting the unique needs of students. She explained that she must be authentic in order to build relationships with and engage students, but she did not feel supported by her administrator to be authentic. While she taught there, she was able to connect with and engage students, even without administrator support, but she felt isolated, and it was emotionally difficult. She eventually left. In her current position, she shared that she feels supported by her new administrator to be authentic and to put the needs of students first:

> I have a dynamic principal. It's why I moved because I needed somebody who loved up kids as much as I did and put them first no matter what inconvenience it was, and I got one of those. And I've got a department that's pretty much on the same page too . . . I definitely expect that we are meeting [student] needs first before the content and I'm with those people.

She explained that having a shared vision with her administrator and colleagues has greatly improved her well-being and motivation to engage in school-wide practices that her administrator asks her to participate in.

Admin M trusted teachers and gave them autonomy, but he explained that he also gives staff guidance and support when they need it. He spends the first hour of his day, every day visiting classrooms and observing what is going on:

> It takes me from 8:00 to 9:30 every day. I go into every class. . . So, I do a couple of observations this week, and then write up some stuff. But normally I go in every day. I can tell if I need to stay, or if I can just say, "Good morning."

Ensuring that teachers are building positive relationships with students and that students are learning was a priority for Admin M. He trusted his staff to do what's "best for kids" but he explained that he also observes teachers and if someone is struggling to connect with and engage students, he will work with that teacher to coach and guide them to improve.

Creating a Supportive Environment

All teachers shared that they felt supported by their administrators. Mr. S said, "Our admin here is really good. They're supportive, which is nice. . . They'll help us out when we need . . . I'd say they're super supportive and definitely have our backs if that makes sense." He said he may not always agree with the decisions the administrators make, but he always feels supported by them. One teacher shared that without her current administrator's support, she would have left the profession. Teachers in all four schools described feeling trusted as professionals by their administrators and feeling safe to express concerns or ask for support. Mrs. M shared:

> I'm in my niche here, and I feel safe here, and I know when something happens that I'm going to be supported. All the same things that I want my class to have, I need to have those things too . . . trust, communication, safety, and the reset button. . . We can call them all these different synonyms but just safety, honesty, trust is what you need.

In addition to supporting teachers with coaching and guidance to develop as educators, Admin M described a policy he established to support teachers when students are struggling with emotional meltdowns in the hallway:

> We have certain people that deal with [students]. If [students] are having a meltdown in the hallway, we don't allow teachers to go there. We don't want teachers to try to stop them. They just phone me or whoever else is with them, and then we go work with [the student] . . . It really helped keep the sanity of teachers. Because . . . they're not thinking of that [student] any differently. The next day when they come, they can have that normal conversation with [the student].

He explained that when students have 'an emotional meltdown,' they may say hurtful things to teachers that may damage their relationships. Admin M preferred that students say those hurtful things to him so that the teacher can maintain a positive relationship with the student.

All teachers said they valued that their current administrators support them in meeting students' unique needs, even if it requires creative solutions. Mr. O explained:

> Our administration's really good at understanding just, whatever you need to do with your kids, do. That simple. If you need to do this for kids, do it and we'll support you. If you need to take them for a walk in the middle of math class, do it . . . If you are trying to do something, or you need money for something, it's all based around what's best for kids, they've got your back.

Administrators described being open to teachers' proposals of creative strategies to meet student needs. Admin L said, "We try to be a 'yes' community. 'Let's try that, sure.' As long as there's a good why . . . then there's no real reason to not try something." She explained that positive deviant teachers are skilled at understanding and meeting the unique needs of struggling students.

Teachers shared that administrators also supported them through advocating. Mr. O said, "Our administrator does a really a good job understanding our school's differences and advocating for [it to] our district." He explained that his school serves a higher percentage of disadvantaged students than other schools in the district and therefore has different needs that the district might not fully understand. To ensure that teachers feel supported, Admin C described always considering and balancing (1) what is best for students and (2) what staff can handle, whenever making decisions.

Creating a Culture of Growth

Administrators expressed a belief that all humans have the potential for growth, and that to support staff development, a culture of trust that is focused on growth must be established. Administrators, like teachers, valued realness and authenticity and explained that when staff trust them, it enables them to have honest conversations about difficult topics. All administrators described the importance of giving staff permission to try something new and not be perfect. Admin M shared, "So you create a climate where people feel like it's okay to make a mistake as long as you own it and you change." Mr. C described his administrator as, "really big in trying to

focus on the whole school, just trying to be a little better every day, and focusing on 'where can we grow?'"

Trust and Support. Teachers explained that when their administrators created a culture of trust, support, and growth, it contributed to their motivated them to try new strategies or change how they approached something because they felt safe and supported. Mrs. M reflected, "This [is a] safe place for me to learn and grow and make mistakes. . . it's just been this really incredible curve of 'this didn't work' but then I wasn't crucified for it." She offered an example of being given the grace to grow from a mistake early in her career. She explained that she had a very "tough group of students" that she thought she could trust to take outside, but it did not go well. The students "got out of hand," and when she brought them back inside, her administrator said, "Oh lord. Tough day." He knew that she'd learned from the experience, and he did not need to reprimand or punish her for making a mistake. She explained that she did indeed grow from that experience and that her administrator's response helped her feel safe to learn and grow at that school.

Self-Awareness and Fulfillment. Similar to what teachers believed about guiding the development of students, administrators believed their role was to guide the development of teachers as fellow humans. One aspect of that was encouraging self-awareness and fulfillment. Admin M explained that people have different skills and passions and that finding what is more aligned with one's authentic self makes one more effective. He shared that he requires all staff members to participate in extra duties and leadership, and he prefers that staff members choose the activities they participate in based on aptitude and enjoyment. He also wants teachers to help students with the same:

> The most important thing for a teacher is obviously the education for kids, and to be able to individually find out where kids are at and get them to a place where

> they can be confident in themselves and happy mentally and physically. Coming to school and being able to feel like they can do something . . . once they know that they're good at something, they're going to be able to take off.

He believed that once students find what they care about and have an aptitude for they will engage more. He believed the same about teachers and that everyone is skilled at something, but they may not have discovered what that is. He described an experience with a teacher who struggled when teaching one content area but once that teacher was given the opportunity to teach a different content area that aligned more with his interests and aptitudes, he excelled.

Reflection. Administrators all described allowing space for teachers to learn from mistakes while also providing guidance and supporting reflection and growth when needed. Admin C and Admin L both described guiding teachers through reflective conversations to facilitate growth. This mirrored what teachers said about guiding students to reflect and grow. Admin L explained that she uses generative dialogue, which involves asking reflective questions to guide teacher growth. She said:

> [I say] “Tell me more about that. Why do you feel that way? What was the end goal for you today with Tommy? How did you feel about that? Did you succeed?" You want to be really non-judgmental and allowing and supporting teachers to just find their own answers through that process. That's been really good over the last couple of years.

While not all teachers believed every teacher has the capacity to become a positive deviant teacher, administrators believed it is possible through professional development, coaching, and growth. One administrator described effectively supporting a teacher to develop the skills of building relationships with and engaging disengaged students. The administrator believed in this teacher’s capacity for growth and was effective in supporting that.

Making Intentional Decisions

Changes to school-wide policies and procedures or major curriculum changes can impact teachers and either lead them to feel supported or add more to their plates. Administrator participants all described being very intentional in making school-wide decisions. Admin C explained that it was important to think about staff capacity as well as student needs when making decisions or implementing changes. She said, "[We always keep in mind] what's best for students and what our teachers' capacity is."

Teachers and administrators shared the belief that school and classroom decisions should be driven by what is best for students, even if it means changing the system or trying something creative. This applied to school-wide decisions such as bell schedules as well as individual accommodations for students. Mr. C described valuing administrator support to try something creative with students:

> There's never been a time where I'm like "Hey, can we do this? I think it will be good for this kid," and then someone is like, "no, we don't have time," or "that's not a priority." It's like, "yes, let's do that." . . . we work with the supports we have and so sometimes we have to be flexible, but at the same time, I can't remember a time when I was told no if it was to help a kid.

In both schools in the Canadian province, all students who needed an accommodation were permitted to have one, whereas, in the two schools in the U.S. state, only students who were identified with learning disabilities were entitled to certain accommodations such as a scribe or extended time.

Administrators emphasized the importance of explaining to staff why they make changes. Admin H explained that she is intentional in choosing new initiatives and only selects those that align with the school's vision. She shared that she experiences high commitment and motivation from staff because she communicates clearly why new priorities are chosen and how they align

with the work the school is already doing. Admin M and Admin C both described 'digging into the data' and using committees with shared leadership and multiple perspectives to drive their decisions about changes to policy, visioning, and professional development needs.

Support Resources

Teachers described support staff, collaborative meetings with colleagues to align their classes or student supports, and communication with families as additional school-level factors that impact them. Teachers from the province in western Canada described a broader structure of additional staff to support students than participating teachers in the western U.S. state. Support staff that U.S. and Canadian teachers both mentioned are:

- Education/teaching assistants
- School counselors
- Special education teachers
- School social workers,

Canadian teachers also mentioned:

- a Family-school liaison
- a First Nation, Metis, and Inuit liaison
- a 'Making Connections' worker
- A Student Assistance Instructional Centre (SAIC) teacher (someone who supports students who need a mental, emotional, or physical break or if students need exams read to them)

The first three additional support staff mentioned are roles that created connections between the student, school, family, and community. These were not roles identified by teachers in the U.S. state.

In addition to increased support staff, teachers in this province in Canada described access to a “poverty intervention fund” that enabled teachers to buy snacks for students whose basic needs were not being met outside of school. The teachers’ association for this province in Canada allocates funds for teachers to take days off to collaborate as they build supports for students. These increased external support structures were one difference found between participating U.S. and Canadian teachers.

Nearly all teachers in all schools described the value of collaborative meetings with colleagues for content planning, lesson ideas, vertical alignment, and social-emotional support for students. Mrs. K described the value of weekly content area vertical alignment meetings:

> I don't have kids at all [one day a week]. I only have them 4 days a week. And at first, I didn't like that, and then I started to understand really why. They do that so that we can have vertical alignment plan time, which is huge because then we're on the same page and it actually really is helpful.

Mrs. L and Mrs. J both valued regular meetings with colleagues to discuss struggling students and share ideas. Mrs. L said, “We have bi-weekly meetings. If there are issues, ‘Well, what works in your classroom?’ We are always sharing ideas and what works, what doesn't work." These meetings created opportunities for staff to collaborate to support students more effectively.

Communication and relationships with families were school-level factors that all teachers discussed. One school had a policy requiring teachers to communicate with families before they brought concerns to the administrator. Several teachers reported making positive phone calls home to build relationships with families to allow for more effective partnering to support students. Strong family communication was not shared among all teacher participants.

Summary

At the organization level, teachers explained that their administrators’ beliefs, leadership style, and the school environments they created increased teachers' sense of belonging, well-

being, and job satisfaction through fostering mutual trust and respect, giving teachers autonomy, developing shared vision, encouraging collaboration, providing support, and promoting authenticity and growth. The school environments and teacher relational-motivational dynamic developed by administrators for staff mirrored the environments and relationships developed by teachers for students. Administrators were described to directly support teacher success in four ways: (1) supporting teachers when they wanted to try creative solutions to the barriers students face, (2) encouraging and supporting teachers to be real and authentic with students, (3) valuing and prioritizing positive teacher-student relationships, and (4) viewing mistakes as opportunities to grow and learn.

Additional support staff was mentioned as a factor that supported staff well-being because there were additional individuals supporting students' social and emotional needs. This was one difference between participating Canadian and U.S. teachers, as teachers in the school district in Canada described several additional support staff roles designed to connect students, families, and communities with the school. These positions did not exist in participating U.S. schools.

Part Four – District and State/Provincial Factors

The fourth level of the ecological model (see Figure 3) includes factors regarding policy and structure supports and requirements from both the school district and either the state or province. With the exception of district-shared student files, teachers described most factors in this level as not directly impacting their success in building relationships with and engaging students. Rather, factors in this level, like most organization-level factors, impacted teacher well-being, job satisfaction, and retention.

District

At the district level, teachers and administrators described dedicated time for collaboration and shared student files as two factors that impact them.

Time for Collaboration

Administrators and teachers in the Canadian province explained that one valuable support from the school district that increased their job satisfaction was dedicated time for collaboration. Teachers shared that vertical content teams from across the district were provided time to collaborate, allowing for alignment conversations within feeder systems. The district also created opportunities for administrators of different schools to collaborate. Teachers described this time as valuable to align supports for students and to connect with colleagues. Administrators described the value of being connected with other administrators to share ideas and strategies. However, one administrator felt that that having to spend too much time in district meetings takes time away from relationships with staff and students in the school.

Shared Student Files

Participating teachers in both the United States and Canada had access to district cumulative files that provide information about students' backgrounds and the additional social, emotional, or academic supports students have received. Five Canadian teachers explained that reading student files to learn about their students before the school year began was invaluable. It helped them develop empathy for students and learn how they might meet students' academic and social emotional needs more effectively.

State or Province

The provincial and state-level factors most frequently mentioned by administrators and teachers were standardized testing and budget decisions.

Standardized Testing

One area of difference between teacher participants from the western U.S. state and western Canadian province was the level of personal stress standardized testing created. Participating U.S. teachers and administrators described greater stress around standardized testing. Two factors contributed to their increased stress levels. In the western U.S. state, teachers, administrators, and schools are evaluated by student test scores and their future employment may be impacted by consistently poor test scores. Teachers in the western Canadian province explained that they are not personally evaluated or at risk of losing employment based on student test scores. In addition, the testing time burden is greater in the U.S. state because every student is required to take state tests every year beginning in third grade. In this Canadian province, teachers explained that testing is every three years. Canadian teacher participants described being shielded by their administrators from worrying about provincial test scores. They explained that being given permission to let go of that pressure decreased their stress and allowed them to focus more on building relationships with students.

All participating teachers from all locations explained that while testing is required, it is not their primary focus when teaching students. Their primary focus is building relationships with students and using their content area to guide students to develop as humans. One U.S. teacher expressed anger about the testing students are required to do:

> I definitely think that they're screwing us over with standardized testing . . . it's really hard to pump these kids up every year having looked at how they're scoring [the tests] and what they've got these kids trying to do. We never had to do that stuff that early, and there are developmental stages where kids can't really do that. I just think we're putting too much on kids and the standardized thing puts too much on everybody and it's such a waste of time and money.

While she disagrees with testing policies and does not focus her teaching on test preparation, her students consistently score higher on state tests than any other middle school in the district. One

U.S. teacher shared that she may leave the profession because of the over-emphasis on testing, “I feel beaten down a lot by the over, I don't know, overemphasis on standardized testing, on data, on showing the kids know x, y, and z.”

Admin M described feeling frustrated that the government does not make decisions based on ‘what’s best for kids’ but he also explained that it does not impact him much. He shared that he knows how to positively impact students’ lives and improve their academic abilities, and he will continue to do that. While testing frustrates him, he does value the data it provides and uses it to make academic decisions for his school.

Admin C explained that preparing for and administering standardized tests take significant time and detract from the time that she and her staff have to connect with students and each other:

> I think that sometimes it's hard to build relationships and do that... I don't know what you'd call it... the soft stuff, when you're also trying to prep for [state testing and other state requirements]. You know? . . . I think the hard part is because we're small, we don't have a person with a hat on who does just one thing. They're wearing six million hats. And so, there's not a lot of time. And so, you have to really, consciously choose to make time to connect with people.

Budget Decisions

Provincial budget cuts were a concern expressed by teachers in the western Canadian province. Mrs. M considered educational budget cuts to be the biggest challenge they are facing in meeting students' needs. She was not concerned that the cuts would impact her ability to build relationships with and engage students, but she was worried about the long-term impacts for students if they lose additional supports. Mr. C also expressed his concerns:

> We’re facing a lot of cuts right now so I’m expecting that we’re going to lose a lot of our outreach programs, but that’s more outside of the classroom. I’m worried for those kids that are really vulnerable though because they need those community outreach workers.

Summary

At the district level, teachers described time for collaboration and shared student files as beneficial supports. At the state/province level, all teachers and administrators expressed frustration over standardized testing and the burden of time and stress that these tests create for teachers and students. Teachers in the Canadian province primarily expressed concerns over budget cuts and the potential decrease in additional supports for students, whereas U.S. teachers described already having fewer supports and did not mention budget cuts as an area of concern.

Part Five: Human Connection and Growth

Woven throughout all levels of the ecological model was a theme of human connection and growth. Human connection and growth were described by participants in all samples as important to teacher-student relationships and student engagement. It was also an important factor contributing to teacher job satisfaction and well-being.

Human Connection

At the individual level, all teachers described genuinely enjoying connecting with students and wanting to support their development as individuals. They also explained that developing connections with students was a key to teaching effectively. Mr. P shared:

> I want all the kids to be welcome in my class so I try to make connections with the kids that also aren't athletic just so they feel comfortable in class and are more willing to participate and do things and take those risks.

He explained that students who feel a connection with him and feel safe in his class are more motivated to participate.

Teachers also described valuing relationships with colleagues. Mr. P said, "I became a teacher for relationships, because I like people. . . I like having interactions with my colleagues

and interacting with the kids and it's always different it's always changing, which is what I appreciate."

At the relational level, all participants agreed that teachers connecting with students as fellow humans was one of the most important factors contributing to positive teacher-student relationships and increased student engagement. Adult former students described how they felt with those teachers. Valerie said, "[it was] like a big weight was off my shoulders, chest, whatever, like I could relax and enjoy and learn pleasantly." Isabella described her experience as, "Because most of the time we were just joking around, it didn't feel that much like there were teacher and students. Most of the time it was like you were just talking to another friend, right? And that they just wanted the best for you."

Adult former students explained that when they felt connected to their teachers, they were motivated to work harder in those classes. Valerie said, "I definitely would try harder for those ladies. . . Because I wanted to make them as happy as they were making me, and I wanted their approval." Sofia shared:

> The connection with the other teachers was not how the connection was with Ms. X. So the learning was way different with Ms. X. I actually wanted to go to her class and be in her class, when with other teachers, it was just more boring . . . With her, it was more easy-going. I wanted to listen to her so that we wouldn't be on bad terms.

Mateo described working harder:

> When they would ask me to do things, I would actually do it. It made it a lot easier because I wanted to continue to grow and them treating me like an equal just made me feel important. It made it easier for me to do what they requested of me.

Administrators shared a belief in the importance of the human connection between teachers and students. Admin H has worked in multiple schools and has seen how positive deviant teachers build relationships with and engage students:

> I think they make kids feel important, listen to, heard, cared about, so they make time to really give to kids, and they engage with them about their life, and they talk to them about who they are as people . . . I think kids when they feel valued, and they feel like you're listening to them and you care a little bit about who they are, it goes a long way.

At the school organizational level, teachers and administrators both described the similarity between students' and teachers' needs. Administrators described the importance of building positive relationships with teachers and guiding their growth as professionals in similar ways to how teachers described connecting with and supporting student growth. Additionally, teachers and administrators both valued their connections with colleagues and students and described those relationships as sources of joy and fulfillment. Mr. C said:

> [He and his colleagues] always just kind of come together between classes, and we're always joking around, telling stories. It's awesome to have such a great staff to work with, it makes it easier, because I feel like I have so much support here and I feel like it's not just kids and me. . . I don't want to go to a place where there's teachers who don't care to make connections with students . . . I don't find passion in working with people like that. I need to be pushed by other caring, empathetic, driven teachers. . .Your colleagues are such a huge part of it.

At the district/state/province level, the two factors identified that were shared by most teachers related to time to connect. Policies or requirements, such as testing, that take time away from connection with students or connection with each other were sources of frustration for teachers and administrators. Mrs. K's students have shown the highest growth in the district on state assessments for years, but she expressed frustration about the focus on testing rather than connection:

> I care about the kid, and if I don't help them be healthy in the head, they can't be functioning members of society. And then we're just building more prisons. So screw your test, I'll deal with it when I get to it. But if I do my job then they will at least be able to jump through the hoops. That's what I would say to all those policy people.

The time districts provided for connection and collaboration with colleagues from other schools was described by teachers in the Canadian province as being helpful. Mrs. N explained, "There are three other Grade Six LA Social teachers . . . and our [Teachers Association], pays for us to take days off together, to just sit down and build resources." Teachers also shared that connecting with teachers within their feeder systems was helpful because it enabled them to align their content and understand what students learned in different grade levels. In one U.S. school, collaboration within the school to align content was more common and helpful than the time provided by the district.

Teachers, administrators, and adult former students all shared that human connection was a significant contributing factor to positive teacher-student relationships and student engagement. Teachers explained that connection with colleagues and students contributed to their job satisfaction and well-being, whereas requirements that take them away from connection served as sources of stress.

Human Growth

Teachers and administrators shared a belief in the human capacity for growth and valued growth both for themselves, each other, and students. Admin C. described her role with teachers to be the same as teachers' roles with students, which was to create a safe space, encourage self-reflection, and partner in their growth. Teachers appeared open to feedback and learning and expressed an appreciation of administrator support of their professional growth. Teachers and administrators all described wanting students to understand the value of growth.

Potential for Growth

Teachers described a belief in their own capacity to grow and evolve and in students' capacity for growth. All teachers and administrators described feeling some level of hope that

students who came from difficult home lives could grow, evolve, find meaning, and not repeat the family patterns they grew up with. Not all teachers believed all students could completely break the cycle of poverty, given their difficult circumstances, but they did all agree that students have the potential to grow and evolve as humans. They also explained that their role was to guide students in that pursuit. Administrators believed that their role was to support the growth of teachers to then support the growth of students.

Individuals Would if They Could. Teachers and administrators expressed a belief that "individuals would if they could." They believe that their role, as someone in a position of guidance and leadership, was to equip others with the skills and knowledge they needed to succeed. If a student or staff member was not doing what they were asked to do, the assumption participants expressed to me was that the person needed support, guidance, or training. Mr. O explained, "If kids can be successful, they will. Everybody wants to be successful. . . Kids want to... if they can do well, they will. That's innate, that's just who we are as human beings." Admin H shared a similar belief, "[I] believe whole heartedly the kids will be able to do it . . . they just don't have the skills right now . . . and if we teach them and we show them and we model what that looks like, that they can."

Admin H explained that one of the differences she saw between positive deviant teachers and teachers who struggle to build relationships was that positive deviant teachers believed that students "would if they could" and do not take student disengagement personally:

> I think realizing that kids, if they could, they would. And for whatever reason when a kid acts out or a kid doesn't engage, or a kid doesn't attend, it's not because they are they're targeting you as a teacher . . . I think it's not necessarily about "you're disrespecting me." It's about, this kid, if they could, they would, so what is the barrier? What's going on for this kid that they can't?

The belief of "if students could, they would" contributed to teachers' success in connecting with and engaging students. Teachers explained that rather than becoming frustrated with students for lack of participation, they attempted to understand what barriers might be preventing student engagement and then partner with students to overcome those barriers. Teachers and administrators explained that this approach improved relationships because students felt supported, and it equipped students to feel more confident to engage.

In addition to believing that "if students could, they would," administrators believed that staff members also "would if they could." Admin L shared her beliefs about supporting teachers:

> If they aren't doing it, it's because they don't know how or they need support in some way. I don't think any teacher wakes up in the morning and is like, I'm going to be real grumpy today with my students. I think that those things happen because they're tired or they're frustrated with something, or their home life is difficult. We have to treat them like the human professionals that they are.

Mistakes are Opportunities. Teachers and administrators described being forgiving of human imperfection and seeing mistakes as opportunities for growth. Mr. O expressed his belief, "I'm a believer in second and third chances. I think sometimes that's where students and adults, even we, have learned the most, from second and third chances" Mr. C explained that he shared stories with his students of his own failures so that he could model for them that failing is an opportunity to learn. He said, "Because if I want the kids to believe they can fail at something again and still get better, I have to learn that too. I'm not always going to succeed. Things are going to bomb, and lessons are going to fail."

Administrators described encouraging staff to grow from mistakes rather than punish them. Teachers described an administrator's focus on growth as providing a safe environment for them to implement creative solutions to support student needs.

Reflection as a Tool for Growth

Guiding reflection to facilitate growth emerged at both the relational level between teachers and students and at the organizational level between administrators and teachers. In addition to guiding students to reflect, teachers described using reflection to grow personally and professionally as they gain self-awareness, become more authentic, and increase their effectiveness with students. Mr. C described using self-reflection to evolve into a more authentic teacher and improve his interactions with students:

> I just kept kind of reflecting on what was going on, and I'm like "This is not working, and I'm not having fun, and I'm stressed all the time." I had to look at why that was because it wasn't the kids . . . Sometimes I'll just be doing a lesson plan and all of a sudden space out and think about an interaction I had with a kid and I'm like, "that was good." Or "that was horrible. I should not do that again."

Mr. P explained that he did not appreciate being required to reflect during his university courses, but he now realized its value to him as a teacher, coach, and father. He said, "As a teacher you're passionate about what you teach, but then you use what you teach to teach about life." He shared that he guides his students to reflect on themselves because it has served him as a valuable skill in his life.

Admin C. explained that the most significant difference between positive deviant teachers and other teachers was the use of reflection:

> The number one difference, I think, is the ability to reflect on their practice and on their actions. I think reflection on practice, and just every moment that you have with students, and to reflect on the adult role and the student role . . . where things worked and where things didn't work. And I think in order to have that ability to reflect, adults have to have, fundamentally, a collaborative nature about them, and accept that power is not power over, but power with.

Administrators described guiding staff to reflect and grow through facilitative conversations. All administrators discussed the importance of developing trusting relationships with teachers that allow them to have the types of reflective conversations that encourage

growth. Admin C explained that her responsibility, if she wanted teachers to self-reflect and share power with students, was to model both herself:

> The administrator has to model [reflecting]. I think it has to be modeled and reinforced by administrative actions . . . fundamentally the administrator's role is to truly model that and facilitate and encourage those reflective conversations by creating a safe place.

Summary

Woven throughout all four levels of the ecological model was an underlying theme of the value of human connection and growth and their importance in the development of positive teacher-student relationships and student engagement as well as teacher job satisfaction and well-being.

Chapter Summary

The inclusion of the perspectives of three participant samples (teachers, administrators, and adult former students) across varying demographics, including teachers and administrators (of different ages, genders, years of experience, subject area expertise, and located in one province in western Canada and one western state in the United States) and adult former students (Latino/Latina and White and ages 18 – 63) from six different regions within the United States, allowed for the identification of factors that were shared among a majority of participants regardless of demographic variables. It also allowed for the identification of factors that varied between teachers from the province in Canada and the state in the United States.

All teachers described factors within the individual and relational levels of the ecological model as directly impacting their success in building relationships with and engaging students. All teachers expressed a high level of confidence in their abilities to build relationships with and engage students regardless of organizational or district/state/province factors. Whereas teachers described the factors within the organization and district/state/province levels, for the most part,

as impacting teacher well-being, job satisfaction, and retention, which may also indirectly impact their success with students. Findings also revealed an underlying theme of human connection and growth woven throughout all four levels. This theme reflects teacher and administrator beliefs that students and teachers are fellow humans and their role, as leaders, is to guide growth and development.

At the individual level, teachers shared four beliefs that impacted their success in building relationships with and engaging students. Teachers believe that (1) building relationships with students is the most important factor in engaging them, (2) students are fellow humans and their role as teachers is to guide students' development, which requires an understanding of human development and needs, (3) being authentic and real is essential to being successful, and (4) they are confident in their abilities to build relationships with and engage students in addition to teaching their content area. These commonly held beliefs informed their leadership styles, the choices they made about their classroom environments and policies, their interactions with students, and how they approached curriculum and learning.

At the relational level, triangulated teacher and student themes revealed a commonly shared four-part dynamic that includes: (1) teachers saw, valued, and accepted students as fellow humans, (2) teachers were authentic and real with students, (3) teachers created safety and trust, (4) teachers believed in students' abilities and strategically guided students to reframe how they saw themselves. When students felt seen, valued, and accepted as human beings by teachers, and students trusted teachers because they were authentic and real, then they were more likely to feel safe enough to engage when they otherwise might not. The trust students felt for teachers also opened the door for students to believe teachers when teachers showed them that they could do and be more than they thought possible. All five aspects of the student relational-motivational

dynamic (see Figure 4) were agreed upon by teacher and adult former student participants as necessary to increasing motivation to engage, both because students' beliefs about themselves shifted and because they wanted to preserve their relationships with their teachers.

At the organization level, administrator beliefs impacted their leadership style, how they interacted with and supported teachers, how they interacted with students, the policies and practices they established, and the school environments they created. Teachers shared that the organizational supports and administrator relational-motivational dynamic that supported them mirrored the classroom environments and relational and motivational supports students needed from them. Teachers explained that when they felt mutual trust, autonomy, support, shared vision, collaboration, and a focus on growth from their administrators, they experienced an increased sense of belonging, well-being, and job satisfaction. Administrators were described to support teacher success in four ways (1) supporting teachers to try creative solutions to the barriers students faced, (2) encouraging and supporting teachers to be real and authentic with students, (3) valuing and prioritizing positive teacher-student relationships, and (4) viewing mistakes as opportunities to grow and learn.

An additional school-level factor mentioned was access to support staff. This was one difference between teachers from the U.S. state and Canadian province. Teachers from this province in Canada listed additional support staff that provided connections between the school, families, and communities that did not exist in participating U.S. schools. Middle school teachers from the province in Canada also mentioned access to a teacher and physical space in the school where students who needed a mental, emotional, or physical break could go. This teacher was also able to read exams for students who required that accommodation. The additional supports

students received were described to increase participating Canadian teachers' job satisfaction and well-being.

At the district/state/province level, two factors emerged as district supports, (1) time and support for collaboration with colleagues, and (2) shared student files. Teachers from the province in Canada described the district giving them time to meet with other teachers who shared their content, allowing for alignment and collaboration. This was not mentioned by participating U.S. teachers. It is unknown if that resource existed because it was not asked as an interview question. Teachers in both countries mentioned student files as helpful in understanding and meeting student needs, however, Canadian teachers described utilizing the files more intentionally and consistently.

State and provincial standardized testing and provincial budget cuts were factors that teachers described as creating stress. Teachers in both countries described standardized testing as creating stress, taking time away from connecting with students and colleagues, and decreasing job satisfaction. Teachers and Administrators in the western state expressed more concern and frustration with testing mandates than teachers from the western province. In the western U.S. state, tests are administered to every student (beginning in third grade) yearly as opposed to every three years in the western Canadian province. In the western U.S. schools, teachers and schools are evaluated by students' standardized tests scores more than teachers in the Canadian province, and low student test scores have potentially negative impacts on teacher employment in the U.S. state. Whereas teachers in the Canadian province do not face the potential loss of employment and described being shielded by their administrators from the negative impacts of low test scores. Finally, teachers in the Canadian province expressed concern about new budget cuts and how that may decrease the supports students have access to.

Factors impacting the success of teachers from the two school districts in the western U.S. state and the one school district in the western Canadian province were shared among all teachers at the individual and relational levels of the ecological model; however, differences were identified at the organization and district/state/province levels. The primary differences identified in this study between participating teachers in both countries were (1) the increased level of support staff dedicated to connecting students, families, and communities with the school that are available to students at the organization level in the district in Canada and not in the two districts in the western U.S. and (2) the increased stress and time burden of standardized testing in the western U.S. state.

This study's focus on examining positive deviant teachers through the lens of an ecological model and through the perspectives of three diverse participant samples from multiple regions provided a more systemic exploration of the factors impacting positive deviant teachers as they built relationships with and engaged disengaged students.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Positive teacher-student relationships have the potential to create turning points for chronically disengaged students on a path toward dropping out of school (Hutchison, 2019; Kelley & Lee, 2018; Yair, 2009). However, while teacher beliefs (Pajares, 1992; Uden et al., 2014), administrator impacts on teacher wellbeing (Aloe et al., 2014; Richards et al., 2018), and the benefits of positive teacher-student relationships on engagement (Fredricks, 2014; Klem & Connell, 2004; Lee, 2012; Roorda et al., 2017) have been studied, a study investigating teacher success through the systemic lens of an ecological model has not previously been completed. Additionally, the specific teacher beliefs and administrator influences have not been investigated, nor has the mechanism by which those relationships influence turning points. This study's focus was on how teachers (through a systemic lens) increase student motivation to engage because disengagement (whether it is due to adolescent development needs, factors associated with disadvantage, or motivational constructs such as self-efficacy and hope) is strongly correlated with high school dropout rates. Increasing engagement has the potential to increase school completion rates and prevent the potential future disadvantage associated with low educational attainment.

The purpose of the study was to investigate, through a systemic lens, how secondary teachers who are highly skilled at building relationships with and engaging disengaged students do so. I sought to identify and understand the commonly shared factors that impacted the success of these teachers, regardless of teachers' geographical setting, personal characteristics, or subject taught. I utilized qualitative description as a research methodology (Choy, 2014) and included the perspectives of positive deviant teachers, their administrators, and adults who experienced a positive deviant teacher in their youth. Two research questions were investigated:

1) How do positive deviant teachers successfully build relationships with and engage disengaged students?
2) What are the factors within an ecological model that impact the success of positive deviant teachers?
    a. What shared factors transcend demographic variables (urban, rural, gender, years of experience, content area taught, located in a western Canadian province or a western U.S. state)?
    b. Are there different factors impacting teachers from the school district in a western Canadian province versus teachers from the two school districts in a western U.S. state?

This chapter offers a discussion of the major findings from the perspectives of teachers, adult former students, and administrators. The answers to research questions 1 and 2a are interwoven and are presented as major themes that support both rather than being separated. Question 2b is summarized separately. Major themes are grouped and discussed within the following categories: (1) foundational beliefs shared by positive deviant teachers, (2) how removing barriers to engagement and engaging in a specific student relational-motivational dynamic has the potential to create turning points for youth, (3) how positive deviant teachers navigate student discipline, (4) the importance of authenticity for teachers and administrators, (5) the potential of administrator leadership style to decrease teacher stress and burnout, and (6) differences identified between teachers from the participating Canadian and U.S. schools. Findings are organized by sub-headings, and connections are drawn between the findings and existing literature on human needs, teacher-student trust and relationships, removing barriers to student engagement, youth turning points, student discipline, authenticity, learning theories and

teacher beliefs, and the impact of administrator leadership and teacher burnout. The chapter concludes with a discussion of policy and practice implications, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

The Foundation of Positive Deviant Teachers' Success

Much of the previous research on teacher-student relationships focused on understanding instructional, relational, and classroom management strategies and classroom policies and environments (Allen et al., 2013; Roorda et al., 2017); however, in this study, those factors were not commonly shared among all positive deviant teachers. This finding suggests that, while those are important, it is possible that something else may be serving as the foundation upon which those strategies lead to success. This study's findings suggest that this foundation is comprised of teachers' belief that the role of education is to guide the development of fellow humans (through teaching their content); a knowledge of human development and needs; self and other awareness; striving to be authentic; and believing in and guiding students to succeed and grow in ways they did not believe possible.

Beliefs

Teachers and administrators in this study believed that the purpose of teaching was to guide students as they developed towards adulthood, evolved, and discovered their authentic selves (what they cared about, what they enjoyed learning, how they learned best, what they thought and felt) so that they could be successful adults. Teachers in this study used the content areas they taught as a means to guide that growth and development. Administrators in this study supported staff growth, much in the same way that teachers in this study supported students in their growth as humans. These fundamental beliefs shared by teachers and administrators appeared to influence their decisions, the actions they took, the relationships they cultivated, the

environments they created, their approaches to discipline, and the policies and practices they implemented.

On the surface, teacher participants' classroom management and relational styles varied greatly, ranging from highly structured to less structured, and teachers' relational styles ranged from stern to friendly to nurturing. Some teachers used humor, while some were serious. However, common among all participating positive deviant teachers were their underlying beliefs about the purpose of education, the importance of authenticity, and what it means to be human.

This finding is important because while it is understood that beliefs and values can influence individuals' thoughts, decisions, and actions (Bandura, 2001; Guskey, 2002), there is a paucity of research examining the impact of teachers' beliefs and values on their success in building relationships with and engaging students. The few studies that do exist indicated that teachers' beliefs and values did impact the decisions they made about their students, how they approached student relationships, and how they planned for and delivered instruction (Anderson, 2015; Bielenberg, 1993; Lo, 2018; Palak & Walls, 2009; Pajares, 1992; Uden et al., 2014). However, many of the research studies investigating teacher beliefs were either small case studies that may not be generalizable (Bielenberg, 1993; Lo, 2018) or studies that focused more on beliefs regarding a specific academic content and teachers' instructional decisions (Anderson, 2015; Palak & Walls, 2009). This study expands the conversation to propose that perhaps the underlying beliefs held by positive deviant teachers about the purpose of education and their role in it lay the foundation for being highly successful in building relationships with and engaging disengaged students.

Human Needs. For teachers in this study, guiding student development also involved understanding and meeting their human needs. Positive deviant teachers repeatedly mentioned the importance of meeting students' basic and psychological needs before students would be able to learn in school. Human needs have been defined by Maslow (and influenced by ideas from the Blackfoot tribe in southern Alberta; Feigenbaum & Smith, 2020) as including three types: basic (including physiological and safety needs), psychological (including belongingness, love, and esteem needs), and self-fulfillment needs (including creative endeavors and self-actualization through aligning with one's authentic self and achieving one's full potential; Maslow, 1999; McLeod, 2018). The importance of meeting students' basic and psychological needs is commonly discussed in the field of education (Sage et al., 2012; Meltzer et al., 2015; Richards & Combs, 1992). However, this study's findings expand the conversation by: (1) including examples of how teachers met those needs, (2) explaining that when teachers met student human needs, it increased student engagement and commitment in those teachers' classes, (3) illuminating the importance of meeting self-fulfillment needs for both teachers and students, and (4) revealing that teacher wellbeing and job satisfaction are enhanced when administrators meet the basic, psychological, and self-fulfillment needs of staff. Each of these four topics is addressed below.

Teachers Meeting Student Needs. Teachers in this study met students' basic needs by creating safety in their classrooms by developing trusting relationships and meeting their unique learning needs, as well as giving students food and allowing them time to sleep if they had not been able to meet those needs at home. They met students' psychological needs of belonging and care through accepting them without judgment, finding ways to personally connect with them, valuing their perspectives as equal humans, listening to them when they struggled, and putting

additional time and effort into seeing, understanding, and supporting their unique needs. Finally, they supported students' self-fulfillment needs through designing activities and facilitating reflective conversations that guided students to gain greater self-understanding, discover their interests and passions, reframe how they saw themselves and what was possible, and gain confidence in their abilities.

Students Tried Harder. Rather than focusing on following specific strategies or protocols, teachers in this study focused on increasing student *motivation* to engage through valuing and accepting students as fellow humans, partnering in their learning, putting in additional effort to support student needs and remove barriers, and shifting student beliefs about themselves and what was possible. Adult former students in this study explained that they tried harder for positive deviant teachers. When teachers treated them like fellow humans; when teachers took the time to explain things in multiple ways because students struggled with a language barrier; when teachers brought in supplies for students from their homes; when teachers took time out of their days to really listen, understand without judgment and guide students; when teachers gave students flexibility in how and what they learned; and when teachers went out of their way to help students when they were struggling in life or school, it caused adult former students in this study to try harder in those classes. They explained that because their positive deviant teachers were exerting so much effort, they wanted their teachers to feel that their time was not wasted. They also expressed wanting to make their teachers as happy as their teachers were making them.

This study's findings suggest that regardless of the classroom management or relational styles of positive deviant teachers, they all shared common beliefs that the role of teachers is to guide the development of their students and attributed their success to being authentic. Teachers

saw students as fellow humans and attempted to meet their human needs, including their self-fulfillment needs, to support student growth. These beliefs appeared to be the foundation for how teachers built relationships with, engaged, and potentially created turning points for students.

Turning Points

Chronic disengagement is strongly associated with school dropout rates (Balfanz et al., 2007; Goodman & Gregg, 2010; Houltberg et al., 2012; Koplan & Chard, 2015). Disengagement could be due to factors associated with disadvantage (Balfanz et al., 2007; Goodman & Gregg, 2010; Koplan & Chard, 2015; Phan, 2013; Tella et al., 2011), teachers not meeting adolescent developmental needs (Pianta & Allen, 2008), or students struggling with motivational constructs such as self-efficacy (Tella et al., 2011) and hope (Goodman & Gregg, 2010). Although this study's focus was on how teachers engage chronically disengaged students (regardless of why they are disengaged), findings indicate that positive deviant teachers also have the potential to create turning points for struggling students. This is especially important for students on a trajectory towards dropout and the potential economic disadvantage associated with low educational attainment (Braveman & Gottlieb, 2014; Goodman & Gregg, 2010; Koplan & Chard, 2015; Schoon & Bynner, 2003).

Adult former students in this study described not only increased engagement in their positive deviant teachers' classes but also some level of positive transformation in the trajectories of their lives as a result of their experiences with those teachers. For example, a change might include deciding not to drop out of school or aspiring to make a difference for their communities through their chosen careers. A third change was experienced by Latino and Latina adult former participants as their positive deviant teachers guided them to realize that they were not the negative stereotypes they saw in the media or heard from other students or adults. That

teacher relationship was able to speak louder to them than the societal messages they were receiving and positively change their self-image and what they thought was possible.

Adult former students in this study explained that their teachers saw them as fellow humans, accepted them without judgment, provided a space where their human needs could be met, removed barriers to learning, and helped them shift how they saw themselves and what was possible. These approaches not only helped them succeed in school but also created turning points that positively influenced the trajectories of their lives. This finding is consistent with research findings that teachers or other influential adults who are highly skilled at building relationships with students have the potential to help students change the trajectories of their lives by contributing to changes in self-concept (Allen et al., 2013; Hutchison, 2019; Noble-Carr et al., 2014) and increasing confidence (Yair, 2009). The student relational-motivational dynamic I identified in this study (see Figure 4) is one possible mechanism by which changes in self-concept and increases in confidence may occur.

In this study, teachers increased student engagement by (1) engaging in the students relational-motivational dynamic I identified and (2) removing student barriers to engagement. Both approaches not only increased engagement but also contributed to turning points for adult former student participants. They are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Student Relational-Motivational Dynamic

Substantial research connects positive teacher-student relationships with improved academic (Cornelius-White, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Lee, 2012; Murray, 2009; Roorda et al., 2017; Woolley & Bowen, 2007) and life outcomes (CDC, 2009; Chapman et al., 2013; Culyba et al., 2016; Kelly & Lee, 2018). However, findings from this study suggest that those outcomes may be a result of more than teacher-student relationship-building (establishing

rapport, connecting with students, and helping students feel a sense of belonging) and instead point to a possible mechanism (see Figure 4) by which they occur.

The mechanism identified in this study included a five-part student relational-motivational dynamic that enabled teachers to help students shift how they saw themselves and what was possible. Teachers developed trust and safety with students by (a) connecting with, valuing, and accepting students without judgment, (b) being "real" and authentic, and (c) believing in them. That trust and safety enabled teachers to strategically help students reframe how they saw themselves and what was possible. According to adult former students in this study, positive deviant teachers accepted them without judgment, believed in them, and helped them reframe how they saw themselves, their current lives, and what was possible. Trusted teachers' acceptance of and belief in them was essential to changing how they interacted with and participated in those teachers' classes. That shift in thinking about their self-concept, their lives, and what was possible influenced engagement in those classes, but it also impacted the trajectories of their lives.

Supporting students in reframing how they see themselves can also be understood as facilitating a change process around student self-concept. According to literature about the process of change, psychological safety is essential because confronting information or experiences that push one to change one's self-beliefs can produce anxiety (Schein, 1996). Psychological safety is a person's perception that taking interpersonal risks will not result in ridicule or punishment (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). In schools and classrooms, it is created through developing trusting relationships (Allen et al., 2013; Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Popp et al., 2011) and providing guidance and scaffolded support as individuals attempt to change (Schein, 1996). Students are more likely to trust teachers when they are honest, when students

feel like teachers care about their wellbeing (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000) and when teachers accept and respect them (Allen et al., 2013; Pianta & Allen, 2008). Teachers in this study excelled at creating environments in which students trusted teachers and felt safe. They did this by creating environments that considered students' unique needs, relating to them like fellow humans, being honest and authentic, and accepting students without judgment.

Developing those trusting and safe environments may have provided the psychological safety necessary for students to engage in the change process. Adult former students in this study explained that trusting and feeling safe with their positive deviant teachers opened the door for them to believe teachers when they proposed that students were more capable or valuable than they initially believed they were and that their futures could be more than they had imagined.

Researchers have identified a connection between positive adult beliefs about youth and youths' identity formation and self-concept (Aronowitz, 2005; McFarland et al., 2016; Verschueren et al., 2012). Changes in one's self-concept or beliefs about one's life can lead to turning points (Hutchison, 2019). In this study, teachers and adult former students shared *how* teachers did so. Teachers explained that because they believed in students more than students believed in themselves, they strategically guided students to reframe how they saw themselves, what they were capable of, and what their futures could hold. In some cases, reframing was accomplished through scaffolding and strategically structuring class experiences so that students succeeded when they had historically struggled. For example, in one teacher's class, she broke writing an essay into small, clear, concrete steps that students felt more capable of accomplishing. During observations at the end of that unit, students in her class expressed joy and disbelief that they wrote an essay because they did not believe it was possible.

In other cases, reframing involved countering negative stereotypes or helping students realize that they did not have to repeat the difficult life patterns of their families. These shifts often occurred during conversations between teachers and students. Adult former students in this study recounted conversations in which teachers explained how their cultural identity was a strength and who they were was more than the stereotypes they saw in the media. Teachers and adult former students in this study described one-on-one conversations between teachers and students in which teachers helped students realize that they were not their parents, and they did not have to repeat the difficult family patterns they had grown up with.

In still another case, reframing involved supporting a student so that she felt like she could withstand the struggles she was facing and persevere to complete high school. One adult former student participant, who experienced bullying from students and negative and controlling relationships with other teachers, described school as unbearable. She explained that being cared about, having her unique learning needs met, and being respected as a fellow human by her positive deviant teachers enabled her to stay in school. Without that, she may not have graduated.

An important aspect of the reframing that occurred in this study involved reflection. All teacher participants described facilitating student reflection to help students increase self and other awareness, think differently about their situations, and understand how their current choices may impact their future lives.

Removing Barriers to Engagement

In addition to engaging in the five-part student relational-motivational dynamic that increased engagement through reframing, teachers in this study also exerted additional effort to remove the barriers to engagement that students experienced. Teachers were attuned to the needs of their students and were supported by administrators to think creatively about how to meet

student needs and remove barriers such as lower reading levels, lack of self-efficacy or confidence, low hope, language or cultural barriers, or lack of trust in adults. Some examples of creative solutions included changing dress code policies for physical education when current policies did not honor the cultural traditions of students or developing alternative assessment options that enabled English Language Learners to demonstrate learning more accurately. The following sections discuss how positive deviant teachers addressed three common barriers to engagement and achievement: low self-efficacy, stereotypes, and low hope.

Self-Efficacy. Self-efficacy is the degree to which students believe they will be successful (Bandura, 2007; Tella et al., 2011) and is associated with lower motivation to engage in school (Ounweneel et al., 2013; Tella et al., 2011). Teachers in this study did four things that seemed to increase student self-efficacy: (1) they developed positive and supportive relationships, (2) they told and showed students that they believed students could be successful, (3) they accommodated students' specific academic or physical needs such as decreasing the number of math problems or including breaks during physical education class, and (4) they developed strategically scaffolded activities in which students were able to experience success in areas where they previously had not. Both knowing that teachers believed in them, and succeeding when they did not believe they could, appeared to increase student self-efficacy and engagement. The same was true for adult former students in this study.

One teaching strategy utilized to increase self-efficacy is scaffolding. Scaffolding is used to meet students at their current skill and knowledge levels and then carefully guide them to grow and learn from that point (Ormrod, 2011). It can help students feel academic safety because they are able to experience success in areas where they may have historically struggled to succeed. While scaffolding is not unique to the positive deviant teachers in this study, they did

appear to be highly skilled at assessing students' skill levels (through observation, formative assessment methods, student files, and communication with prior teachers) and then guiding them to grow and learn. Teachers in this study were able to read students' emotional states and needs and were attuned to how much to challenge a student, knowing that may vary based on the day. As witnessed through observations and recounted by adult former students in this study, when students succeeded in classes where they historically struggled, it reframed what they believed about their abilities and seemed to increase their self-efficacy.

Stereotypes. Stereotypes can serve as another barrier to engagement and success in school. Stereotypes are generalizations about groups of people that have been shown to influence both how teachers view students and the formation of students' social identity and academic success (Elliot & Dweck, 2017). In addition to contributing to identity formation, stereotypes can impact how youth envision their lives and how they fit into society (Way et al., 2013). In this study, adult former students of color reported that their teachers helped them reframe their own identity by helping them see and believe that they were more than the stereotypes they saw in the media and experienced from other adults. This enabled them to see more possibilities for their futures.

Hope. Another barrier to engagement and achievement in school is hope for the future (Ciarrochi et al., 2007; Goodman & Gregg, 2010; Rubens et al., 2020; Snyder, 2002). Adult former students in this study described their positive deviant teachers as increasing their hope for the future by helping them to see that the world was not all bad or by giving them a safe space where they felt seen, valued, and not judged. During conversations with students or carefully designed lessons, those teachers helped students feel hope that their futures could be more than they imagined. They combated negative stereotypes, helped students discover who they were and

what they cared about, and helped students realize that they did not have to repeat the harmful patterns of their families.

In this study, adult former students experienced turning points from their relationships and interactions with positive deviant teachers that changed the trajectories of their lives. They attributed this to: (1) feeling valued and accepted by teachers as fellow humans, and (2) teachers being authentic, creating trusting environments, removing barriers to engagement, and guiding them to reframe what they believed about themselves and what was possible.

Student Discipline

In addition to the above-mentioned barriers to engagement, another important factor that impacted teacher-student relationships and student engagement in this study was how teachers navigated student discipline. Overly punitive and ineffective management of student behavior and discipline can serve as a barrier to developing positive teacher-student relationships and creating the safe and trusting environments associated with increased engagement (Brown, 2005; McGrath & VanBergen, 2015; Meltzer et al., 2015; Roorda et al., 2017). Teachers in this study were identified in part for their success in managing students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs. They reported lower rates of behavior incidents in their classes, which they attributed to developing positive student relationships that were grounded in trust and respect. This is consistent with previous research indicating that students exhibited fewer unwanted behaviors and higher levels of engagement when they felt high levels of trust in their teachers (Gregory & Ripski, 2008; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) found that individuals were more likely to trust someone if they felt that a person cared about their wellbeing, was open, and was honest. Adult former students in this study noted that they felt those things during conversations with their teachers and in the way

teachers supported their learning. Additionally, adult former students attributed teacher realness, teachers accepting students without judgment, and teachers respecting them as fellow humans as three of the essential reasons why they trusted their teachers and would engage in those teachers' classes.

Although the classroom management styles of teachers in this study varied, they all appeared highly skilled at managing student behavior in respectful ways that did not damage the trust they had developed with students. As leaders in their classrooms, teachers in this study sought not to engage in power struggles, attempt to exert control, or respond with anger to behavior incidents. Instead, they believed the best way to address unwanted behavior was to engage in a private, respectful conversation with the student, asking questions about why the student was struggling, explaining how the student's behavior impacted them (building empathy), and guiding reflection. Adult former students in this study explained that discipline was ineffective when teachers tried to exert power over them because it damaged student trust and left students feeling disrespected. Positive deviant teachers, however, shared that they saw students as fellow human beings and understood student mistakes and unwanted behavior to be both a developmentally expected part of being an adolescent and an opportunity to guide growth.

Teachers in this study possessed specific skills and knowledge such as high self and other awareness and high social-emotional competence (an ability to understand others, manage emotions, and make decisions based on how they will impact the self and others; Oberle et al., 2020) that contributed to their success in managing student behavior. Their understanding of their students was partly due to a strong understanding of adolescent development. According to Jennings and Greenberg (2009), teachers who have high social-emotional competence are more

likely to manage student behavior in a way that contributes to the development of positive teacher-student relationships. The following sections discuss these topics.

Teacher Self and Other Awareness

In this study, teachers and adult former students described positive deviant teachers as having high self and other awareness. Adult former students described their positive deviant teachers as understanding them and seeing who they were and what they needed more than other teachers who tried to force them to fit into a box or learn the same way as everyone else. Teachers in this study described growing in their self and other awareness through frequent reflection as they sought to understand themselves, their students, and what interactional approaches were most effective in changing student behavior. They described gaining both self-awareness and an awareness of their students' social, emotional, and academic needs by reflecting privately or by having conversations with colleagues or administrators.

Teacher Social-Emotional Competence

Social-emotional competence is associated with building positive teacher-student relationships (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). In this study, positive deviant teachers demonstrated high social-emotional competence in that they were highly skilled at building positive student relationships, managing students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs, and engaging disengaged students. They described developing social-emotional competence from both life experience and continual reflection, adaptation, and growth during their careers. When asked how they were able to manage their own emotions when student behaviors triggered them, teachers in this study explained that if they tried to exert power over students or lost their tempers with students, it would damage their relationship. They explained that not only would they lose the respect of that student, but they would also lose the respect of other students.

Teachers in this study explained that one key to managing their emotional reactions to student behavior was not taking it personally. Three strategies supported them in that: (1) understanding human development and recognizing what types of behaviors were developmentally appropriate, (2) remembering what it was like to be at that age and how they thought and felt about school and their teachers, and (3) having empathy for students by understanding what they were going through in their lives, which teachers gained through reading student files, talking to colleagues, and having conversations with students.

Understanding Adolescent Development

Teachers in this study appeared to understand adolescent development, and that was another factor that enabled teachers to control their own emotional reactions and consequently more effectively manage student behavior. Rather than feel personally disrespected as the teacher, this understanding enabled teachers to anticipate specific developmentally appropriate student behaviors and then guide students to learn from those incidents. Teachers' beliefs that behavior incidents could be used as opportunities to guide growth also decreased the degree to which teachers in this study had emotionally charged reactions to student behaviors. Instead, teachers in this study developed trust with students and, through their positive relationships, sought to guide students to reflect and grow from mistakes. Additionally, teachers in this study explained that having permission and support from administrators to prioritize relationships and engage in disciplinary practices focused on growth rather than punishment decreased their own stress and contributed to their success in managing student discipline.

It should be noted that not all teacher participants began their careers with the skills needed to manage student behavior effectively that they had at the time of this study. Most

teacher participants explained that it took them the first few years of teaching to gain confidence as they learned how to manage their classrooms and student discipline effectively.

Authenticity

In this study, authenticity emerged as an important factor that influenced the success of positive deviant teachers in three of the four levels of the ecological model (individual beliefs, the relationships between teachers and students, and how administrator beliefs impacted organizational factors). Teachers and administrators described valuing realness and authenticity in themselves and others and attributed their success to being authentic. This importance placed on authenticity may be connected to their emphasis on supporting the human side of their students and staff, respectively. According to three prominent figures in the study of human nature, Abraham Maslow (psychologist), Carl Rogers (psychologist), and Paulo Freire (sociologist and educator), the goal of being human is to find and express one's authentic voice (Maslow, 1971; O'Hara, 1989; Rogers, 1987). This sentiment appeared to be shared by teachers and administrators in this study.

Teacher and administrator participants' beliefs about the human potential for self-understanding and growth and the importance of being one's authentic self appeared to influence a culture of trust within classrooms and schools in which individuals felt safe to be authentic and to grow from mistakes. Bruyckere & Kirschner (2016) found that students believed that teachers who were more authentic and real were more effective than other teachers. Adult former students in this study reported that when teachers were authentic and 'real' with them, not only were teachers more effective, but it increased student trust, students felt more respected and cared about, and they engaged in those classes more. Teacher participants reported being less effective

when they were not authentic, explaining that students could sense when they were real or not, and it impacted their relationships and engagement.

In addition to impacting teacher effectiveness in this study, authenticity was a key factor that contributed to student trust in teachers. As was seen in the student relational-motivational dynamic identified in this study (see Figure 4), authenticity served as one of the foundational aspects that enabled students to reframe how they saw themselves and what was possible. According to Rogers and Freire, finding and expressing one's authentic voice requires addressing the distortions from outside influences that diminish the self and prevent one's authentic voice (O'Hara, 1989). In this study, adult former students described teachers doing this through seeing and accepting students without judgment, believing in students more than they believed in themselves (due to past experiences of failure or trauma) and helping students realize that they were not the negative stereotypes that surrounded them.

Authenticity is foundational to both humanistic and transformational philosophies of leadership and teaching. Teachers and administrators in this study shared the mindsets that aligned with aspects of both philosophies, which was exemplified in both their teaching and leadership styles.

Humanistic and Transformational Theories of Learning

Humanistic and transformational learning theories both place a strong emphasis on authenticity (Richards & Combs, 1992; Kitchenham, 2008). In this study, most teachers and administrators' beliefs about human nature and their role in guiding the development of students and staff respectively, the importance of meeting basic, psychological, and self-fulfillment needs, and the priority they placed on authenticity were all aligned with aspects of both theories.

Humanistic learning theory is based on the premise that student learning involves the whole child and that individuals should strive toward achieving their potential and finding their authentic voices (Hollis, 1991; O'Hara, 1989; Richards & Combs, 1992; Sage et al., 2012; Tangney, 2014). Teachers in this study aligning with this philosophical approach, even though they did not, in most cases, use that terminology. Several factors enabled teacher participants to see their students as whole children and support them more effectively to find their authentic voices. Teachers in this study had a strong understanding of adolescent development and the impact of adversity and trauma on their students. This knowledge enabled them to see their students' behaviors differently and respond with more patience and understanding. It also enabled teachers to recognize the importance of helping students change the trajectories of their lives, which they did by guiding self-reflection, engaging in reframing conversations, and increasing self-efficacy through carefully scaffolded activities.

Teachers in this study seemed to be humanistic teachers, but the additional steps they took to help students reframe how they saw themselves and what was possible seemed to align with Freire's belief that learning should be transformative and include increasing student self-belief and confidence so that they will feel empowered (Tangney, 2014). Transformational Learning Theory, developed by Mezirow and rooted in the work of Jarvis and Freire, is based on the concept that developing authentic and meaningful relationships with students can lead to a transformation in how students see themselves and the world around them (Cranton, 2006; Harrell-Levy et al., 2016; Kitchenham, 2008; Taylor & Snyder, 2012). That transformation is facilitated by trusting relationships with authentic teachers and results from critical self-reflection, which involves questioning assumptions and the associated deep feelings and beliefs (Kitchenham, 2008).

Both humanistic and transformational theories of learning propose that authenticity is foundational. This is aligned with the shared belief among teachers, administrators, and adult former students in this study that teachers must be authentic to be effective. Despite this strong alignment with both learning theories, most teachers and administrators in this study were not formally trained in either but instead reported developing those beliefs and approaches to teaching and leading primarily through experience.

Authenticity in Leadership

This study's findings suggest that the qualities of authentic leaders were seen in both teacher and administrator participants as they led students and staff, respectively. The positive impact of authenticity in leader-follower relationships has been studied extensively in the field of business leadership (Gardner et al., 2011; Ilies et al., 2005) and somewhat in the field of educational leadership (Begley, 2005; Bhindi & Duignan, 1997; Duignan, 2014). However, although teachers serve as leaders to the students in their classrooms, there is very little research investigating the leadership style of teachers or the impact of teacher 'realness' or authenticity on positive teacher-student relationships and student engagement. In this study teachers and administrators seemed to utilize aspects of humanistic and transformational leadership styles. Additionally, authenticity was a key factor that contributed to their success in motivating and engaging students and staff respectively (see Figures 4 & 5).

Leadership Styles. Teachers and administrators in this study utilized approaches aligned with humanistic or person-oriented leadership (Hasel & Grover, 2016) and transformational leadership (Fitzgerald & Schutte, 2009). However, they did not use those terms to describe what they did. These two leadership styles have been studied more extensively in the fields of business and organizational leadership than they have in education. As was the case for teachers and

administrators in this study, humanistic leaders are concerned with their follower's wellbeing, development, and growth and experience higher worker productivity than role- or task-oriented leaders who are primarily concerned with structure and an exchange of performance for reward (Hasel & Grover, 2016; DeVries et al., 2010). Teachers and administrators in this study also exhibited qualities of transformational leaders. Transformational leaders focus on guiding the development of their followers (Ross & Gray, 2006). They tend to have a clear vision for the organization and build relationships with employees, seeking to understand their needs, and encouraging them to reach their potential (Aydin et al., 2013; Fitzgerald & Schutte, 2009; Lambersky, 2016; Ross & Gray, 2006). Under the leadership of their administrators, teachers in this study demonstrated increased teamwork with colleagues, the desire to connect with and engage students, and motivation to find innovative solutions to support struggling students, all of which are associated with working for humanistic and transformational leaders. Similarly, adult former students in this study, under the leadership of their teachers, described having an increased motivation to engage and experienced greater success in those classes because their teachers were concerned with their wellbeing, sought to understand their needs, guided and encouraged their growth, and encouraged them to reach their potential.

Authenticity is a key tenet of both leadership styles employed by teachers and administrators. The definition of an authentic leader varies, but what is commonly agreed upon is that authentic leaders use self-reflection to gain greater awareness of their own and others' values and beliefs and that they strive to have openness and truthfulness in their relationships (Duignan, 2014; Gardner et al., 2011; Ilies et al., 2005). Their self and other awareness enable them to be sensitive to the needs of those they lead (Begley, 2005). In this study, as authentic leaders, teachers and administrators were described by others as open and honest during interactions.

Both described continually personally reflecting on themselves and their interactions with others to develop self and other awareness and discover who they authentically were in their roles.

Teachers and administrators in this study exhibited a strong understanding of human nature, values, and motivation, which aligns with Begley's (2005) assertion that authentic leaders have a strong capacity to infer the values and motivations of those they lead. In addition, authentic leaders also value growth in themselves and those they lead and focus their efforts on supporting the strengths and growth of those they lead (Ilies et al., 2005). This was seen in teachers and administrators in this study as they encouraged the development of self-awareness and authenticity in students and staff, respectively, through facilitating reflection during conversations and strategically designing learning activities.

Administrator Influence

Although teachers in this study expressed high confidence in their abilities to build relationships with and engage students regardless of organization-level factors, they did explain that administrator support, trust, and shared values contributed to their job satisfaction and wellbeing and enhanced their success with students. Because most teachers in this study worked their entire careers in the same schools and environments, they could not comment on how other working environments impacted them. However, the three teachers who previously worked in different schools explained that while they were still successful at building relationships with and engaging students, they experienced greater stress and lower job satisfaction when their previous administrators and colleagues did not share their values about the importance of teacher-student relationships and being authentic.

Teacher Stress and Burnout

Prior research findings have demonstrated that teacher job satisfaction and wellbeing are inversely related to teacher burnout (Aloe et al., 2014; Richards et al., 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2015) and that high burnout can negatively impact teacher-student relationships (Richards et al., 2016). Under their current administrators ' leadership, none of the teachers in this study described feeling indicators of burnout.

Teacher burnout has been found to be significantly higher for secondary teachers and associated with personal, student, and administrator variables (Byrne, 1994; Richards et al., 2018). Teachers can experience higher levels of burnout when faced with student apathy, lack of sense of community within the school, lack of administrator support (Aloe et al., 2014; Harmsen et al., 2018; Richards et al., 2018; Spilt et al., 2011), curricular and testing pressures, low self-efficacy managing student behavior (Aloe et al., 2014; O'Brennan et al., 2017; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011) lack of shared decision-making and shared vision with administrators, conflicting role demands (Byrne, 1994), and lack of administrator trust (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2014), which can be highly impacted by administrator authenticity (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1997). Managing student behavior can also be a significant source of stress and burnout for teachers when they lack social-emotional competence or self-efficacy in meeting the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students (Byrne, 1994; Hargreaves, 2000; Gregory & Kipski, 2008; Chang, 2013; Hastings & Bham, 2003).

In this study, teachers expressed high confidence in their abilities to develop relationships, teach their content, and navigate their students' social and emotional needs (high SEC). Teacher participants explained that their success in building relationships and engaging students, seeing how students responded to them, and the positive messages students shared with

them increased their self-efficacy and gave them a high sense of personal accomplishment. Their social-emotional competence also equipped them to use effective coping strategies when navigating the emotional challenges of being a teacher. Their high self-efficacy, sense of accomplishment, and effective coping strategies seemed to contribute to their low levels of burnout indicators.

Administrator leadership styles in this study also contributed to teacher wellbeing and seemed to prevent burnout. Previous researchers have identified several administrator-level factors that impact teacher morale, job satisfaction, and teacher stress and burnout (Aydin et al., 2013; Lambersky, 2016; Ross & Gray, 2006; Urick & Bowers, 2014). Those factors include trusting relationships (Boies & Fiset, 2019; Tschannen & Hoy, 2000), offering support (O'Brennan et al., 2017; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2014), respect and autonomy (Hasel & Grover, 2016; DeVries et al., 2010; Lambersky, 2016), focusing on growth (Abernathy et al., 2021; Yeager & Dweck, 2020; Dweck & Leggett, 1988) and having shared values and a shared vision of their work (Ross & Gray, 2006; Wang & Hall, 2019).

In this study, specific beliefs, values, and actions of administrators that benefitted teacher wellbeing and success were identified in a teacher relational-motivational dynamic (see Figure 5). Participating administrators created environments in which teachers felt supported, included in shared decision-making, shared vision, and felt a sense of community within the school. Administrators respected teachers as professionals by including their voices in leadership decisions and granting them autonomy. Administrators also encouraged authenticity, prioritized relationship-building with students, supported teachers in using innovative methods to support student learning and saw mistakes as opportunities for growth. Administrators sought to develop their own social-emotional competence through reflection and growth and supported their

teachers' development of social-emotional competence. They did so through engaging teachers in self and other reflection, guiding teachers to find their own answers and discover their authentic self and teaching style, and providing support and guidance when teachers struggled with student behavior.

Only three teacher participants in this study described experiencing aspects of burnout at different points in their careers; however, even at times of very high stress and emotional exhaustion, none of them described experiencing the student depersonalization aspect of burnout. In all three cases, stress and emotional exhaustion were related to one or both of the following: (1) curricular or testing pressures that increased personal stress and created barriers to building relationships and supporting student growth, and (2) working for administrators who did not value the importance of authenticity or prioritize positive teacher-student relationships. In two of the three cases, these teachers changed positions rather than stay in those environments. In the third case, the teacher expressed a desire to leave the field of teaching because the heavy focus on testing created barriers to changing students' lives in the way she desired.

At the time of the study, all teacher participants worked for administrators who shared their values and the beliefs that students are fellow humans and that a teacher's role is to guide the development of students. Those commonly held beliefs and values contributed to their shared vision. They agreed that being effective required authenticity, meeting students' human needs, focusing on growth, and engaging in reflection to develop self and other awareness.

Teacher Capacity for Growth. In this study, administrators expressed the beliefs that all individuals have a capacity for growth and that their role was to support teachers' growth. Those beliefs were evident in their leadership styles. Administrators in this study sought to create trusting environments in which staff felt safe and supported to grow and change. This was

similar to way the environments that teachers in this study created for students. Administrators did this through reflective questioning to help teachers gain greater self-awareness and empathy for students and to guide teachers to find solutions to their problems within themselves. Administrators also used modeling to support teacher growth, which they explained was especially important for new teachers. Because administrators believed in growth and trusted that teachers wanted to do what was best for students, they supported teachers in trying new techniques and strategies to support students, trusting that teachers would learn from mistakes if they occurred. This focus on growth seemed to encourage staff collaboration as teachers described feeling safe learning from each other. Positive deviant teachers in this study attributed their high job satisfaction and commitment to the school, at least partly, to administrator support to collaborate with colleagues, grow from experiences, and try innovative strategies to support students.

Meeting Teachers' Human Needs. In the same way that teachers sought to support students' basic, psychological, and self-fulfillment needs, administrators in this study sought to create environments in which the human needs of teachers were met. For example, Admin C described always considering and balancing (1) what is best for students and (2) what staff can handle, whenever making decisions. Administrators created environments where teachers' basic needs were met by developing trusting and supportive relationships through respectful communication, listening when staff had concerns, trusting teachers as professionals, and offering support through coaching and mentoring when teachers struggled. Administrators in this study also created environments where teachers' psychological need for belonging was met. Administrators valued teachers' perspectives, shared leadership and decision-making with teachers, and developed a shared vision with staff. Administrators sought to support teachers'

self-fulfillment needs by facilitating reflective conversations with teachers to help them gain greater self-understanding, encouraging growth over perfection, and asking staff to engage in extra-duty activities aligned with their strengths and interests. Administrators also recognized that teachers were more successful when they were authentic, thereby giving teachers autonomy in their classrooms and supporting creative problem-solving to meet students' needs.

Differences Between Participating Canadian and U.S. Schools

In this study, the choice to include teachers and administrators from two schools in Canada and two schools in the U.S. increased maximum variation in sampling. Maximum variation in sampling increases the likelihood that findings may be applied to more settings (Palinkas et al., 2015). This choice was also made to enable me to see beyond the biases that may be present when examining the familiarity of my own country (the U.S). It should be noted that this study was conducted at two schools from one school district in a western province in Canada and two schools from two school districts in a western state in the U.S.. Therefore, any differences identified were specific to those three contexts and cannot be generalized to all of Canada or the U.S.

Positive deviant teachers from all four participating schools in this study shared common beliefs and engaged in the same student relational-motivational dynamic with students (as described above). However, differences between factors that impacted teachers from the participating Canadian and U.S. school districts did emerge at the organizational and district/state/province levels, such as the utilization of district student files, number of support staff, and standardized testing.

Communication between feeder schools can be an important strategy to support student academic, social, and emotional success during school transitions (Chambers, 2018; Hopwood,

Hay, & Dyment, 2016; Strand, 2020). What was lacking in the literature, but highlighted in this study, was the value of district student files as a means of communication between feeder schools and grade levels. In this study, both U.S. and Canadian teachers mentioned the valuable information contained in district student files. However, most Canadian teachers in this study, especially at the middle school level, described being more strategic and consistent than teachers from participating U.S. schools in their use of student files as they prepared to address student needs. Canadian teachers in this study explained that the information contained in student files enabled them to understand students' academic, social, and emotional needs, which led to increased empathy for students and equipped them to meet students at their current ability levels. They explained that this contributed to the safety students felt in their classes and to the relationships they were able to build with students.

Another difference between the four participating Canadian and U.S. schools was the number of support staff and external support structures for struggling students. The two Canadian schools (located in a school district with a higher percentage of Indigenous students) had additional support staff, such as a First Nation, Metis, and Inuit liaison, a Making Connections position, and a family-school liaison. The purpose of these additional staff members was to support student, school, family, and community connections. These positions were not identified by teachers in the two participating U.S. schools. In addition to increased support staff, participating Canadian teachers had access to two funding sources that participating U.S. teachers did not. One was a rural poverty intervention fund that enabled teachers to purchase snacks for students whose basic needs were not being met outside of school. The other was funding from the teachers' association that enabled teachers to take days off to collaborate as they built supports for students.

Standardized testing pressure can decrease teacher wellbeing (Youn, 2018), increase burnout by creating conflicting role demands (Aloe et al., 2014), create pressure and stress for teachers (Dishke-Hondzel, 2014; Moon et al., 2007), and take time away from other learning activities that teachers deem more valuable (Moon et al., 2007; Dishke-Hondzel, 2014). Administrators in both Canadian schools made it clear that teacher-student relationships were the priority, shielding teachers from the pressures of standardized testing. Teachers reported that being shielded from that pressure decreased their stress. They no longer had to manage the conflicting role demands of attending to test preparation while also attempting to focus on relationship-building, creating safety for students, and removing barriers to engagement. This was less possible in the two participating U.S. schools where the teachers, administrators, and schools were evaluated every year based on student academic performance on standardized tests, and poor student test scores could lead to removal from the profession.

It is established in the literature that there are differences between Canadian and U.S. school systems concerning teacher salaries, academic achievement regardless of socioeconomic status (OECD, 2021), social support (Hoynes & Stabile, 2019), and violence (Szmigiera, 2021). However, the differences identified in this study centered primarily around participating Canadian teachers having access to additional support personnel and funding resources, experiencing decreased standardized testing pressure, and utilizing student files more consistently than participating U.S. teachers. It is difficult to draw conclusions about the wider implications of those differences with such a small sample size.

Implications

There are five implications from this study's findings. First, acknowledging the systemic nature of the factors that contribute to effective teaching and positive student outcomes has the

potential to enable educator preparatory programs to better meet the needs of teachers and students. Second, positive deviant teachers and their administrators engaged in leadership styles aligned with humanistic and transformational philosophies, which seemed to be foundational to their success, indicating a need for an increase in training on these philosophies and how to apply them. Third, when teachers engage in the five-part student relational-motivational dynamic identified in this study, it impacted not only student engagement in those classes, but also created turning points for the adult former student participants and positively impacted their adult lives. Fourth, positive deviant teachers' beliefs, relational dynamics, social emotional competence, *and* administrators' leadership styles seemed to all contribute to high job satisfaction and low burnout, suggesting that there may be concrete solutions to addressing the high burnout and attrition rates of teachers. Fifth, the frequency and degree of standardized testing may be unintentionally creating barriers to students' success. Each of these topics are described in the following sections.

The Systemic Nature of Teacher Success

This study examined the success of positive deviant teachers through the lens of an ecological model. Findings suggest that teacher success is not solely dependent on their knowledge or skills. There are important internal, relational, and organizational factors (such as teacher beliefs, teacher leadership style and relational dynamics with students, and the leadership style of their administrators) that all synergistically contribute to the success of positive deviant teachers. Conceptualizing educator preparatory programs, licensure requirements, and teacher evaluation processes differently to reflect this systemic reality could benefit teachers, administrators, and students by supporting the development of all levels that impact teacher success rather than solely focusing on teacher skills.

Humanistic and Transformational Leadership Styles

Teachers and administrators in this study not only reflected the mindsets and approaches of humanistic teachers and leaders, they extended their focus to also include aspects of transformational learning and leadership styles. Administrators and teachers in this study (through their use of these leadership styles) focused on motivating staff and student engagement respectively by developing trusting and caring relationships, removing barriers to engagement by shifting mindsets or supporting skill development, and believing in them.

Humanistic philosophy is not new to education or leadership although it is not commonly included in educator preparatory programs. The fact that all positive deviant teachers' teaching and leadership styles seemed to be grounded in humanistic and transformational philosophies, even though they did not receive much if any formal training in it, indicates that it may be time to reevaluate the teaching philosophies that are promoted in teacher training programs. Additionally, findings from this study indicate that in order to support students in finding and expressing their authentic voices and achieving their potentials, humanistic learning theory in the 21st century needs to include training teachers: (1) to be authentic, (2) to guide students to reframe how they see themselves, (3) to build student self-efficacy, (4) about adolescent development, and (5) to understand the effects of adverse early life experiences and trauma on students' school experiences and lives.

Creating Opportunities for Turning Points

Many policy efforts to help disadvantaged groups fail because they do not strategically focus on key life events and the transitions during which interventions might be more effective (McDaniel & Bernard, 2011). Adolescence is a specific time during human development when individuals discover who they are, form identities (Hutchison, 2019), and create visions for their

futures (Phan, 2013). Supporting students in changing self-concept and developing a positive identity can facilitate turning points (Hutchison, 2019) for youth on a trajectory toward dropping out of school (Kelly & Lee, 2018; Noble-Carr et al., 2014; Watson, 2017), and adolescence is a key time to do so.

Through creating trusting environments, being authentic, valuing and accepting students as fellow humans, believing in students, and strategically guiding students to reframe what they believe about themselves and what is possible, positive deviant teachers have the potential to positively influence a change in self-concept and create turning points that positively impact the life trajectories of students. The five-part student relational-motivational dynamic identified in this study has the potential to serve as a mechanism by which those shifts in identity occurs. This is not currently a focus for many teacher or administrator preparatory programs or teacher professional development efforts. If more middle and high school teachers understood the *importance of* as well as *how to* engage in this five-part student relational-motivational dynamic with their students, teachers might feel greater permission to be authentic as they create the safe and supportive environments, interactions, and transformative guidance that not only increase student engagement in school, but also change the trajectories of students' lives.

Teacher Attrition

Findings from this study have the potential to contribute to decreasing teacher burnout and attrition rates. High rates of teacher attrition are a problem in many countries, including the United States and Canada (Kutsyuruba et al., 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011), with many teachers leaving the profession within the first three to five years due to factors associated with burnout (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2015), low student motivation, negative teacher-student relationships (Junker et al., 2021), not feeling a sense of belonging and value, struggling to

manage student behavior and discipline issues, conflicting time demands (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011), conflicts with administrative leadership, and poor colleague relationships (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2015). In contrast, the areas where the positive deviant teachers in this study excelled, such as positive teacher-student relationships (Spilt & Koomen, 2009) and high teacher efficacy for managing student behavior have been shown to be inversely related to teacher burnout (Jennings & Greenburg, 2009; Oberle et al., 2020; Richards et al., 2016). This suggests that equipping teachers to build positive teacher-student relationships and effectively manage student behavior may prevent teacher burnout.

In this study, teachers expressed that in order to experience wellbeing, job satisfaction, and low burnout indicators, they needed the same supports, relationship qualities, trust, and respect from administrators that students needed from teachers. Understanding the specific factors that contributed to the success and wellbeing of the positive deviant teachers and the administrators who supported them in this study sheds light on what types of belief systems, training, support, and environments may be associated with teachers who have high job satisfaction, wellbeing, and low burnout indicators. These findings may provide insight into how administrators can equip more teachers to build the types of relationships with students which have been shown to increase both student success and teacher wellbeing and job satisfaction, potentially decreasing teacher stress, burnout, and attrition.

Standardized Testing

Although standardized testing was developed and implemented in an attempt to ensure that all students learn what they need to in order to be successful, there may be some unintended consequences of the frequency and degree to which these tests are administered, especially in the United States. For example, positive teacher-student relationships are significantly associated

with increased academic achievement (Lee, 2012; Murray, 2009; Roorda et al., 2011; Woolley & Bowen, 2007), and yet this study's findings indicate that standardized testing took time and focus away from building relationships with students, while also increasing the reported stress levels of teachers and students. If standardized testing can serve as a barrier to developing positive teacher-student relationships and those relationships are significantly associated with higher academic achievement, it may be worth considering that testing policies intended to ensure student learning and achievement may be unintentionally decreasing positive student outcomes.

Additionally, testing can create competing priorities for teachers, which is one of the factors associated with increased burnout (Richards et al., 2018). In this study, those competing priorities were two-fold. Some teachers felt pulled between designing their classes and creating environments that positively impacted students' lives while also feeling pulled to take time to prepare for testing. Some teachers also felt conflicting demands between creating academically safe learning environments for their students and requiring students to engage in standardized testing, which they perceived to create stress and perpetuate feelings of failure for struggling students. Teachers reported that this was especially true for English Language Learners who were unable to access the test content and consequently achieved low scores.

Practice and Policy Recommendations

The purpose of qualitative description as a methodology (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Sandelowski, 2000) is to identify policy and practice recommendations that may improve the field through the experiences and perspectives of those involved in a phenomenon. In this case, practice recommendations for teacher and administrator training programs and professional development as well as standardized testing were identified.

Teacher Preparatory Programs and Training

The understanding gleaned from this study of how positive deviant teachers build relationships with students, increase engagement, and help students reframe how they see themselves and their futures, may contribute to the development of teacher training programs, professional development, and policies regarding teacher licensure. Although there is much variation in teacher preparatory programs' structures and requirements across Canada and the U.S. (Olson et al., 2015), most of the current programs in both countries focus primarily on pragmatic content such as pedagogy, lesson planning, and assessment practices. Very little time is spent exploring learning theories, relationship-building, deeply understanding human needs, development, and growth, and effectively managing unwanted student behavior (Freeman, Simonsen, Briere, & MacSuga-Gage, 2014; Nahal, 2010; National Council on Teacher Quality [NCTQ], 2012; NCTQ, 2017; Olson et al., 2015).

Findings from this study indicated that authenticity, student relationship-building, understanding human needs, development, and growth, and effectively managing student behavior are key factors contributing to positive deviant teachers' success; however, I was unable to find any teacher preparatory programs that devoted time to exploring teacher values, beliefs, or how to become an authentic teacher. Adding these topics to teacher preparatory programs has the potential to equip teachers more comprehensively, increasing their effectiveness and job satisfaction while also improving student outcomes.

In order to equip new teachers with the knowledge, beliefs, and skills utilized by positive deviant teachers, teacher preparatory programs would need to: (1) encourage the development of authenticity through guiding teachers to identify, reflect on, and understand how their values and beliefs impact their teaching and classroom management styles, (2) encourage the perspective

that the primary role of a teacher is to guide growth through teaching content, (3) train teachers to both understand and meet the human and developmental needs of students, and (4) teach teachers how to guide student learning and growth rather than focus solely on pedagogy, lesson planning, and assessments.

Encouraging the development of self-awareness and authenticity and equipping new teachers with those skills and knowledge may, in turn, increase their effectiveness and decrease their risk of high stress, burnout, and attrition. Additionally, teacher preparatory programs that equip teachers with the skills needed to engage in all aspects of the five-part student relational-motivational dynamic identified (see Figure 4) in this study have the potential to create opportunities for students to experience turning points and shift the difficult trajectories of their lives. More teachers perceiving of the value of guiding student development, accepting students without judgment, being honest and real with students, developing trust, and strategically guiding students to believe in themselves has the potential to positively change the trajectories of struggling youth. This may be especially important for disadvantaged students who are more likely to be on a trajectory toward dropping out of school (NCES, 2018).

Finally, prior study findings indicated that state agency policies influenced an increase in the percentage of teacher preparatory programs devoting time to classroom management (NCTQ, 2020). Therefore, it is possible that implementing state or provincial policies that emphasize the importance of teacher authenticity (through understanding values and beliefs) in teacher preparatory programs and licensure requirements could lead to a change in those programs that may generate more effective teachers, potentially decreasing their burnout and attrition rates.

Administrator Training Programs

Not only do the findings in this study have the potential to support teacher training, but they also have the potential to inform administrator training programs, equipping administrators to guide teachers to develop the belief systems and skills utilized by positive deviant teachers. Some topic areas administrators might address to support teacher development are to (1) guide teachers' exploration of their beliefs and values to support the development of self-awareness and authenticity, (2) train teachers to build positive teacher-student relationships grounded in trust, respect, and non-judgment, (3) train teachers to manage student behavior with a focus on growth rather than punishment, (4) encourage teachers to find creative solutions to the barriers students face, and (5) train teachers to increase student engagement through the five-part student relational-motivational dynamic identified in this study.

Equipping administrators to share leadership with staff, create trusting environments that are focused on growth, and to facilitate the type of teacher development described above should be incorporated into administrator training programs as well as professional development for the field. These shifts in training and organizational support may improve teacher wellbeing, decrease teacher burnout, and increase retention rates while improving student outcomes.

Standardized Testing

It may be time to reevaluate policies regarding the frequency and extent to which standardized testing are utilized. One goal of standardized testing is to measure student learning so that school leaders can understand and meet the needs of their students and improve outcomes. However, over-testing can serve as a barrier to building the positive teacher-student relationships associated with increased student engagement and achievement. Extensive testing

can also create undue stress for students and teachers, in some cases influencing teachers to leave the field of education, when shortages already exist.

Additionally, it may also be important to reexamine testing policies for English Language Learners who cannot demonstrate their knowledge on these tests due to a language barrier. If the goal of education is to guide the development and knowledge acquisition of students, and frequent testing unintentionally serves as a barrier to those outcomes, it will be important to reexamine testing policies to ensure that a focus on data collection does not take precedence over developing positive teacher-student relationships and guiding student learning and development.

Limitations

This study was limited to 12 teachers and five administrators from one school district in one western province in Canada, two school districts in one western state in the United States, and seven adult former students from six different regions across the western United States. Qualitative research studies tend to include smaller sample sizes, and their findings are linked to the specific context in which those studies occur. This typically results in findings being less generalizable to other contexts. This study was designed to identify the factors commonly shared among positive deviant teachers regardless of their regional, demographic, and personal differences. In order to do so, maximum variation in sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015) was utilized by including adult former students from six different regions within the United States and teachers (of multiple subjects) and administrators from several different geographic areas that included rural and small urban secondary schools. Although maximum variation in sampling increases the likelihood that findings may be applied to more settings (Palinkas et al., 2015), findings from this study may not be transferrable to other contexts.

One potential limitation in qualitative studies is the influence of bias during data analysis. Although steps were taken to decrease personal bias, such as practicing reflexivity and including teachers and administrators from another country, my background in education and my belief system were likely to have impacted the patterns that stood out to me in the data. In order to ensure that my findings accurately portrayed the perspectives and experiences of study participants, member checking took place at all stages of this study. While not all participants provided feedback during member checking, those who did confirmed the accuracy of my findings.

Another possible limitation in this study was that all participating administrators shared positive deviant teachers' beliefs about the role of teachers and the importance of developing student relationships. Only three teachers experienced working in previous schools with administrators who did not share their vision of education. This lack of diverse leadership did not allow for an examination of how positive deviant teachers succeed in schools with less supportive or like-minded administrators.

Additionally, teacher observations were not conducted during the third phase of the study as they were in phase one. The purpose of the third phase was to increase the sample size of teacher and administrator participants. Including a larger sample and the increased physical distance between participating schools made the possibility of observations unrealistic but may also serve as a limitation. Additionally, observations during the fall of 2020 were not possible due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Inclusion of teachers in a study requires prior approval from school districts. Due to the length of application wait times and the number of district applications that must be completed and submitted, this study was limited to four schools within three school districts. In addition to

district application wait times, approval from a large urban school district was not granted due to COVID-19 restrictions and policies. This prevented the inclusion of teachers and administrators from a large urban context.

My original study design included using a qualitative questionnaire in phase three of the study that would be drafted based on findings from the first two phases of the study and would be completed by positive deviant teachers and teachers who struggle with building relationships and engaging disengaged students. However, due to the added stress of teaching during the COVID pandemic administrators did not approve my request to administer the questionnaire and limited my interview to only positive deviant teachers. This prevented me from gathering data directly from a comparison group. The only comparison data I was able to collect was through the perceptions of participating administrators. The findings in this study indicate what factors were common among positive deviant teachers, but this does not inherently mean that other teachers do not engage in some of the same strategies or share some of the same beliefs. Further study with a comparison group would be needed in order to make that assertion.

Recruitment efforts of adult former students from Canada were unsuccessful and negatively impacted by COVID-19 travel restrictions. This limited the adult former student perspective to only individuals from six regions within the United States. While analysis indicated that adult former student and teacher perspectives of the relational factors aligned, it is unknown if the inclusion of Canadian adult former students would have altered those findings. Additionally, it should be noted that one adult former student participant was a former student of a teacher participant. Although that teacher was not notified as to which student participated, the adult former student may have felt pressure to describe the teacher in a positive light, and that data may contain a positive bias.

This study's focus was on what was commonly shared among positive deviant teachers and not what was different based on demographic variables. Due to this, demographic data such as ethnicity, age, gender, and socioeconomic background were not collected for teachers or administrators. Additionally, with the exception of age, only demographic that participants mentioned while answering other questions during interviews were collected from adult former students. Explicitly collecting more extensive demographic data from all three participant samples would have allowed me to note the degree to which my samples were representative of various demographic groups.

Finally, the expert review of administrator and teacher interview guides for the third phase of the study was conducted only by reviewers from the United States. It would have been preferable to include reviewers from both countries. This may or may not have impacted the development of those interview guides.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study was limited to 12 teachers, five administrators, and seven adult former students. It would be beneficial to conduct further studies that include larger sample sizes, potentially from wider geographic areas.

Data collection in this study did not include interviews with staff at the district, state, or provincial levels. Expanding a similar study to include the perspectives of individuals at the policy level would lend additional insight into the beliefs, values, and reasons behind policy and practice decisions that either support or hinder the success and wellbeing of positive deviant teachers.

This study focused on what was commonly shared among all teachers who were highly skilled at building relationships with and engaging disengaged students. Examining differences

among teachers based on specific demographics such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, or years of experience was not conducted. Further research exploring whether there are differences between positive deviant teachers based on their own demographic variables or if the shared factors remain consistent would provide valuable insight to the field.

A future study comparing the differences between positive deviant teachers and teachers who struggle to build relationships and engage disengaged students may provide an understanding of how to support more teachers to become positive deviants. Additionally, in this study, positive deviant teachers and their administrators had shared beliefs and vision about the purpose of education and the importance of relationships. Future studies of positive deviant teachers in schools with different leadership visions and priorities may lend greater insight into which organizational factors support and impede the success of positive deviant teachers. Understanding the differences between teachers and how administrators influence success may inform the development of both teacher and administrator training programs as they seek to better equip teachers and decrease burnout and attrition rates.

Resilience is the term used to describe a person's ability to navigate through and recover from significant stress and adversity (Tozer et al., 2015; Armstrong & Boothroyd, 2007), such as AELEs. School connectedness, positive relationships with teachers or mentors, and involvement in school or community activities have been shown to foster resilience (Armstrong & Boothroyd, 2007; Slaten et al., 2014; Lee, 2012; Vera et al., 2015). Although this study focused on factors that impact teachers, findings indicated that positive deviant teachers might increase youth resilience as they help students shift beliefs about what they are capable of and what is possible for their futures. Future research exploring the connection between positive deviant teachers and increased youth resilience may benefit the field.

Finally, self-actualization is highly correlated with hope (Snyder, 2002), and low hope is correlated with increased dropout rates (Ciarrochi et al., 2007; Day et al., 2010; Dixson et al., 2017; Snyder, 2002; Worrell & Hale, 2001). It is possible that as teachers help students meet their basic and psychological needs and support students to discover who they are and what they value, it moves students towards self-actualization and thereby increases hope. Additional research specifically exploring student hope, teacher relationships, and student engagement is needed.

Conclusion

This study's findings contribute to the literature surrounding teacher-student relationships, student engagement, and turning points for youth by examining the factors that impact positive deviant teacher success through the levels of an ecological model. Findings indicate that internal, relational, and organizational factors (such as teacher beliefs, teacher leadership and relational dynamics with students, and the leadership style of their administrators) all synergistically contribute to effective teaching and positive student outcomes. Understanding teacher success through this systemic lens has the potential to enable educator preparatory programs to better meet the needs of administrators, teachers, and students. Additionally, the findings shed light on how administrator leadership styles may support teacher wellbeing and the development of self-efficacy, social-emotional competence, and managing student behavior effectively, all of which have the potential to decrease teacher stress, burnout, and attrition.

Teachers are not always considered leaders of the students in their classrooms as the focus is usually placed on teaching techniques, lesson planning, and classroom management rather than on how a teacher, as a leader, can inspire student motivation and growth. However, in this study, teachers and administrators exemplified the leadership mindsets and approaches of

both humanistic and transformational leaders and these contributed to their success in supporting and motivating engagement of students and staff respectively. This study's findings point to a need to enhance teacher and administrator training programs to focus on cultivating humanistic and transformational leaders, developing authenticity, increasing an understanding of human needs and development, and supporting the development of teachers' social-emotional competence.

On a personal and relational level, positive deviant teachers' success at building relationships with and engaging students in this study was impacted by their: (1) beliefs about the role of teachers in the development of youth, (2) authenticity, (3) social-emotional competence, (4) use of reflection to both develop personally and to guide growth for students, (5) understanding of human development and human needs, (6) abilities to create safe environments in which students feel accepted, cared about, and believed in, and (7) skill at helping students reframe what they believe about themselves and what is possible all contributed to. These aspects also contributed to the student relational-motivational dynamic associated with increased engagement and the turning points adult former students experienced. This was true regardless of teachers' geographic locations, whether they taught middle or high school, what subject they taught, or their years of experience. Most of those beliefs, skills, or attributes were developed on their own or with administrator support after completing school and not taught in their teacher preparation programs. Teacher training programs that focus on equipping teachers with the mindsets, skills, knowledge, and attributes of positive deviant teachers have the potential to improve teacher efficacy, student engagement and outcomes, and positive shifts in the trajectories of students' lives.

Factors that contributed to teacher wellbeing and job satisfaction were a combination of administrator leadership and teacher individual factors. The sense of wellbeing and job satisfaction described by teachers in this study appeared to be influenced by their administrators' leadership styles (that included shared beliefs and vision about the purpose of education; support and guidance to grow from mistakes; giving teachers autonomy and respect; developing trust; and encouraging teachers to be authentic) and their own self-efficacy, social-emotional competence, confidence and success in managing student behavior, and success in building relationships with and engaging students. These findings indicate that in addition to the personal skills, mindsets, and attributes of teachers, administrators' leadership styles have the potential to influence teacher wellbeing or burnout. As seen in the teacher relational-motivational dynamic identified in this study that supports and motivates teachers. Findings also suggest that administrator leadership has the potential to help teachers successfully navigate student relationships, manage behavior, and increase student engagement as they support the development of teachers through facilitating reflection and providing professional development and coaching to increase staff self-efficacy and social-emotional competence.

Administrator training programs have the potential to equip administrators to generate school environments in which teachers can develop the mindsets and skills of positive deviant teachers, which may increase job satisfaction and wellbeing, decrease burnout and attrition, and positively influence the life trajectories of students. Training programs with this goal in mind would need to equip administrators to develop shared leadership and vision among staff; guide teachers to develop self and other awareness through reflection; encourage creative solutions to the barriers that students face, and support staff to become authentic, grow from mistakes, build

relationships with students, and manage discipline in respectful ways that encourage growth rather than punishment.

Finally, findings from adult former students indicate that when teachers are authentic, value and accept students without judgment, create trusting environments, remove barriers to engagement, and strategically guide students to reframe what they believe about themselves and what is possible, they have the potential to not only motivate students to engage in their classes but also create turning points in students' lives. These turning points can lead to positive changes in students' life trajectories, in some cases interrupting a cycle of disadvantage.

If the purpose of education is to support the human development and knowledge acquisition of students, and positive relationships with authentic teachers grounded in trust and the belief that students are capable of more than they thought is an effective path to attain that, it may be important to reevaluate the over-emphasis on policies that detract from teachers' success in developing those types of relationships and learning environments. Establishing policies and training programs that encourage and equip more teachers (and the administrators who support them) to develop the relationships and environments that can lead to turning points for chronically disengaged youth who may be on trajectories towards high school dropout (and the often-associated poverty, and social, emotional, and mental health struggles) has the potential to improve not only those youths' lives but also the collective health of society.

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Appendix A: Ethics Board Approval

University of Lethbridge

Office of Research Ethics
4401 University Drive
Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada
T1K 3M4
Phone: (403) 329-2747
Email: research.services@uleth.ca
FWA 00018802 IORG 0006429

Wednesday, May 13, 2020

Principal Investigator:	Rebecca Knighton, Doctoral Student
Faculty Co-Supervisors:	Bonnie Lee, Faculty of Health Sciences Susan McDaniel, Faculty of Arts & Science
Study Title:	How Teachers Build Connection with Students to Protect Against the Negative Effects of Adverse Early Life Experiences: An Ecological Model
Action:	Approved
HPRC Protocol Number:	2020-045
Approval Date:	May 13, 2020
Term Date:	August 31, 2021

Dear Rebecca,

Your human research ethics application titled "How Teachers Build Connection with Students to Protect Against the Negative Effects of Adverse Early Life Experiences: An Ecological Model" has been reviewed and approved on behalf of the University of Lethbridge Human Participant Research Committee (HPRC), and assigned Protocol #2020-045. The HPRC conducts its reviews in accord with University policy and the Tri- Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (2018).

Please be advised that any changes to the protocol or the informed consent must be submitted for review and approval by the HPRC before they are implemented. An annual renewal report will be required and is due to the Office of Research Ethics no later than **May 12, 2021**.

We wish you the best with your continuing doctoral research.

Sincerely,

Susan Entz, M.Sc., Ethics Officer
Office of Research Ethics
University of Lethbridge
4401 University Drive
Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada
T1K 3M4

Appendix B: Recruitment Email to Teachers

Dear _____,

My name is Rebecca Knighton, and I am a Ph.D. student from the University of Lethbridge. Prior to starting my PhD, I was an interventionist at a middle school and worked with disadvantaged students who struggled with not feeling connected to or engaged in school. Helping these students be more successful in school is a passion of mine. I am conducting a study investigating what factors help teachers connect with and engage disengaged students. I am looking for individuals who would be willing to share their thoughts and experiences through filling out an open-response questionnaire with the option of participating in a 30 – 60 minute interview with me. I am looking for teachers who feel like they easily connect with and engage struggling students and you were recommended to me as a teacher who is highly skilled in that area. All of your responses will be confidential and protected. Your feedback will help me understand the factors that help and hinder relationship building so that we can figure out how to help more teachers connect with and engage struggling students. If you are interested in learning more, please contact me at Rebecca.knighton@uleth.ca

Sincerely,
Rebecca Knighton

Appendix C: Recruitment Email to Adult Former Students

Dear _____,

My name is Rebecca Knighton and I am a doctoral student at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada. You were identified by _____ as someone who may be able to offer insight into a research study that I am conducting. My study is investigating how teachers connect with and engage students who are struggling (with not feeling connected or engaged in school) and positively impact a positive shift in those students' lives. I am looking for individuals who had that experience of struggling and who had a relationship with a teacher that positively impacted a change in their lives who would be willing to share their thoughts and experiences with me in an interview. Anything you share with me would be confidential and protected. Your feedback will help me understand, from the student's perspective, what key factors need to be present for a teacher to deeply impact a student who struggles with connection and disengagement. This is important information that might help other teachers develop those skills and strategies. If you are interested in learning more, please contact me at Rebecca.knighton@uleth.ca

Sincerely,

Rebecca Knighton

Appendix D: Social Media Recruitment Post for Adult Former Students

I am doing a research study about teachers who are amazing at building relationships with students who are struggling in life and school. I am looking for adults who had the experience of struggling in life and school during middle and/or high school and had a positive change in their life path because of a relationship with a teacher, or group of teachers, to participate in a 30 – 60 minute interview with me about their experience and how that teacher was different than other teachers. Please let me know if you are interested in learning more about participating.

Appendix E: Recruitment Email to Administrators

Dear _____,

My name is Rebecca Knighton, and I am a doctoral student at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada. Prior to starting my PhD, I was an interventionist at a middle school and worked with disadvantaged students who struggled with not feeling connected to or engaged in school. Helping these students be more successful in school is a passion of mine. I am conducting a study investigating what factors help teachers connect with and engage disengaged students. We've all heard that research indicates that building relationships with students is incredibly important to increasing their engagement and achievement, but there is little information out there about how to connect with and engage students who don't trust adults and push teachers away. I am trying to understand both what factors help teachers connect and engage students what factors may get in the way of connecting and engaging students. I am looking for two – four secondary schools to participate in my study. Participation would include:

- A school principal or assistant principal to participate in a 30 – 60 minute interview
- Four to six teachers to complete a short-response survey followed by an optional 30 – 60 minute interview

I am interested in teachers who feel like they easily connect with struggling students but also, equally importantly, teachers who struggle to connect with disengaged students. All participant responses will be confidential and protected. As an administrator, your feedback will help me understand the organizational-level and relational factors that help and hinder relationship building. My hope is that the findings of this study can help guide teacher Professional Development to equip more teachers to connect with and engage struggling students. If you are interested in learning more, please contact me at Rebecca.knighton@uleth.ca

Sincerely,
Rebecca Knighton

Appendix F: Semi-structured Interview Guide for Adult Former Students

Follow up most questions with, “how did they do that?” or “what did they do that made you feel _____?” or “can you give me an example?”

Who and Why

- Can you tell me a little bit about why you are interested in participating?
- When you think about the teachers that had a strong impact for you, were there several, or was there just one?

Describe the Teacher

- What was it about the teacher that made such an impact for you?
- What was it like to be in their classrooms?
- What was that power dynamic like with that teacher?

How the Teacher Impacted Them

- How did they make you feel about yourself and your abilities? Did they change how you felt about yourself?
- How do you imagine your life would be different now if you hadn't had that teacher in your life?
- Did your relationship with that teacher impact your hope for the future?

The Difference Between That Teacher and Others

- What was your experience with school and life before that teacher came into your life?
- Did you have any teachers where it was a bad experience? Can you describe that experience?
- Can you tell me a little bit about how that teacher was different than other teachers you had?

Appendix G: Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Teachers

Follow up most questions with ""how did you develop that?" or "how do you do that?" or "what experiences led you to that?"

Teaching

- What do you think the role of a teacher is?
- Why did you become a teacher?

Building Relationships

- How do you build relationships with kids; especially the ones that are more at risk?

Discipline and Conflict

- How do you resolve student-teacher conflict and handle discipline with your students? If there's a student behavior that just really triggers you, how do you not let it take control? How do you manage power conflicts with students?

Supporting Students

- When you have a student who doesn't have any confidence in their ability to succeed at what you're asking them to do, how do you handle that?
- Do you believe all students can succeed, even those from difficult home lives who are below grade-level? Do you feel like you are equipped to help them do that?
- What do you do to help students feel safe, valued and a sense of belonging?

School-Level

- Is there anything within the policies at your school that makes it easier or harder to connect with and engage with kids?
- How would you describe your relationship with your administrator? Do you feel like you get support from admin? Do you feel like your administrators trust you? What do they do that makes you feel trusted and respected?
- Do you feel like you have a clear vision of what you're supposed to be doing as part of the school community?
- Do you feel like you have the permission to be flexible to meet the kids with what they need?
- How do your relationships with other staff members impact you?
- Is the school approach to discipline congruent with your own approach to discipline?

District/State/Province-level

- Are there any district or state/province requirements or supports that impact your success in building relationships with and engaging students?

Appendix H: Semi-Structured and Peer Reviewed Interview Guide for Administrators

Intro

- Why did you become a school administrator?
- What is the purpose of education?

Perspectives on Teachers and Students

- What are your beliefs about struggling students' capacity to succeed? What needs to happen in order for that to occur?
- What do you see as the differences between teachers who are highly skilled at building relationships with and engaging students and those who struggle?
    - What seem to be some of the biggest barriers those who struggle experience that make it more difficult to connect with and engage students?
    - Have you had any success in supporting teachers in improving in their ability to connect with and engage kids? What worked well?

Conflict and Discipline

- How do you handle conflict? (when you personally have conflict with staff members and also when teachers and students are having conflict)?
- What's your philosophy on discipline and how that should be handled? How do you address it with teachers who have a different view about what it should be?

Decision-Making

- What's your process for making decisions about school-wide issues?
- How do you make decisions about what professional development to do with your staff?
    - How do you handle it when staff don't buy-in to what you are asking them to do?
    - Do you have non-negotiables set up? Do teachers know what those are? How do you hold teachers accountable for non-negotiable issues?

School Vision

- Do you feel like there's a clear vision for your school, that everybody knows, "This is our vision and mission," kind of thing?

District/State/Province

- Are there any district, state/province level policies or supports that make it easier or harder to meet the needs of disengaged students?

Appendix I: Teacher Consent Form

PARTICIPANT (ADULT) CONSENT FORM

(Teachers)

How Teachers Build Connection with Students to Protect Against the Negative Effects of Adverse Early Life Experiences: An Ecological Model

You are being invited to participate in a research study entitled***, How Teachers Build Connection with Students to Protect Against the Negative Effects of Adverse Early Life Experiences: An Ecological Model***, being conducted by Rebecca Knighton. Rebecca is a Ph.D. student in the Population Studies in Health program at the University of Lethbridge (Canada), and you may contact her if you have further questions at: Rebecca.knighton@uleth.ca

Youth growing up with socioeconomic disadvantage often struggle with disengagement at school. Some teachers are able to help these students increase engagement. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a teacher in a school identified as serving a higher percentage of socioeconomically disadvantaged youth. The purpose of this research project is to understand the key factors within an ecological model that impact the success of teachers to connect with and engage disengaged students. The levels within the ecological model include:

1. Internal: factors within the teacher such as core beliefs, prior experiences, etc.
2. Relational: relationship factors between teachers and students and relationships factors between teachers and administrators and teachers with each other
3. Organizational: school-level policies and procedures, bell schedules, professional development, etc.
4. District/State/Provincial: testing requirements, curriculum requirements and supports, etc.

Your participation in this project will involve participating in one 30 – 60 minute interview, with a possibility of a completely optional second, follow-up interview with the researcher. Questions in the interview will address the factors within the ecological model and may include inquiries about your personal beliefs about discipline and student/teacher relationships, school-level policies and procedures, expectations or supports for teachers regarding building relationships with students, organizational-level factors that may impact teacher-student, administrator-teacher, and teacher-teacher relationships, how you feel about and engage with district and state/provincial testing and curriculum requirements, and your own struggles with building relationships with and engaging disengaged students.

These interviews may be in person, on the phone or via the internet (e.g. Skype, Zoom, etc.) and will be scheduled based on what is convenient for you. If shelter-in-place orders are still in effect, all interviews will occur via phone or internet. With your permission, the interviews will be recorded on a portable recording device and later transcribed. Please initial if you do or do not consent to your interviews being audio-recorded:

____ I DO consent to my interviews being audio-recorded

____ I DO NOT consent to my interviews being audio-recorded

You will also have the opportunity to share any documents you use to facilitate activities during your classes that may be related to how you build relationships with and engage students, although sharing documents will not be required.

Data collected through the interviews will be analyzed for the key factors within each level of the ecological model. A report of these key factors will be emailed to you for member checking. All identifying information will be removed from this report. You will have two weeks to respond with feedback about the key factors and include any information you think may be missing or not represented accurately. At the conclusion of the study, participants will receive a final summary of findings. All identifying information will be removed from this final report.

Participation in this study has few anticipated risks or discomforts. In order to protect the confidentiality of participants' data, the information included in the final report will be a summary from multiple teachers and principals or assistant principals from multiple schools who are participating. All identifying information associated with participants will be removed prior to sharing this summary with anyone. Quotes will not be shared without permission from the participant. Participation will require the time commitment of participating in one interview, with a possibility of a completely optional second, follow-up interview (interviews may run 30 to 60 minutes). This time commitment may be experienced as a burden. Interviews will be flexible according to the participant's schedule. The researcher will be considerate of the participant's time and be efficient in her interview questions.

As a result of participating in this study, participants will receive a final summary of findings of the key factors within an ecological model. These findings may help inform professional development and/or be used to inform the practices of teachers as they work to engage students who struggle with disengagement.

All efforts to maintain confidentiality will be made. All identifying information will be removed from the final report. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants' names. You may choose your own pseudonym or ask the researcher to assign one to you. The schools participating will be described in general terms that are not identifiable. Any quotes used in the final publication will be approved by participants prior to publication. All of the data collected will be protected with encrypted software or stored in a locked file cabinet. Only the researcher and her supervisory committee will have access to the anonymous data. Any identifying information will be removed from interview transcripts and any documents shared before the supervisory committee has access to any of the data. Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Participating or not participating will not affect your relationship with your school or the school district of which you are a part. You may withdraw your participation at any time without penalty, risk or consequence. If you wish to withdraw from the study, you may notify the researcher verbally or in writing. No explanation will be expected. If you do withdraw from the study, your data will be omitted from the results, and all notes and interview audio recordings will be deleted or destroyed within three days.

For information or questions about this research, please contact the researcher, Rebecca Knighton, at Rebecca.knighton@uleth.ca. Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Office of Research Ethics, University of Lethbridge (Phone: 403-329-2747 or Email: research.services@uleth.ca). This study has been reviewed for ethical acceptability and approved by the University of Lethbridge (Canada) Human Participant Research Committee.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of your participation in this study and that you consent to participate.

Name of Participant	*Participant Signature*	*Date*
Name of Researcher	*Researcher Signature*	*Date*

A copy of this signed consent will be provided for you.

Appendix J: Adult Former Student Consent Form

University of Lethbridge
Faculty of Education

PARTICIPANT (ADULT) CONSENT FORM

(Adult Former Students)

How Teachers Build Connection with Students to Protect Against the Negative Effects of Adverse Early Life Experiences: An Ecological Model

You are being invited to participate in a research study entitled***, How Teachers Build Connection with Students to Protect Against the Negative Effects of Adverse Early Life Experiences: An Ecological Model***, being conducted by Rebecca Knighton. Rebecca is a Ph.D. student in the Population Studies in Health program at the University of Lethbridge (Canada), and you may contact her if you have further questions at: Rebecca.knighton@uleth.ca

Some students struggle with not feeling connected to or engaged in school, and some teachers are highly skilled at building relationships with and engaging those students, often positively changing the student's life. This study seeks to identify the key factors within an ecological model that impact a teacher's success in connecting with and engaging students. It would be impossible to understand what the key factors are that enable a teacher to connect with a struggling student in such a powerful way without hearing from individuals who experienced a relationship with a teacher that impacted them in that way. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an adult who has reported having had such a relationship with a teacher during your youth. Your voice is vital to understanding what those key factors within an ecological model are. The levels within the ecological model of this study include:

1. Internal: factors within the teacher such as core beliefs, prior experiences, etc.
2. Relational: relationship factors between teachers and students and relationships factors between teachers and administrators and teachers with each other
3. Organizational: school-level policies and procedures, bell schedules, professional development, etc.
4. District/State/Provincial: testing requirements, curriculum requirements and supports, etc.

This study involves two phases. You will be participating in phase one of the study. Phase two will include interviews with teachers and school principals or assistant principals and a survey for teachers. Your participation in this project will involve participating in one 30 – 60 minute interview, with a possibility of a second, follow-up interview with the researcher. Interview questions will primarily focus on the relational level within the ecological model and center on questions about your relationship with that highly impactful teacher. Questions may also address school-level factors and district/state/provincial factors and how those impacted your relationship with that teacher and your engagement in that teacher's class.

These interviews may be in person, on the phone or via the internet (e.g. Skype, Zoom, etc.) and will be scheduled based on what is convenient for you. If shelter-in-place orders are still in effect, all interviews will occur via phone or internet. With your permission, the interviews will be recorded on a portable recording device and later transcribed. Please initial if you do or do not consent to your interviews being audio-recorded:

____ I DO consent to my interviews being audio-recorded

____ I DO NOT consent to my interviews being audio-recorded
Data collected through the interviews will be analyzed for the key factors within each level of the ecological model. At the conclusion of this phase of the study, participants will receive a summary of findings via email for member checking. You will have two weeks to respond with feedback about the findings and share any information you think may be missing or not represented accurately. All identifying information will be removed from this report. At the conclusion of both phases of the study, participants will receive a final summary of findings.

At the conclusion of this phase of the study, participants will be given the option to participate in a collaborative group with teachers, school principals or assistant principals and the researcher. Adult former students will be a vital voice to include in this collaborative group. The group will use the findings of this phase of the study and results from a pilot study conducted during the previous school year to draft a questionnaire that will be administered as a survey to teachers in the second phase of the study. There is no requirement to participate in this collaborative group. Participation will be completely voluntary.

Participation in this study has few anticipated risks or discomforts. In order to protect the confidentiality of participants' data, the information included in the final report will be a summary from multiple adult former students, teachers and school administrators. All identifying information associated with participants will be removed prior to sharing this summary with anyone. Quotes will not be shared without permission from the participant. Participation will require the time commitment of participating in one interview, with a possibility of a second, follow-up interview (interviews may run 30 to 60 minutes). This time commitment may be experienced as a burden. Interviews will be flexible according to the participant's schedule. The researcher will be considerate of the participant's time and be efficient in her interview questions.

As a result of participating in this study, participants will receive a final summary of findings of the key factors within an ecological model. These findings may help inform professional development in schools and/or be used to inform the practices of teachers as they work to engage students who struggle with disengagement.

All efforts to maintain confidentiality will be made. All identifying information will be removed from the final report. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants' names. You may choose your own pseudonym or ask the researcher to assign one to you. The schools participating will be described in general terms that are not identifiable. Any quotes used in the final publication will be approved by participants prior to publication. All of the data collected will be protected with encrypted software or stored in a locked file cabinet. Only the researcher and her supervisory committee will have access to the anonymous data. Any identifying information will be removed from interview transcripts and any documents shared before the supervisory committee has access to any of the data. Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Participating or not participating will not affect your relationship with your school or the school district of which you were a part. You may withdraw your participation at any time without penalty, risk or consequence. If you wish to withdraw from the study, you may notify the researcher verbally or in writing. No explanation will be expected. If you do withdraw from the study, your data will be omitted from the results, and all notes and interview audio recordings will be deleted or destroyed within three days.

For information or questions about this research, please contact the researcher, Rebecca Knighton, at Rebecca.knighton@uleth.ca. Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Office of Research Ethics, University of Lethbridge (Phone: 403-329-2747 or Email:

research.services@uleth.ca). This study has been reviewed for ethical acceptability and approved by the University of Lethbridge (Canada) Human Participant Research Committee.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of your participation in this study and that you consent to participate. If you are not able to print, sign, scan and email me this form, please email me a response that includes the following statement: "Yes I have read the informed consent form. I do not have any concerns about participating and consent to participate."

Name of Participant	*Participant Signature*	*Date*
Name of Researcher	*Researcher Signature*	*Date*

A copy of this signed consent will be provided for you.

Appendix K: Administrator Consent Form

PARTICIPANT (ADULT) CONSENT FORM (Principals/Assistant Principals)

How Teachers Build Connection with Students to Protect Against the Negative Effects of Adverse Early Life Experiences: An Ecological Model

You are being invited to participate in a research study entitled, ***How Teachers Build Connection with Students to Protect Against the Negative Effects of Adverse Early Life Experiences: An Ecological Model***, being conducted by Rebecca Knighton. Rebecca is a Ph.D. student in the Population Studies in Health program at the University of Lethbridge (Canada), and you may contact her if you have further questions at: Rebecca.knighton@uleth.ca

Youth growing up with socioeconomic disadvantage often struggle with disengagement at school. Some teachers are able to help these students increase engagement. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an administrator of a school identified as serving a higher percentage of socioeconomically disadvantaged youth. The purpose of this research project is to understand the key factors within an ecological model that impact the success of teachers to connect with and engage disengaged students. The levels within the ecological model include:

1. Internal: factors within the teacher such as core beliefs, prior experiences, etc.
2. Relational: relationship factors between teachers and students and relationships factors between teachers and administrators and teachers with each other
3. Organizational: school-level policies and procedures, bell schedules, professional development, etc.
4. District/State/Provincial: testing requirements, curriculum requirements and supports, etc.

Your participation in this project will involve participating in one 30 – 60 minute interview, with a possibility of a second, follow-up interview with the researcher. Questions will address the factors within the ecological model and may include inquiries about school-level policies and procedures, expectations or supports for teachers regarding building relationships with students, organizational-level factors that may impact teacher-student, administrator-teacher , and teacher-teacher relationships, professional development strategies and processes, and your perceptions of what stands out about teachers who are highly skilled at building relationships with and engaging disengaged students

These interviews may be in person, on the phone or through Skype or Zoom and will be scheduled based on what is convenient for you. If shelter-in-place orders are still in effect, all interviews will occur via phone or internet. With your permission, the interviews will be recorded on a portable recording device and later transcribed. Please initial if you do or do not consent to your interviews being audio-recorded:

____ I DO consent to my interviews being audio-recorded

____ I DO NOT consent to my interviews being audio-recorded

Data collected through the interviews will be analyzed for the key factors within each level of the ecological model. A report of these key factors will be emailed to you for member checking. All identifying information will be removed from this report. You will have two weeks to respond with feedback about the key factors and include any information you think may be missing or not represented

accurately. At the conclusion of the study, participants will receive a final summary of findings. All identifying information will be removed from this final report.

Participation in this study has few anticipated risks or discomforts. In order to protect the confidentiality of participants' data, the information included in the final report will be a summary from multiple teachers and principals or assistant principals who are participating. All identifying information associated with participants will be removed prior to sharing this summary with anyone. Quotes will not be shared without permission from the participant. Participation will require the time commitment of participating in one interview, with a possibility of a second, follow-up interview (interviews may run 30 to 60 minutes). This time commitment may be experienced as a burden. Interviews will be flexible according to the participant's schedule. The researcher will be considerate of the participant's time and be efficient in her interview questions.

As a result of participating in this study, participants will receive a final summary of findings of the key factors within an ecological model. These findings may help inform professional development and/or be used to inform the practices of teachers as they work to engage students who struggle with disengagement.

All efforts to maintain confidentiality will be made. All identifying information will be removed from the final report. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants' names. You may choose your own pseudonym or ask the researcher to assign one to you. The schools participating will be described in general terms that are not identifiable. Any quotes used in the final publication will be approved by participants prior to publication. All of the data collected will be protected with encrypted software or stored in a locked file cabinet. Only the researcher and her supervisory committee will have access to the anonymous data. Any identifying information will be removed from interview transcripts and any documents shared before the supervisory committee has access to any of the data. Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Participating or not participating will not affect your relationship with your school or the school district of which you are a part. You may withdraw your participation at any time without penalty, risk or consequence. If you wish to withdraw from the study, you may notify the researcher verbally or in writing. No explanation will be expected. If you do withdraw from the study, your data will be omitted from the results, and all notes and interview audio recordings will be deleted or destroyed within three days.

For information or questions about this research, please contact the researcher, Rebecca Knighton, at Rebecca.knighton@uleth.ca. Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Office of Research Ethics, University of Lethbridge (Phone: 403-329-2747 or Email: research.services@uleth.ca). This study has been reviewed for ethical acceptability and approved by the University of Lethbridge (Canada) Human Participant Research Committee.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of your participation in this study and that you consent to participate.

Name of Participant	*Participant Signature*	*Date*
Name of Researcher	*Researcher Signature*	*Date*

A copy of this signed consent will be provided for you.